Note about the Cover

Waxemedlagin xusbandayu’
(Even though I am the last one, I still count)

In the early 1960s my grandfather, Charles Eaton Willie, sold these eight bumblebee masks. They became the property of the Museum of Anthropology. In 1998 my Uncle Ernest Peter Willie hosted a potlatch in Kingcome Inlet. As part of the ceremonies, replicas of these eight masks were created by my Uncle Don Willie and danced by the young children of our families.

The Bumblebee dance is a children’s dance. Amongst the Musgamagw Dzawada’enuxw, it is often one of the first dances a child participates in during the Winter Ceremonial. A father and mother bee lead progressively smaller bees out onto the dance floor one by one. When the children are led back into their “beehive” at the end of the dance, one child is discovered missing. The father bee circles the floor four times searching for this lost child. On the fourth round the child is found hidden amongst the spectators and is led home.

“Even though I am the last one, I still count” is part of a children’s rhyme, and I have used it in reference to this dance. The central photograph depicts my aunts and uncles as children. My Uncle Don Willie, who carved the replica masks in 1998, is the young boy on the left. Two sisiutl (double-headed sea serpents), four wolves, and two parent bees form the painted borders.

Though my grandfather was forced to sell these masks in the early 1960s due to social/economic circumstances, I created this piece to recognize that the rights and privileges that they embodied are still active and integral to the Musgamagw Dzawada’enuxw people. He sold the masks at a time when the future of our traditional culture was in doubt. It is with great pride that I am able to look back and know that each generation of my family has participated in this dance, and feel assured that the continuance of its practice is now without doubt. There are four keepers of this dance; the member of our family who currently holds this place is my cousin Charlene Dawson, who inherited it from her mother Florence Amy Willie.

—Marianne Nicolson, Kwakwaka’wakw