

# Weaving History with Integrity

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HISTORY  
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Wooshinkindein Da.aat Lily Hope brings many to the path of a once-endangered artform

By Rachel Bishop

**M**OST PEOPLE don't quite know what to expect when they walk into the new Wooshinkindein Da.aat Lily Hope Weaver Studio. Wooshinkindein Da.aat, Lily's Tlingit name, means "walking together one behind another." Located in downtown Juneau, the studio is in the perfect location to catch the eye of the wandering visitor. Window displays of woven jewelry, weaving kits, and photos of Chilkat blankets pique one's curiosity. Renowned Chilkat weaver Lily Hope beckons to the hesitators, encouraging any patron to come and learn about this once endangered artform. Before they know it, they are drawn into the beauty of Chilkat as they handle a tuft of mountain goat wool and watch Lily skillfully finger-twine the yarns into a story of spirit and community.

Lily, Tlingit, Raven T'akdeintaan, was born in 1980 in Juneau to full-time artist parents. Her father, Bill Hudson, is a painter and multimedia artist. Her mother, the late Clarissa Rizal, was a multimedia artist and Chilkat weaver who studied alongside master Chilkat weaver, Jennie Thlunaut. Lily grew up in Juneau and remembers watching her mother's hands constantly at work while she was encour-

aged to help. She would help lay out mother-of-pearl buttons, stir the dye pot, or wind yarns, and thigh-spin warp. Given her parentage, it's no surprise that Lily was destined to become one of the most renowned Chilkat weavers of her generation, but if you ask her, she will clarify that she didn't always recognize herself as a weaver.

Chilkat is a woven art form practiced by Tlingit, Haida, Tsimshian, and other Northwest Coast peoples of the US and Canada. The Chilkat ceremonial robes are commissioned by clan leaders or given as gifts to be danced during cultural ceremonies and are coveted by museums and fine art collectors. Historically, the robes were twined on a warp of thigh-spun mountain goat wool and cedar bark, but in the present day, Merino wool is used as it is easier to obtain. The Merino weft yarns can be dyed with natural materials like hemlock and wolf moss. A full-size ceremonial blanket is time- and labor-intensive. It can take up to 2,500 hours of labor, not only due to the finger-twining and braiding of the pat-

tern, but also because a weaver will invest several hundred hours in material prep or purchasing prepared materials (which can cost upwards of \$7,000) before they even begin warping up the loom. The designs come from the Northwest Coast art style, Formline, and are adapted to work within the twining techniques. The designs record history that calls on ancestors when the robe is danced, the fringe swaying out from the wearer to the witnesses in threads of connection. It's a magical experience that Lily likens to "watching a child take their first steps."

TRADITIONALLY, knowledge is passed from one family member to another. In the last 120 years, there have been fewer than a dozen Chilkat weavers capable of weaving full-size ceremonial regalia. Lily recalls the realization she had about her mother teaching her to weave. "I was a storyteller, actor, and teacher. My mother was the weaver. It wasn't until after her passing that I realized how sneaky she was when she was teaching me how to weave. But now I know she was always preparing me for this life and now she's on the other side of the veil guiding me on this path."

For Lily, it's not just about creating art.

If you'd like to learn more about Lily, please visit [lilyhope.com](http://lilyhope.com) or you can follow her on Instagram, @lilyhopeweaver. Search for "Chilkat Dancing of the Robes Ceremony" on YouTube to view the largest known collection of child-size Chilkat robes being danced for the first time earlier this year.



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It's about sharing the story behind the art and bringing awareness to Chilkat weaving. She spends just as much time teaching workshops, speaking to textile and weaver's guilds, and asserting Chilkat's significance to museums, galleries, and universities. "I want the world to recognize Chilkat weaving as fine art. I want people to hear the word Chilkat and immediately have an image of a Chilkat blanket pop into their heads. The goal is global recognition of these amazing woven beings," she declares as she works on a child-size blanket that she's weaving for her Patreon students.

She's well on her way to making this goal a reality. A decade ago, if you were to do an online search of Chilkat weaving, a few articles might pop up with a profile of one or two historical weavers. Someone hoping to commission a piece would have only had six weavers with the time and knowledge to complete the work. Now you'll find numerous articles explaining the significance of the art form. New robes and smaller pieces are being woven and displayed in museums across the United States every year. Lily currently has her weavings on display at the Native Arts & Cultures Foundation, the Houston Museum of Natural History, and the Smithsonian Renwick

Gallery in Washington, D.C., and in over seventeen permanent collections. As a result of Lily's dedication to teaching others, there are now over two dozen artists with the technical and spiritual knowledge to weave a full-size ceremonial Chilkat blanket. Many of her students also weave for museums and galleries and have begun teaching workshops themselves.

Wooshkindein Da.aat. Walking together one behind another. Walking together. No one falling behind. Many are now on this path. The studio is a communal space. She's quick to give gratitude to the teachers who came before her and never fails to acknowledge the weavers who help carry the knowledge to the next generation. Just like her name, Lily encourages you to follow with integrity, and witness the powerful fine art of Chilkat weaving. ■

*Rachel Bishop grew up in Georgia but found her way to Alaska in search of cooler weather and more dynamic scenery. She works part-time for a nonprofit, Juneau Jazz & Classics, and is executive assistant to Lily Hope. When she is not busy supporting and uplifting artists, she is writing and recording her own projects and enjoying the Tongass National Forest.*

LESSON PLAN

