

# Can't Wreck Her Beach

*Advocate spends decades defending nature and naturism*

**T**housands of people who use Wreck Beach in Vancouver may have never heard of Judy Williams, but a great many others know her leadership has helped keep that picturesque strip of shore natural and open to all.

It's a popular beach that's perpetually threatened. Her persistence and tact have helped protect it and have been useful at naturist sites in two countries, where Williams has frequently been called in to give aid.

She was born in the Gulf Islands of the Pacific Northwest and quickly grew to respect humanity's reliance on the Earth. At eight years old she stood down a bulldozer that threatened a beloved meadow. She said Chief Joseph's philosophy best explains her own: "Man did not weave the web of life, he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself."

Soon after she first enjoyed Wreck Beach she was fighting off trucks with rocks to dump there. Currently, proposed construction of housing towers by the University of British Columbia threatens to shatter the natural integrity of the area, and she's gathered opposition and focused it against that project. Now plans to build a road bridge and an island at the beach are looming.

This ongoing struggle is the topic of a book Williams is writing. Writing and reading fascinated her through her 41 years as a teacher, which began after she earned a master's degree in Reading Education from the University of British Columbia. She said, "If we lose this fierce battle with UBC and GVRD (Greater Vancouver Regional District, the development oversight body) does not back us legally, I plan to call a press conference and burn my degree on



James Loewen

“ One cannot succeed without grassroots involvement from local groups and individuals. ”  
—Judy Williams

the president's steps.”

The causes she embraces are numerous and she's joined dozens of groups and boards to work with fierce commitment. That doesn't mean she can't have fun. Williams is a model in life drawing classes and is very proud of her pilot's license. She's also "buns master" for the Wreck Beach Bare Buns Run. "We are coming up on our tenth year of this event Aug. 6, 2006."

By March she plans to be out of her house on Nathan Creek in Bradner, British Columbia and onto her houseboat "The HMS Cricket Lady." It's a home she'll share with her two parrots, three cats and one dog, but the seven outdoor cats, the raccoon family of five and the possum family of six she feeds and helps now may need weaning.

Her dedication and compassion earned Williams the 2006 Baxandall award for volunteer service in naturism. She hadn't learned of that honor when she corresponded with *N's* Jeffrey Decker on life and beach protection.

**Q: Your career was as a teacher?**

**JW:** I taught secondary school for 41 years, mostly special needs, journalism, and adult education through both learning assistance and individualized and independent reading centers. I am fascinated on how and what motivates folks to read. I was known as a maverick because I refused to use rows of

desks and chairs and converted all my classrooms into comfortable learning centers with easy chairs, carpeting, sofas, refrigerator hidey box, and so on...always had a tea kettle and soup for those kids who were too proud to admit they didn't have food, so everyone got fed to protect their dignity.

**Q: What's your day job today?**

**JW:** 24-7 Wreck Beach naturist and environmental activist. When

it doesn't get in the way of my advocacy work for the beach, I nude model for art classes and artist groups. I spend over 72 hours of volunteer time per week on these issues. I rarely have the luxury of having an evening at home, so I treasure them when I am able to make the time. I am involved in Pacific Spirit Regional Park Society (the Trails Initiative Group, the Vegetation Group, Night Quest Planning Group, the strategic planning review group for the park), and park plan, the GVRD Parks Forum, the Administrative and Governance Committee of the Forum, the Fraser River Coalition, a coalition of 13 environmental groups dedicated to the health and enhancement of the Fraser River. I am also the Government Affairs Officer, the Public Relations Officer and the VP for the Federation of Canadian Naturists, and shaped the brief I presented to the Justice and Human Rights Committee of the House of Commons on Parliament Hill in Ottawa twice over a two-year period regarding protection of our children and other vulnerable persons. The legislation lumped mere nudity of children in with child porn.

**Q: Please talk about how you first began as a naturist.**

**JW:** When I was a small child, I used to traipse about the woods with my two dogs pretending I was an Haida Indian princess (I am part Haida). I used to take off my clothes and lie in the grass with my two dogs on either side of me while we watched insects crawl through the blades.

**Q: When did you first notice that forces off the beaches can limit access?**

**JW:** From the very beginning in 1969 when UBC and the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation first brought bulldozers down to the beach. And, again, when authorities put out surveyor stakes at the beach in 1974 and no one could tell me who had put them there. The more I searched for answers, the more angry I became at the implacable stonewalling I kept running into. This was when two Vancouver engineers surveying the beach were overheard referring to me as that "brass-breasted bitch." Subsequently, that nickname has stuck over the years!

**Q: You've been helpful to naturist causes at Haulover, Mazo, Crystal Crescent, Beaconia, Prior Lake and others. What lessons have**



Williams explaining legal issues at a Naturist Action Committee workshop in 1991.

**you learned from these struggles that can be helpful to others?**

**JW:** One must know the hierarchy within park systems, either at the national, state or provincial, regional or county levels, and then at the municipal levels including local bylaws and operative legislation. One in Canada must also be familiar with the Canadian Criminal Code, and the province-by-province stance toward public nudity since prosecution or tolerance of public nudity is up to the discretion of each individual attorney general. Whether in Canada or the States, one must also search out local supporters, "historians" of the beach, sympathetic media, and secretaries or administrative assistants. Cultivate one's contacts!

The UBC Towers issue has been one of the most complex cases I have encountered yet. This case also illustrates the necessity of involving as many supporters and experts as possible to help protect much-loved naturist areas from development as well as also protecting the nude or clothing-optional status. Shirley and Richard Mason's outreach, for example, with Haulover Beach, and their knowledge of local government and governance plus the overlying jurisdictions, is what made Haulover such a success story. Also, their ability to gather a team of folks to help them maintain vigilance was a necessity. Once you have your facts straight [get] your strategy mapped out, including who will be the spokesperson. It does not work to have a number of people speaking out who may or may not be working from the same page or who might be more easily manipulated by the press or the "other side's" lawyers.

**Q: Have you been part of tactics that just don't work or that made matters worse?**

**JW:** One cannot succeed without grassroots involvement from local groups and individuals. There's only so much one can accomplish with long-distance phone calls and e-mail. As in the case of Crystal Crescent Beach in Nova Scotia, for example, I finally sought and was granted an appointment with Nova Scotia's prosecuting attorney. Carefully working with the local team, we coordinated my visit with several TV spots and after my visit with the head of the Bluenose Naturists, I was able to address some 350,000 viewers across the Maritimes that evening. That's an example that worked. In another situation back here in B.C., after almost six years of working with local authorities and a local group, a situation opposing nudity again arose. The first time



## Winner of the 2006 Baxandall Award: JUDY WILLIAMS

### TNS:

I'd like to nominate Judy Williams for the 2006 Baxandall Naturist Leadership Award. Judy has been effective in grassroots activism in keeping British Columbia's Wreck Beach a model of clothing-optional recreation for not only North America but the world. She of course is not alone in her work in advancing naturist freedoms there, but has been the lightning rod and cattle prod to both naturist and textile in defending clothes-free use of this marvelous site. Her continued and vigorous work with the Naturist Action Committee, the Naturist Education Foundation, the Federation of Canadian Naturists, and the Topfree Equal Rights Association is unparalleled. I can think of few men or women who have been as active as she for so long.

Specifically, her ability to generate public and naturist support, she's used streetwise dramaturgy as well as professional "behind-the-scenes" lobbying to be effective across Canada and in the Pacific Northwest of the U.S. I've seen her enter a room, bracelets and golden hair flashing, and command the full attention of everyone present. When she was working with Washington state naturists to protect local sites in the mid-1990s, she encouraged me to get involved in naturist activism. I owe what I've learned about the power of grassroots from her, and though she was not quite fully upfront about how much work is involved in such activity, I've never been anything but grateful to her for pushing me into the naked political fray.

Sincerely yours,  
Mark Storey

I was involved, I had told the locals to keep it low key so that I could quietly meet with the mayor and city manager, accompanied by local activists, without media attention. A local hothead leaked it to the media that I was coming and the headlines as I deplaned to the eye of a TV camera, in effect, read: "Vancouver Nude Activist to Set Authorities Straight." This was not a sterling beginning. The hothead, who was not part of the team, also made a few prejudicial remarks against gays, which were quoted in the article. Thus, while I was there, I also had to set up a meeting with the head of the Rainbow Association for that area and assure him that I had had nothing to do with that quote and that the hot-

head did not speak for the Okanagan Naturists group.

At any rate, six years later, a new grassroots group had formed, and I flew in twice to help coordinate them. Differences arose between a temporary chair who didn't listen too well to advice and some of the other team. I had worked out a possible compromise with one of the city managers regarding quietly dealing with the anti-nudity enforcement as long as the locals worked with authorities to eradicate some lewd behaviors that were occurring at the beach. In the meanwhile, a large forest fire intervened, ironically, to cool things down. But not before a small group decided, against my advice, to take their arguments public at city hall with the local anti-nudity mayor and council. The results were that the beach remains posted, and the word is that the city has even gone to the attorney general to try to ban nudity altogether at the beach.

**Q: Is it easy for you to relax and have clothes-free fun while a battle like this is ongoing?**

**JW:** I cannot relax. We constantly need money, and I feel I should be walking the beach with a donation bucket, when I am not at the bottom of Trail 6 urging people to sign petitions or write letters.

**Q: What can naturists worldwide do to help?**

**JW:** They can keep the letters opposing the UBC towers coming after checking out the latest information on our under-revision website: [www.wreckbeach.org](http://www.wreckbeach.org) and they can continue to keep donations coming in to 28616 Haverman Road, Bradner, B.C. V4X 2P3 CANADA.

**Q: Are you optimistic that the natural beauty of Wreck Beach will be preserved?**

**JW:** Yes. I have to believe that GVRD will honor its commitment to protect the parklands it stewards, and we are on uncharted grounds when we speak of viewscapes as being part of that commitment to protect. **N**