In June of 1994 on Joint Base Lewis McChord in Tacoma, Washington, I, Taylor Hollis was born. The first 18 years of my life, my father who is originally from North Carolina raised me with my younger sister and brother. My parents divorced when I was five years old, so my father knew in his heart that he was going to raise his children the best he could. My mother wasn’t apart of much of my childhood life, but I would visit my grandmother, every weekend in Kent Washington. She was my anchor to my mother’s side of the family.

For the first several years, my siblings and I attended the same school, Park Lodge Elementary. To this day, I can remember all of my teachers from there. Then for middle school, along with many of my friends, we went to Lochburn. Lochburn went from grade 6-8; those 3 years are actually very faint, and I don’t remember much but shyly trying to fit it. In 2010, I started high school at Stadium! If you don’t know, Stadium is where they filmed the movie, *10 Things I Hate About You.* The school from the outside looked like a castle, and every year there were about 2,000 students who attended the school. So everyday I would try and see if I had seen someone I had never seen before and that was very easy. Within my four years of high school, I became passionate about joining the US military. After my father turned 18, he joined the US Army, and travelled throughout the US, Germany, and Korea. Hearing his stories I have been inspired to either join the military or travel too. For 4 years I was part of a program similar to Cadets called N.J.R.O.T.C, meaning Navy Junior Officers Training Corps. At the time, my father was very supportive, and had me go on every camping trip or strength team competition. But when the military recruiters came around in 2012, he ended up telling them that I moved away and was unavailable. After hearing about that, I became upset and figured I would just go to University instead. My last year of high school I transferred schools from Stadium, to Tacoma School of the Arts. After graduating from there, I wondered why I just didn’t go there in the first place. The school offered great opportunities in: performing arts, visual arts and everyday academics. This helped me branch out my creative side, and I focused on landscape photography and video production. My courses there and my mentors throughout the year prepared me for post-secondary education.

In 2012, I was accepted to several Universities in Washington State, but my father always wanted me to stay closer to home and recommended that I go to a community college first. I wanted to make my own decisions and prove to my father that I am a young adult now. So without telling him, I moved to Vancouver, B.C. My main goal was to gain residency, and be reunited with my Squamish and Sechelt Nation family.

From 2012 to 2013, I took a break from school and began searching for my calling in post-secondary studies. I absorbed my Squamish First Nation’s language and culture right away, and fell in love with my people. I became an Aboriginal Youth Ambassador through the Squamish Lil’wat Cultural Centre, doing what I am passionate about, living and sharing my culture. Befriending and gaining other mentors from the Squamish Nation made me feel that I could do more for my community so I went to University to receive an education and ran for the Nation’s Chief and Council in 2013.

My slogan during the Chief and Council campaign was, “Yewaniwilh Chen” meaning, “I lead by example.” My platform was on transparency and building capacity within the nation by having a stronger relationship with our elders and bringing up the youth to be more engaged politically and with the community. I wasn’t elected, but within the next year, the Nation’s 16 councilors appointed me to be their Trustee on the Squamish Nation Trust. I haven’t felt so honored to be able to be at the service of the nation before. It has been a pleasure to provide grants to my nation’s entrepreneurs and their small businesses.

While being a cultural ambassador, trustee, and aspiring councilor, I have found while taking the Bachelors of Liberal Studies program at Capilano University, that all of the courses I have taken from linguistics, sociology, political sciences, Japanese, business administration and many others are giving me a wide spectrum of studies to bring to the table for my nation or any path I decide to go on. As a cultural ambassador, and sharing the Squamish and Coast Salish culture with my friends, family and people from the around the world I realized that learning languages like Japanese and German has made it much easier to communicate and appreciate other’s culture and background. One day, I would love to study abroad and take a trip to Kyoto, Japan and or Berlin, Germany.

It is my parents, grandparents and mentors who have inspired me everyday and laid out a special foundation for me to continue to go on with my education and dreams.