

Crystal Smith
Hartley Bay
Age 17

Living Traditions

“Grandma, where are you? Grandma, you haven’t told me your story yet. You promised you would.”

“I guess I can tell the story tonight but you have to listen carefully because this is a story from our history. It holds the past and present, with much sorrow and happiness. It will help you decide how you live the rest of your life. Follow this and you will bloom like a beautiful flower at the first sign of spring. It’s a very special story, child, do you understand?”

“Yes Grandma. I do.”

“Alright.”

We were a wolf pack protecting our pups, but wickedness came across the great waters. They came in big boats and used little ones to get to shore. They took over part of our lands by force, with weapons that echoed across the lands. They created posts and builds that were called houses, these houses were put anywhere on our lands. They disturbed our peaceful lands and made it a wreck with buildings and roads all over the place. We were deemed “savages” so they tried to decimate us by teaching our young ones their culture. They followed one mother to her den and then drugged her. They gave her many drinks and she became drowsy and sick. She passed out quickly after. That gave the evil agents time to take her pups and leave swiftly to their camps and force them into their schools. It took a day for the mother to get rid of her symptoms but it was far too late to do anything. Her dear ones were gone...

The evil agents transformed the pups and the pups became “domesticated.” They had been free as the wind but it was all taken away from them at a young age. They began to receive different training and were being fed the wrong food. The pups knew it wasn’t right and they wanted to go back home, where they belonged...

“Did they get back, Grandma? I really hope they get back.”

“Calm down, Sunshine. The story is far from over...”

The mother and pack were on full alert. They worried that the evil agents would come back and asked the Creator for guidance. The evil agents came in different forms and by morning most pups were gone. They had begun learning new traditions; received new ways to react; they lost the real way. Many of the pups still had memories of their traditional homes and culture but if these were expressed in any kind of form in the face of Evil, they were punished. Punished for being who they were and speaking their traditional language. Many pups died in these places. They were killed either way you look at it. Some of the pups died from sickness, because the places were kept from being clean and others were killed from physical abuse day after day. Others walked away from these schools empty. Their emotional, spiritual, and mental health was shattered. These pups were hurt physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually all in that one place, because they were different from the evil beings.

Traditions were gone in a matter of years and a sense of shame was all that remained. Traditions were thought to be lost forever...

“Grandma that’s terrible! Why are you telling me this story?”

“Hush child it gets better... it will be better, I promise... Traditions were never really lost, you see. We fought our assimilation to the best of our abilities; we are fighting that same fight today. Our people kept our traditions alive through potlatches and feasts. Then the government tried to ban these practices but it’s was like telling a cricket not to jump or telling a mother not to give birth, traditions are natural habits and can’t be destroyed. Even though many young lives were lost in residential schools, there were a few who continued to learn about their culture, keeping it alive through the many years the government tried to kill it. Traditions of past times will always live within. Its been

coming out in magical ways, whether it's dancing to our heartbeats or singing from our souls. They will live forever. Our souls continuously shout out to be heard. Waiting for a time to present itself to you beautiful green eyes, heard by your cute little ears, loved by all of our hearts. It's going to be passed on through speeches, by songs, and heartfelt poetry. Do you know why it will last forever?"

"No Grandma. Why?"

"It's because our traditions are strong and our people have many strengths. Like our passion towards mother earth and our love towards life, it will always surround us... These strengths are leading us down paths of gratitude full of life and memories, full of sadness and joyous moments. While walking on these paths with soft steps, you must listen to the elders that have passed on before you. Listen to the legends and their life stories. Learn about yourself through the messages that they give you."

"Grandma, is your mom up there helping you and teaching you?"

"Of course darling, she told me this story when I was your age. She is still with me today; we're together in the great lands. But, you must listen I'm almost finished.

Our ancestors will come to you in your dreams, just as I have. Or they could come as an eagle soaring close by, a killer whale singing in the ocean, a raven flying near the moon, or a wolf protecting it's pack. It could be the wind you embrace or rain drops trickling down your sweet face. Our traditions will never be lost as long as you're open to receiving them. You have the power to change perspectives. You have the heart to continue learning and in the future you can teach. This story will never end 'till things are made right and all native youth like you have a chance to be heard."

"That's a wonderful story Grandmother. I promise to get my voice out through poems, songs, books; anything that I can do, I will do. And I hope that through these things I can inspire many others to do it as well. I want this story to have the best ending ever, but ... when will I see you again? I need your help."

"I'll come to you whenever you call me, just as I did tonight. There is one more responsibility, and that is you have to share this story to everyone you know and beyond that."

“I’m just a child Grandma, how am I supposed to do that?”

“It’s the power of speech child. I believe it’s time to wake up now my sweet, you have to go to school. Your mother awaits you...”