

Honoring Traditional Teachings: The Art of Gifting

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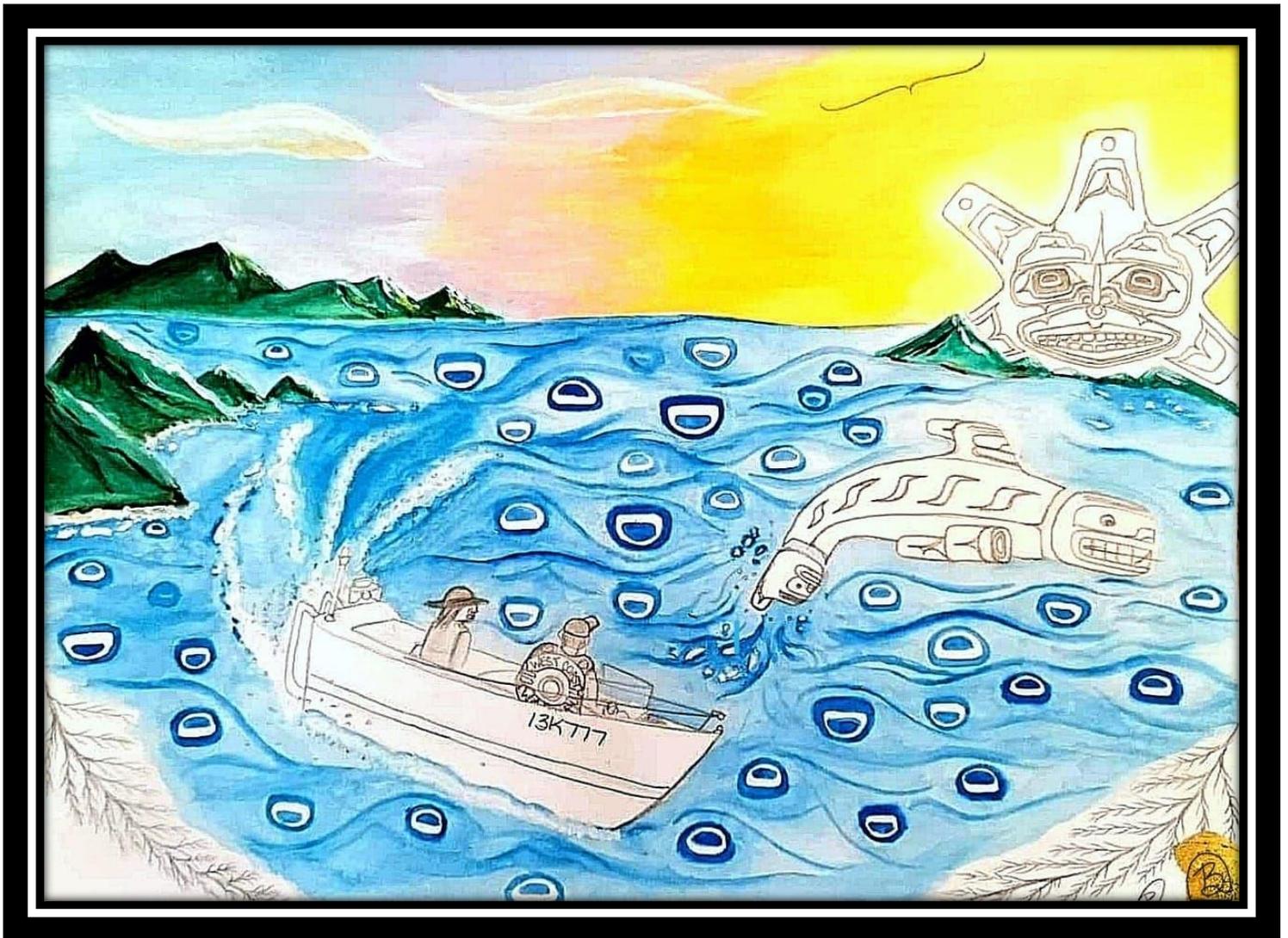
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Sacred Healing



By, Carmin Blomberg (Bear).
Killer whale contributed by, brother, Glen Johnson.

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Gilakas'la. My name is Carmin Blomberg (Bear). I am Cree First Nation on my Father's, Cliff Blomberg, side and carry teachings from my Kwakwaka'wakw brother, Glen Johnson. We share the same mother, Therise Leroux, who was a loving resilient French-Canadian woman, with a big heart. I refer to the members of my family by their title, 'Mother,' 'Father' and 'Brother.' Family holds a special place in my heart and calling them by their title makes me feel more connected to them, because although we have intersecting cultures, we are all still family.

Elder Gerry Ambers, my brother and Anderson (2011) helped me understand the role older siblings have and how to honor their teachings. My brother's role as an older sibling is to pass down and share his knowledge with the youngest. As I am next in line for the teachings, I show respect by practicing and honoring their name(s) when doing so. My brother has taught me, *Gwayasdums*, aka Gilford Island, means "never leaves hungry." A big part of Kwakwaka'wakw tradition, is for the host chief to give away gifts/wealth in thanks for being witness to the Potlatch ceremony; "to give our makings is to show our wealth and love for our family" (Glen Johnson, personal communication, 2020). Every gift I make, I channel my love and share the meaning behind each material, colour and media. As I began to reflect on this leadership role and the traditions of gifting, a few memories with my brother came to mind.

Family member roles are crucial during crises (Doblin-McNab & Yancura, 2018). When our mother passed in 2013, we had some difficult times. It was the first time in our lives that we felt disconnected on such a level neither of us understood. My brother lived in Okanagan at the time and I rarely got to see him, due to the cost of travel. Several years went by and although we had stayed connected over social media, we had not seen each other since our mother's celebration of life. It was tearing me apart in ways I cannot describe. Our mother was our rock. I felt lost, uncertain and alone. I started to have spiritual dreams. In one dream, I saw people I had never met, but for some reason it felt like I knew them. They spoke in ways, "You will not be left behind, we are here. We will never leave you." Each time they said this, the feeling of comfort washed over me, the kind of comfort and safety I felt when my brother was around. When I awoke, I had this heavy feeling, I knew I needed to see him.

I reached out to my social worker about the hard time I was having. She suggested I plan a visit and helped with the funding. My heart felt whole, I knew she cared in a way no other social worker has. I bought a bus ticket and went up Northern BC, Port McNeill, to stay with my brother and nephew, James. It was a week full of quality time and activities. My brother shared stories, encouraged me to continue revitalizing my gifts and took me out on his boat to Gilford Island, his home territory.

The boat glided on the calm ocean water. No one around us. The blue skies above encompassed clouds as light as feathers. We turned and drifted through the pathways of our relation tree islands; I felt present, not a worry on my mind. As we grew closer to Gilford, I could feel an ambience in the air, like more people had entered the space. The vibe became as familiar as the flow of the wind between the trees and the splash of water on my face. I felt the presence of our ancestors.

"My art has literally kept me alive," my brother said as he encouraged me to practice my teachings. He contributed the Killer Whale to my drawing. I am gifting him this finished piece to honor our reunited time of healing. After so many years, to see my family and connect with the land, I felt my body, mind and spirit heal. To this day, I think those dreams were my ancestors reaching out for me to connect to my brother. My social worker honored this need for family connection and culture. I will never forget she showed me how I can make a beautiful impact on someone's life as a helper. The gifts and love I received on this trip uplifted my spirit to carry on. *Gilakas'la, I share my breath and spirit with yours.*

References:

Anderson, K., & Campbell, M. (2011). *Life Stages and Native Women Memory, Teachings, and Story Medicine* (pp. 126-160). Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press.

Dolbin-Macnab, M. L., & Yancura, L. A. (2017). International Perspectives on Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: Contextual Considerations for Advancing Global Discourse. *The International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, 86(1), 3-33. doi:10.1177/0091415016689565