

SALMON WOMAN AND HER CHILDREN□□  
Lummi Culture Protection Committee  
Written by Jewell Praying Wolf James  
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Once, a long time ago, when the world was still young, the Indian People were traveling throughout their territory; following Raven, amongst the islands, all along the shores, and up into the mountains. Raven had a duty to lead them to their source of food. He knew his people were very hungry and if he did not succeed soon then they may starve to death. It seemed that all the animals had failed to provide the annual foods his people normally relied upon. The fruits, the berries, the roots, and all the other types of food seemed to be so very scarce. The people could never remember a time that life was so difficult for everyone. Raven was having a great problem as a leader, he was running out of ideas on where to go, what to do, how to feed the hungry children and elders.

The People had been eating and living on the few roots they could dig year round. Some were drinking a lot of the wild berry teas they could find in the mountains and fields. Others were eating some of the soft sides of the tree bark to stay alive. But, still, this plant food did not provide the people with enough to sustain themselves. Raven had to find another way for the people to survive, a new food source if possible.

There was one thing that Raven did not try, yet. He did not search the unknown parts of the great waters, the bays, the ocean itself. He knew that it was his obligation to try. His canoe was brought to the waters edge. His best canoe paddle was made ready. Tule and cedar mats, and a cedar root hat were placed inside, and some water for his thirst. He did not take any food, for there was very little edible plants gathered to sustain the children and elderly. Raven climbed into his canoe and shoved off, down stream, heading down the Nooksack River, away from the Island at the river delta.

The people all gathered along the shore. They wished the best of luck to Raven. They all sang spiritual songs to give him strength and to guide him. They waved as he paddled out from the village. Some say his act was one of desperation and he did not turn back to wave for fear the people may see his concern in his face- for leaders do not cry. The people watched until he was out of sight from the shore. Each one, young and old, kept him in their hearts, after all he was doing this for them. But, still, they were worried. He was a great leader and had all their respect but he was one person. They admired him for he held the interests of the people up above his personal needs foremost. His heart was bigger than most.

Raven paddled and searched. He went to all the is-lands. His people had been there before. They searched and the land was barren. They were very familiar with all the islands. He traveled past the familiar sites, rechecking all the spots once again. As he paddled, he began to lose his sense of time. He became hungry and drank some water. Day came and then night, then another day and another night. It seemed that time between day and night overlapped and he was no longer able to keep track. Was he gone a week, a month, how long?

Raven went without any type of food for many days and nights- even the plant foods seemed very inviting to him now. Some say this was the beginning of fasting for spiritual gifts. Others say it is just one example of many times that leaders and people fasted and were rewarded for their sufferings. But, for Raven it seemed that he was not winning. He lost sight of where he was from and did not even know where he was going. He could no longer see the familiar island shorelines anymore. During his travels a fog had set in and he became lost.

Raven began to despair. He did not believe that he could survive a trip back to the village, even if he could find his way out of the fog and back to his people. He had only water. He began to accept death. He was cold and had made a

temporary shelter from his matting, but he was losing body heat and could not replace it- since he could no longer burn body oils to restore his energy. He began to sing his death song. He was preparing himself for death, which would take him away from his beloved people. His life was ending in failure, he feared.

Some say that Raven was thinking about his people right up to the last minute. He drifted in his canoe. He sang out, "O' Great Transformer, I regret that I have failed to save my people. They trusted me as their leader. I have tried and now they have no one to protect them, to guide them, to advise them. I only wish to have done more for them." Raven sang his death song, he mind, his body, and now his spirit were getting ready to change worlds. He was going to join his ancestors.

Off, in the distant waters, someone swam, apparently alone, listening to the song and story of Raven. It was Salmon Woman. She was still in the waters, observing. She was moved ever so deeply by the story of Raven and his people's needs. She felt sorry, but at the same time had great respect for him. She admired the fact that he not only was willing to give his life for his people but his last dying thoughts was for their health and safety. She believed anyone who would be so concerned about others must be really good and strong of heart. She listened and slowly swam closer to Raven's canoe.

Salmon Woman decided to do something about it. She used the powers of transformation and changed into a human female. She swam closer to Raven. She hollered out- "Help, Save me. Please!" She knew that Raven could hear her, even though she was not clearly visible from his canoe. She hollered and hollered, swimming ever closer to Raven. She could see him through the fog very clearly, slowly getting closer and closer.

Raven completed his song. He was just going to lay down on his tule mat and cover himself with his cedar mat, with his cedar root hat over his face, and wait for his death; but, then, he heard a female voice. He sat up and listened, staring into the fog, watching along the water surface. He thought he could depict some movement off in the distance. He picked up his paddle and steered his canoe toward the spot where Salmon Woman was. He slowly approached her, then realized it was a woman in the water and he quickly responded and came to her aid. He pulled his canoe along side her and helped her into the canoe.

He thought that she must have fallen from some other canoe. She appeared so weak, so helpless. He made her comfortable as possible. She was allowed to sit on his tule mat, to rap herself in his cedar mat and to cover her wet head with his bark hat. She was given the last drops of his water. He waited, she rested. He wanted her to recover from the cold water, to gain her breath from her swim. He thought how terrible that she could fall out of a canoe and no one would even stop and pick her up. How could anyone be so cruel.

Salmon Woman was amazed at his generosity. He was dying but still was concerned about saving her, about her warmth, her comfort, her thirst. She watched him intently. His eyes were soft and concerned. His voice gentle and caring. She asked about his people. He told her of his people's story, their hunger, their need, and how he was responsible to them. She was pleased and admired him deeply.

She said, "I am Salmon Woman. I have many children. My children play in the oceans all around you. They follow wherever I go and lead them. My children are beautiful, healthy, and their color glows like the sparkle of the sun off the waters surface. My children are obedient and come whenever I call."

Raven looked around. He could not see any children swimming in the water. He was concerned, was her children drowning in the cold waters. Salmon Woman told him, you cannot see them, they swim in the water, below the surface. I shall introduce them to you. She sang a beautiful song, a spiritual song. As she sang she took Raven's bark hat dipped it into the water. Each time she raised the hat she came up with a Salmon Child. She said, these are my children. They each have

a name. This one is called "Chinook." She sang and dipped the hat again, this one is called "Coho." She continued, "this one is called Sockeye, this one is Pink, this one is Chum, and this one is Steelhead." Salmon Woman filled the canoe with her children. The waters around the canoe boiled with so many Salmon Children swimming around it.

Raven was stunned. He had never seen children like this, nor has he ever heard a song like the one she sang. He asked her how many children she had. She said she never could count all of them, although she knew each and everyone of them by name, and loved and cherished them beyond the love that humans could feel for their own children. She told Raven, "I give my children to you and your people, so that they may survive. If your people are as loving and caring as you are then they deserve these children."

Raven was deeply moved. But, he said, "I am lost. I cannot find my way back to the village. Your gift is very appreciated. My people could truly benefit from such a gift, but I am lost."

Salmon Woman told Raven, "just paddle straight ahead and believe. I and my children know these waters, the rivers, and we know where your village is located. Raven did as he was told. As he paddled Salmon Woman sang her song and the children followed alongside and behind the canoe. But, soon, Raven stated, "I cannot see, I am lost, it is hopeless, the fog makes me blind."

Then, Salmon Woman stood up. She sang a new song. Raven listened. He watched. The fog raised up. This was why Salmon Woman is also known as "Fog Woman." She had the spiritual song of the fog as well. Raven looked around and he could see the familiar islands once again. He paddled. Salmon Woman sang her song and her children followed, leaping toward the village. Soon they could see the village in the distance.

As they came closer to the shoreline, the People in the village could hear a strange, and beautiful song that they had never heard before. They all ran to the shore. They could see the canoe of Raven. He was not alone. They were excited. They waited. He arrived and beached his canoe. All the people ran to the canoe to see what he had found. They helped Raven out of the canoe. Then, they all got a first look at the strange and beautiful Indian woman that was with him. She wore Raven's bark hat and had his cedar mat on like it was a cape. They all stood silently, waiting for Raven to speak.

Raven stood, he looked around. He people waited. He told them about how far he went, how hard he looked. He told them that he gave up and was ready to accept death when he found Salmon Woman. He explained how she was in the water, and how he helped her, only to find that she had lived in the water and had more children than she could count. He told them about the beautiful salmon song and then the mysterious fog song. He explained that while he paddled Salmon Woman sang a song and her children followed her to the village. He explained how deeply she loved her children but will sacrifice them for his people to survive.

The people listened. They looked out into the bay and the salmon children seemed to be endlessly coming. They soon filled the whole river. They swam, they leaped, they all came one at a time and Salmon Woman told every-one the names that her children are known by. She explained how she understood the people to be loving, caring and deserving of her sacrifice. . . the Salmon Children were a gift to the people.

The people never had to worry about food. The Salmon Children were with them year round. The salmon stayed in the river, near the village. Raven was so proud of the gift, that he had taken Salmon Woman as his wife. Some say this was the greatest honor he could bestow upon her. He was a great leader and she gladly married him. They spent many years together. The people were happy.

Then, some say it was the children of the people that disgraced the gift of Salmon Woman. Some say that it was Raven, that he was cruel to her and the children, and was abusive toward his wife. Others say it was the people, that they forgot to be respectful and grateful for what they had. One story says

that one child said, "I am sick of salmon. All we eat is baked salmon, boiled salmon, broiled salmon, sun dried, wind dried, kippered, bar-be-qued, and smoked salmon. Salmon with every meal, every day, every week, every month, all year round. Salmon, Salmon, Salmon all the time. I am sick of it and hate it. I wish we did not have to eat it."

They say that Salmon Woman was hurt by the treatment she and her children were receiving. Some say that Raven was gone when she decided to take her children and leave. She stood by the waters edge and sang a new song. She sang this song and as she did all the Salmon Children came back to life. The dried, the smoked, the boiled, all of it came back and rolled to the water. As each neared the water they turned back into whole salmon and leaped into the water, swimming toward the bay, and waiting for their mother- Salmon Woman.

When she finished her song, and all the children had transformed, then she walked into the water and transformed back into a salmon, just like her children. She swam away, singing a song, while all her children followed her. They went in the direction that they originally came with Raven. Soon they were out of site, gone forever. She vowed to never bring her children to a place that they are not wanted or appreciated. She would not tolerate the disrespect of herself or her children's great sacrifice.

The people panicked. They did not mean to be disrespectful. They sent away for Raven, who was on a hunting trip. He came back and demanded to know where his wife was. The people hung their heads and admitted to being abusive. Raven was dismayed. He hurt in his heart over the lost of his wife and her wonderful children. It did not matter whose fault it was, everyone was responsible. Everyone had the opportunity to correct the wrongs that were being done; but, still, Salmon Woman felt damaged enough to have to leave, taking all her children with her.

Raven and the people began to suffer. They began to starve. They all wished for the wonderful Salmon Children. They pleaded with Raven to find his wife, to locate her and ask her to come back, with her children. Raven thought for a long time. He did not know where she came from or how to locate her house under the waters. All he knew was that she came to him in his time of need. She had a good heart and just might listen to their pleas for her to come back. Raven got his canoe, his paddles, his mats, and his water ready and headed out to search for his long lost wife.

Once again, many days and nights were spent searching. It was only after Raven's many promises to make his people, and himself, respect her children did Salmon Woman even come close enough to the canoe for Raven to talk to her. She still loved him and his people. She agreed to come back; but, there were going to be changes. His people would have to accept these conditions. She transformed and boarded his canoe, singing her special songs she lead the Salmon Children back to the village waters of the river.

The people were glad to see her and her children. They gathered, excitedly they listened as Raven told them of the special conditions of their return. First, because the people got to use to having the salmon near them all the time the people took them for granted. The Salmon Children were forbidden from staying near the village year round. Maybe if the people did not see them all the time they may learn to appreciate them more. The Salmon Children would not sleep near the village of people.

So, the Salmon Children were sent upstream to make their beds (spawning beds). And, the children would only stay for certain seasons and then they would leave the river for a time. They would go to the House of Salmon Woman, under the waters of the oceans. They would return after a time, after making this journey each year. The people agreed to the terms and they all became happy once again.

This was a time that the Xwlemi People, as a society, began to pay great honor to Salmon Woman and her Children. At one time they forgot about how poor

they were before they found the "Salmon." But, after enjoying times of plenty, they became disrespectful and the salmon were nearly completely destroyed. However, with care and consideration they were able to restore the salmon runs. Still, it was no longer only Raven's duty to honor and respect her, it was the duty of everyone. The First Salmon Ceremony, today, teaches and reminds the people to respect their food. . . especially that provided by Salmon Woman and her children. It reminds the people that their food, once again, could be taken away from them. It is a story that teaches the children to never say, "I don't like it," or "I wish we did not have to eat it." Ever since, the Indian People honor the First Salmon and are thankful for their food. Salmon is as important to the Xwlemi Culture today as it was in the past; maybe, it might be more important due to the daily battles to protect the Salmon Children and the waters they live in (up the Nooksack River and out in the Bays and Ocean). This is all a part of the extensive problems the Indian and non-Indian people have to work out today. . . who is responsible for protecting the salmon for future generations?

Kwel Hoy> (that is all), Hy>sh>qe (thank you), Se-sealth, Xwlemi

#### BEAR AND THE STEELHEAD□□

Lummi Culture Protection Committee

Written by Jewell P.W. James 02/04/92

The people all lived in the village, at the mouth of the river. They all knew that the gift of Salmon Woman and her Children was amongst them. Raven was a great leader. His wife was wonderful. Each year her children came to the village, and then went upstream to the spawning beds. Each year they returned to their mother's house under the oceans. But, the people always knew that the Salmon Children would return each year. All the people learned to keep the respect for the children. This guaranteed their survival.

Raven had a brother. His name was Bear. Bear was married. His wife was pregnant. In accordance to the beliefs of the people, Bear's wife was in a very spiritually strong condition. She was creating life. She was deeply loved and respected by all the people. She was a part of the great mystery of creation. But, as long as she was pregnant then Brother Bear could not hunt, fish, or even gather roots and berries. In fact, it was preferred that he not touch his gear or that of the other hunter's and fishermen as well.

The people believed that some of the powers around Bear's wife, during this time of creation, could rub off and influence the things Bear does or touches. If he touched hunting gear, or fishing gear, or gathering gear then it could cause harm to the owner or the plants and animal themselves. The hunters and fishermen prayed before they hunted or fished- this was respectful, it was the tradition of the people. Plants and animals were food, but they were once spiritual beings at one time and deserved to be respected. Tools had to be clean physically and spiritually to work properly. If Bear touched such tools, then he could undo all the work.

Brother Bear was restricted from hunting, fishing, or gathering as long as his wife was pregnant. It was Raven's duty to hunt, fish, and assure that plants and roots were gathered for the house of his brother- Bear. Raven gathered up his gear and did his duty, helping provide for his brother's family needs.

To Bear it seemed that each hunting or fishing trip his brother went on took longer, and longer, and longer. He was restless. He wanted to go hunting. He wanted to go fishing. He wanted to do something. It seemed that the rule of his not doing any of these fun things was unfair. He was a man. He should provide for his family, not someone else. It did not seem necessary to him. After all,

it was his wife that was pregnant not him. What harm would it do if he went fishing, at least.

Raven was gone and not expected back for some time. The people would not notice if he left for a short while. If he when fishing then he could provide his wife with extra food, above and beyond that which his brother was providing. He was a man, he should provide for his own wife, this thought became his justification. No one would blame him. Besides, what right was it of Raven to do all of his duties.

Bear knew that the people would see him in the bay if he went fishing there. They would see him in the river if he fished near the village. He thought and thought. Then, it seemed to strike him as a great idea, he would follow the Salmon Children upstream to their beds. He could fish there and the people would never see him. What they did not see could not possibly hurt them. After all, there were millions and millions of the different Salmon Children. No one could possibly notice a few would be missing, not if they were taken in the upper reaches of the river, away from the village.

All of Brother Bear's fishing gear was stored away. He decided to go to the spawning beds and simply fish with his hands. Bear left the village. He arrived up-stream and spotted the Salmon Children in their beds. He knew each one by their names. He could tell them all apart. There was Chinook, there was Coho, there was Sockeye, there was Pink, there was Chum, there was Steelhead. They all were in his reach. All he had to do was to reach out and grab a few. No one would even know.

Bear reached out and touched the Salmon Child called Chinook. As soon as he did then all the Chinook Children died in their spawning beds. He thought nothing of it. He did not realize that the power that surrounded his wife's pregnancy was too overwhelming for the Salmon Children. He, then, reached out and touched the one called Coho and immediately all the Coho died. First the Chinook floated down stream, and pass the village at the mouth of the river. The people saw this and were upset. Then, the people saw the Salmon Child called Coho drift pass the village. They sent a search party out to find Raven, for no one ever remembered the Salmon Children dying like this.

The people searched and searched. The whole village was concerned and being overcome with grief and fear. They anxiously waited for the return of Raven, surely he had answers. In the mean time, Brother Bear was still enjoying himself in the spawning beds. He next found the Salmon Children called Sockeye, then Pink Salmon. As he touched them they all died. They drifted down stream, pass the village.

As soon as Raven returned he called a meeting of the village. He noticed that only one person was gone- Brother Bear. He knew that Bear's wife was pregnant and that Bear was forbidden to touch the fishing equipment for good reasons. This respectful conduct was expected of all the people in the same condition and circumstances as Bear. Bear was not to be treated any different. He realized that it must be his own brother that was violating the promises made to Salmon Woman. . . to respect her children and leave them alone in the spawning beds.

Brother Bear was so happy to be fishing. He thought what a foolish rule it was for them to say he could not fish. Here he was, fishing, all alone, and no one could catch as many fish as he had. Bear did not even notice that the river bed and shore was covered with the multitudes of dead Salmon Children. He did not want to see, so he became blind to his own mistakes and errors. He was happy, that was all that mattered to him. He had an excuse. Next Brother Bear found Chum Salmon. He reached out and caught one, then all the other Chums began to die. They floated down stream.

Raven followed the dead fish upstream. He came to the spawning beds and there he found his Brother- Bear. Bear was just ready to reach out and touch the Salmon Children called Steelhead. Raven stopped him. Steelhead was not touched by Bear. It did not die in the spawning beds. It did not float down stream pass

the village. Bear could not deny he was fishing. Raven explained to Bear all the damage that was done. Bear was ashamed and he shamed his Brother- Raven, and he brought shame upon his whole village and all the people. The vows to Salmon Woman were violated, again.

Raven had to punish his brother. So, he forbid his brother from using any fishing equipment from that day forward. Bear would be stuck with fishing in the spawning beds, when the Salmon are not in their best quality condition. But, the damage was done. The Salmon Children called Chinook, Coho, Sockeye, Pink, and Chum were all touched by Bear when his wife was pregnant.

They, the Salmon Children, all were affected by this. Now, they all die in their spawning beds. Before they use to go to the spawning beds then return to the oceans, to the House of Salmon Woman- under the water. They would take this journey year after year. But, now, it all changed. They would come to the spawning beds only to die.

All except Steelhead- who was not touched by Bear. Steelhead, to this day, continues to swim up to the spawning beds then return to the ocean, year after year. This is why Steelhead is different from all the other Children of Salmon Woman.

Raven remembered all the disrespect before this happened. He remembered the time that Salmon Woman took her children away before, and the people suffered from their foolish behaviors of disrespect. Raven knew that Salmon Woman could leave the village, once again, and take all her children away forever. He convinced her it would be wrong to make all suffer for the poor decision of one-Bear. But, he knew that all of us were responsible to make sure such disrespect did not happen again. So, there had to be a way for the whole village, all the people. to remember this event and not be so disrespectful in the future.

This was the time that the people began to hold the "First Salmon Ceremony." They knew that Salmon Woman would continue to send her children, year after year. But, to remember the sacrifice and the need to not repeat past mistakes, the people began to hold annual ceremonies to remind the elderly and teach the young children to never forget. Through the use of a traditional, annual, ceremony each generation would be taught. All of the people would participate- the elder-ly, the young, and the leadership. Now, each year, with the arrival of the First Salmon Children, the people remember that the death of the Salmon Children is a spiritual matter, and if we want them to come back every year then we have to be respectful. . . they are, after all, spiritual sacrifices for the benefit of the human children.

Kwel Hoy> (that is all), Hy>sh>qe (thank you), Se-Sealth, Xwlemi