

**A Message
from the
Cedar Tree**
by Chenoa Egawa

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Traveling in the footsteps of our ancestors today, we honor them in our identity, language, culture and ceremonies. It is with great pride that our children contribute to their families, tribe, community and Mother Earth.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR

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Ms. Egawa is an enrolled member of the Lummi Nation. She is a published illustrator, working primarily in pencil and pen and ink. Chenoa was an Institute of Current World Affairs (ICWA) Fellow from 1997-1999 in Mexico and Guatemala. During her two years as a Fellow, she published several articles through the Institute based on her travels and experiences living and working abroad.

Clallam Indians (the Hicks family) pose with canoe near Chimacum Creek, Washington, ca. 1914. Older woman in head scarf & shawl over her shoulders stands at the prow of a beached canoe, ca. 1908-1920. Two men and a woman pose inside the canoe with paddle and spear, a man in his shirt sleeves stands behind them. Various small houses visible in the background.

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All the children were so excited to paddle in the canoe, and they thanked Little Emma and her family for this gift. Even Jackie started treating Little Emma better!

That summer the children went out in the canoe for the first time on a short journey across the peninsula. They felt the joy of gliding across the waters. They learned how wonderful it feels to have the ocean breeze on their arms and faces as they paddled. The spirit of the old cedar tree, now a canoe, was happy.



Little Emma and Granny lived together in a quiet place on the water, on a big piece of land, far away from the busy city, far away from loud cars and traffic jams, far away from shopping malls and fast food restaurants.

At night you could see the Milky Way arcing its way across the deep, dark sky. Occasional shooting stars brightened the night sky like huge streaming fireworks, leaving a path of light in their wake.

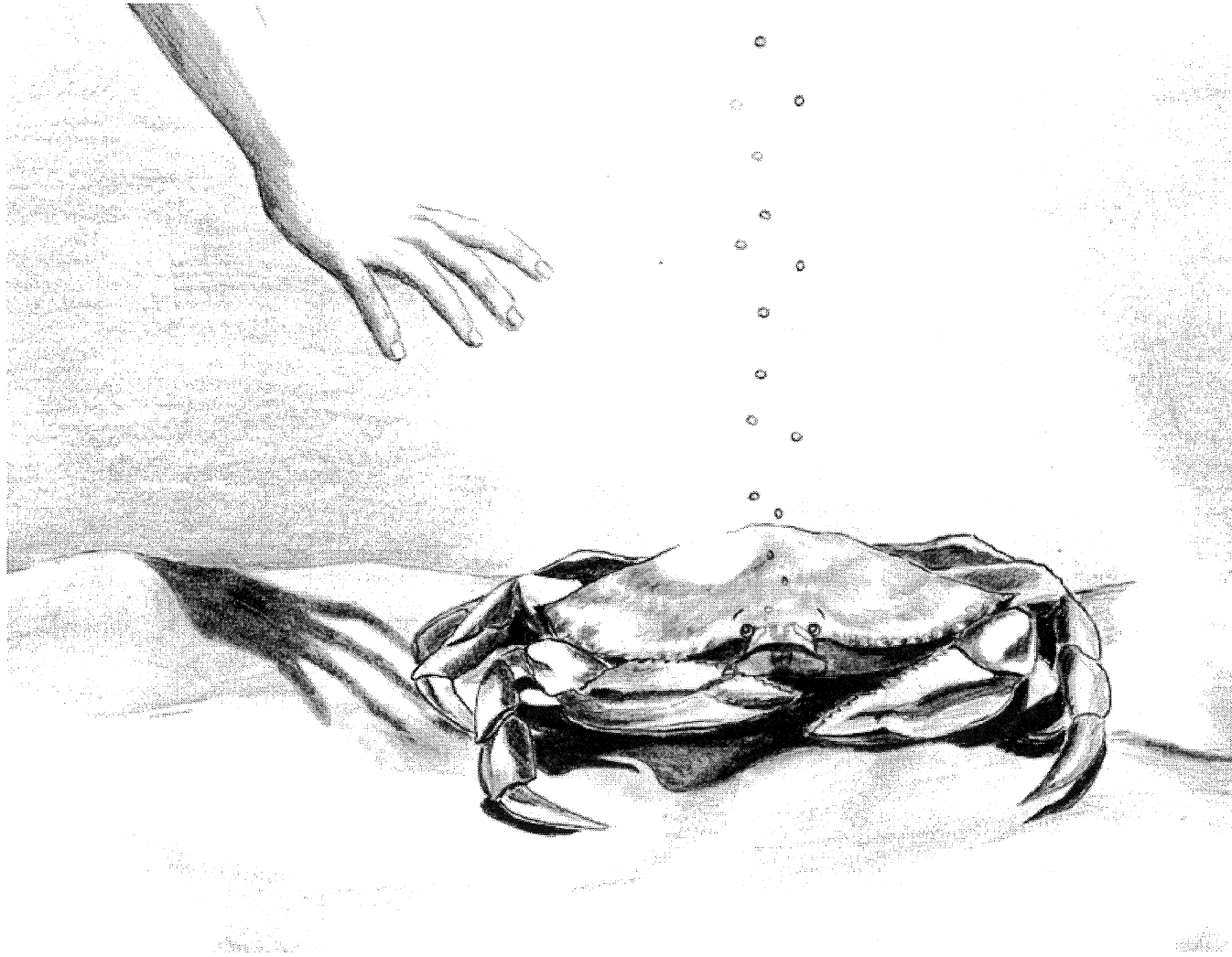
Their home was just right, always tidy, cozy and comfortable. In the cold evenings and chilly mornings Granny kept a fire burning in the wood stove in the center of the living room. On warm spring and summer days they opened the windows and doors and let the cool breeze off the peninsula drift through.

Granny and Emma were Coast Salish people from the S'Klallam Tribe. Granny's very own parents and grandparents lived on this land before her. She remembered gathering cedar in the nearby woods when she was a little girl; she remembered traveling with her parents through the waters of her homeland in her family's big cedar canoe.

Granny thought of moving into town so that her granddaughter, Little Emma, could be closer to her new school, but she decided it was best to stay on her land.

Emma was not looking forward to school, but Granny explained to her:

“School is important, Little Emma. You need to learn reading and writing, math and science and all those things nowadays. School is important, indeed! But,” Granny continued, “there is another kind of education that is equally important for you. That education is the teachings of your Coast Salish people.”



This education had to be taught in nature, at the ocean beaches, in the mountains and in the forests. And so it was that Granny and Little Emma stayed out on their beautiful land on the peninsula.

In the summer they worked together around the house in their big vegetable garden growing carrots, potatoes, beans, tomatoes and other good things. And in the fall they picked the big, sweet, juicy Gravenstein apples from their orchard. All year round they took care of their chickens. They had all these things from the land right outside their front door, but the two of them loved to travel to other places as well.

Sometimes Granny and Emma would load their rubber boots, shovels and buckets into the back of Granny's small canoe, and paddle out to the peninsula. When the tide was going out they would wade through the knee-deep water and pluck out Dungeness crabs that were hiding beneath the surface.



Granny leaned over to Emma.

“He is thanking the tree for its life and promising that its wish to become a canoe will be fulfilled.”

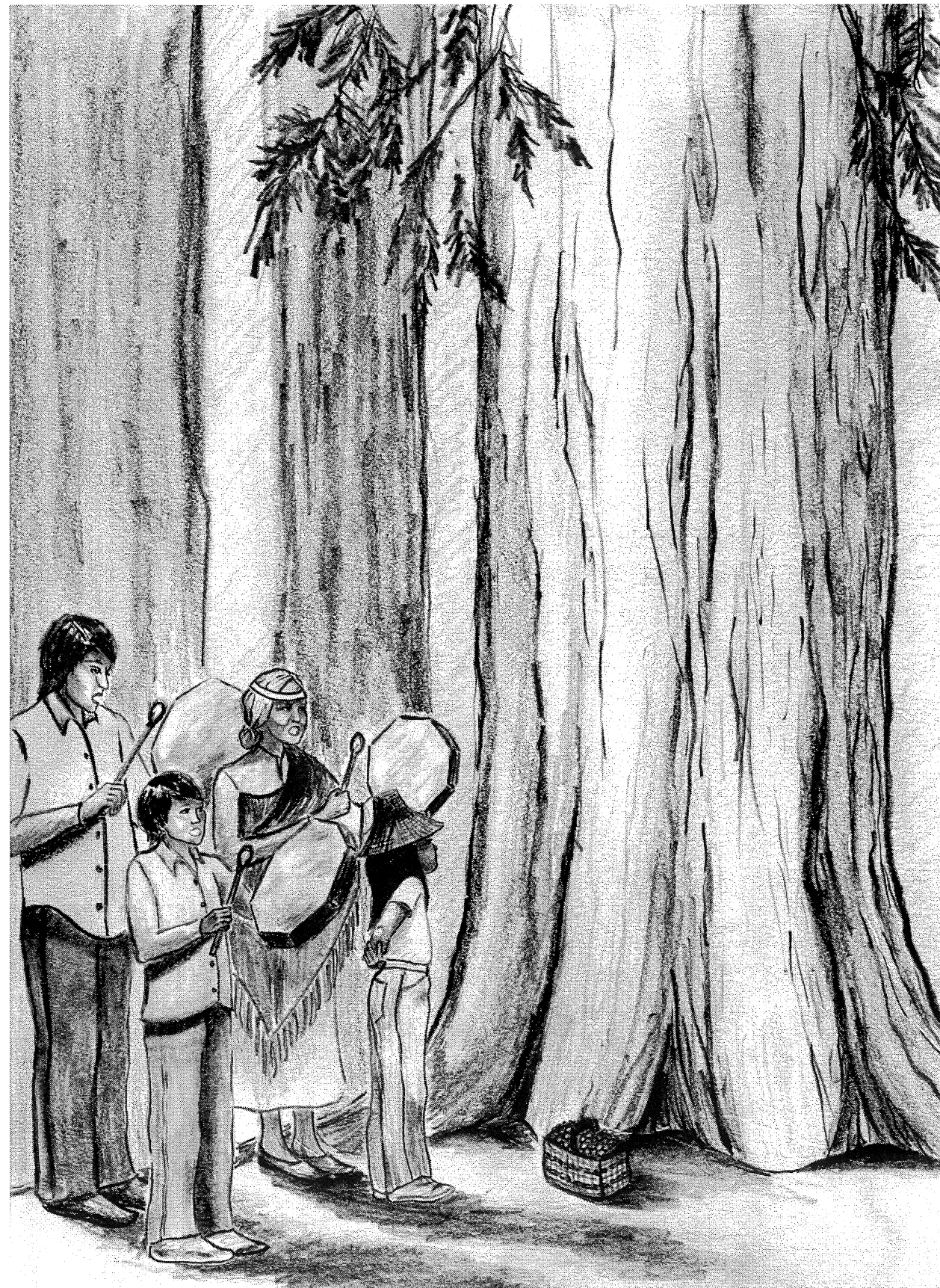
He finished the prayer and both he and Granny sang a song for the tree.

“Now you can leave your gift, Little Emma,” said Granny.

Little Emma knelt down and placed a tiny cedar basket filled with huckleberries at the base of the beautiful tree.

The tree was cut down and taken to Emma's uncle's home, and over the next few months he carved the big cedar into a canoe.

By late spring the canoe was finished and brought to Little Emma's school. Emma's family invited all of her classmates and their families. They told them the story of the old cedar tree and how it wanted to become a canoe for the children. They told them how it chose Little Emma to carry its message to the others.



At low tide they dug butter clams, razor clams and cockles. They gathered oysters too. On nice days, Granny and Emma built a fire right on the beach, cooked up their delicious clams and oysters and talked, laughed and ate together under the warm sun until the tide flowed back to the shore.

Seagulls and bald eagles swooped down from above, breaking open shellfish with their beaks and picking out the sweet meats. The fresh smell of the salty ocean and the movement of the wind and water always filled Granny and Little Emma with joy! When it was time to go home they were tired, but their bellies were full and they were happy.

The two of them had so many fun adventures together! In the forest, Granny taught Little Emma about the many wonders of the cedar trees, the medicine plants and all the edible plants.

They often went to the mountains in the summer months, too. There they picked all kinds of berries, like miniature wild strawberries, and dark blue huckleberries and blueberries.



This was the life Emma knew before she started going to school in town. But as Granny had told her on many occasions, this was one kind of education and going to school was another. Little Emma needed to learn both ways.

It was Little Emma's first week of school. Early in the morning, as the sun was coming out, Granny took Little Emma by the hand and walked out to the road with her to wait for the school bus. Granny knew this was going to be hard for Emma, and she tried to encourage her.

"You will love school, Little Emma. Don't worry. There are children who go to school there from many different Coast Salish tribes – S'Klallam, Makah, Quinault, Quileute, Suquamish, Puyallup, Tulalip and Lummi. It will be only a matter of time before you have all kinds of new friends. Then you can invite them to visit us here. You'll see. It will be lots of fun!"



Little Emma sat down next to the big, old cedar tree and listened.

"I know you," said the tree. "I have seen you come here many times. Not all people can hear me like you, Little Emma. You are a very goodhearted, special person and that is why I called you. I need your help."

"What do you want me to do?" asked Emma.

"Take a good look at my bark and tell me what you see," said the tree.

Emma looked carefully at the tree, and inside its bark she began to see the image of a great canoe.

"Yes," said the tree. "There is a beautiful canoe inside me just waiting to be born. I want to be a canoe for the children of the Coast Salish Tribes. I want to carry the children on journeys. I want them to know the joy of gliding with me across the waters. I want them to know how wonderful it feels to have the ocean breeze on their arms and faces as they paddle. This is the way their Coast Salish ancestors used to travel these waters. I need your help if I am to become a canoe."

Emma promised the tree that she would help it. On the way home she told Granny what the old cedar tree asked her to do.

Granny did not take this news lightly, because she understood that the cedar tree calls out to some people in this way and that it is a blessing.

The next weekend, Granny and Little Emma returned to the great, old cedar tree with some relatives of theirs who lived up North on Vancouver Island. One of Emma's uncles said a prayer for the tree in his language.



“Are you Emma?” asked a woman who was waiting at the door of Emma’s school.

“Yes,” said Emma.

“I’m Mrs. Miller, your teacher,” she said shaking Little Emma’s hand. “Its nice to meet you,” said Emma.

She followed Mrs. M to her new classroom. Little kids ran in after her, laughing and screaming. Granny was right. Many of the other kids were Coast Salish too.

“Who’s she?” shouted one little boy as he ran by Emma. His name was Jackie, the class bully. He had a lot of friends, but some kids were afraid of him.

“Everybody find your desks and sit down,” said Mrs. M. “We have a new classmate this year. This is Emma.”

At recess the whole class ran out to the playground.

Jackie, of course, was the leader.

“Let’s pretend we are in that TV show!” he shouted. All the kids gathered around him and yelled out who they wanted to be. Pretty soon they were all running around acting out their favorite TV show. Emma did not know what game they were playing. She and Granny did not even have a TV!

The recess bell rang and the kids lined up to go back into class. Jackie was behind her and began pushing her. “Poor Emma,” he laughed. “What’s the matter with you anyway, Emma? Haven’t you ever watched TV before? I bet your parents have never taken you to the mall either? He shoved her around and tugged on her hair. Other kids joined in with Jackie and were laughing and teasing Emma.

Why did Granny send me here, she thought to herself, her face flushed with embarrassment. Just then Mrs. M came out to bring the kids in from recess.



“Hey!” she exclaimed. “What’s going on here?”

“Where does Emma come from anyway?” asked Jackie. “She doesn’t know how to do anything!” He laughed and some of the children laughed with him.

All the kids went back into the room, except Jackie. He was sent down to the Principal’s office again.

“I’m sorry, Emma. I’ll see that this doesn’t happen again,” said Mrs. M.

Emma’s first week of school was terrible! When she got home she told Granny everything and insisted that she was never going back to school!

“I promise it will get better,” said Granny. “You are a very special child. You have done so many things that the other children have not been able to do yet. Maybe they have television. Maybe they go shopping at the mall. But how many of those children have gone for walks in the woods, or gone clam digging at the beach, or traveled on the ocean in a cedar canoe?”

That weekend Granny and Little Emma went berry picking. The huckleberries were ripe and the two of them knew exactly where to go to find the plumpest, sweetest ones of all.

Granny and Little Emma found their spot! The berries were thick. Emma loved berries! Some berries made it into her basket, but she ate most of them. Everywhere she looked there were more of the dark blue, sweet, juicy huckleberries and she was drawn down the path, further into the forest.

Suddenly, Little Emma heard her name being called out. She stopped picking berries and looked around to see if it was Granny. No, she could still see Granny way up on the hill. She heard it again and turned around to face the voice. There before her stood a big old cedar tree and she knew it was this enormous, beautiful tree that was calling her name. Emma was not surprised that the tree was talking to her because Granny had explained to her how everything in the forest was alive.

“Everything has a way of communicating with you,” Granny said. “If you walk quietly through the forest, the spirits that live there may talk to you.”

Little Emma had seen Granny communicating with cedar trees many times. Often they had gone to the forest to gather cedar bark to make baskets. Before taking any bark, Granny always told the tree about her cedar baskets. She always asked the tree for permission to take its bark and she always gave thanks. Before they left, Emma noticed that Granny always left a little gift for the tree in return for its bark.

Again the tree called out to Little Emma and she walked over to it. It was so tall that it seemed like the top branches touched the sky.