

## **LHE'WUTHUT SIHE'XUN (SELF-HEALING WITH TRADITIONAL & INDIGENOUS PLANTS)**

Over the week-end of May 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>, I attended a very spiritually-enriching herbal workshop at Providence Farm near Duncan. The workshop was led by Native Elder Herbalist, Theresa Thorne, who apprenticed under Norma Myers- one of the grandmothers of modern day herbalism.

As I write this piece, I still feel the power from Theresa's hands as she waved an eagle feather towards each of us directing the sage smoke our way. Each day we started with this cleansing ritual along with a song-prayer sung by Theresa. Her voice was so hauntingly beautiful- the kind that gives you goose bumps or makes you cry. Theresa said she cries every time she sings it because she absorbs all the pain of those in the room.

That is a lot of pain as there were approximately 30 in attendance. Most of the group, as is usual at herbal gatherings, were women but there were 3 men (one being my Rob) and a young boy. Many had different reasons for being there: some to learn about indigenous plants, some to learn about native spiritual beliefs, and some to meet people of like interests. I was there for all 3 reasons and specifically to learn of forest flora and fauna. Being from New Brunswick and having lived here for only one year, I had not yet connected with many of the plant spirits of the B.C. Woods. In the classroom, we talked about individual plants and Theresa told us stories about her experiences with herbs and healing. I would say she is more of a healer than a herbalist. This workshop was a time to learn through storytelling rather than through questions and answers. It was difficult at first for many of us to change our way of thinking. Theresa was coming from a different perspective, one that is based on intuition rather than scientific facts. As one fellow student put it, it was like learning a new language.

One story Theresa told was about the Yellow Cedar. These were her words:

“There is a story of 3 beautiful sisters who were scared away from the berries they were picking by Raven, who was imitating the call of an owl. They ran and ran until, halfway up a mountain, they were too tired to continue, so they stopped and changed themselves into yellow cedars”.

We also learned about Douglas Fir, Big Leaf Maple, Soapberry, Blue Elderberry, Red Elder, Thimbleberry, Camas, Skunk Cabbage, Nettle, Devil's Club, Labrador Tea, Bracken Fern, Sword Fern, Horsetail, Indian Consumption Plant, Plantain, Yarrow, Salal, Salmonberry, Cranberry, Huckleberry, Oregon Grape, Hardhack, and the Alder. Instead of physical uses of the plants, Theresa often focused on the more spiritual uses. She talked about ghost hauntings which are characterized by things falling down and the sounds of people talking. She recommended burning Red Cedar leaflets in the dwelling and talking to the spirits who are just asking for medicine.

Theresa then led us on a herb walk and identified some of the plants discussed in the classroom. Other students and the workshop coordinator, Beth Lischeron, also pointed out other useful herbs. Everyone shared what information her or she had.

The second day of the workshop was even better even though I was soggy after camping out in the rain. A small group of us volunteered to collect wild edibles for a salad while the others made salves. We collected many yummy herbs such as Sheep Sorrel, Lamb's Quarters, Chickweed, Nootka Rose petals, Red Clover, Wild Mustard, Oxeye Daisy leaves, Dandelion greens, Lemon Balm, Shepherd's Purse, and several others.

The more kitchen-y students worked on 3 different types of salves- Sword Fern & Lavender, a wound healing ointment, and an eczema salve, The Sword Fern plant, according to Theresa, can be placed under one's clothes to help aches and pains. One participant wore hers all day and said it really helped.

Beth, the workshop coordinator, led the salve making and also taught us how to make our own apple cider vinegar. She gave us pieces of the “mother of vinegar”, the bacterial culture that helps to ferment the apples. Mine's fermenting away as I write!

Beth and Therea made a good combination for this sort of workshop. Beth, creator of “Dragonfly Dreaming” products for Mums and Babes, had an outgoing energy while Theresa was very soft-spoken with a strong healing energy. It was a privilege to meet and learn from both of them.