

Foreword

By Inez Bill

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I've been taught that everything we do begins with a prayer.

Our teachings tell us that before we harvest a plant, we say a prayer to show our gratitude for what the plant provides us, and to let it know how we will use it. In that way, we are honoring its spirit.

Our ancestors had a strong connection to our natural world. We see ourselves not as separate from or over our environment, but as equals with the plants and animals and all of nature. The environment provides for all of our needs; that is how our ancestors survived.

All things in our environment are a gift -- foods to nourish our bodies, medicine to heal us, and a spiritual connection that brings us into our values and teachings. Our teachings tell us not to take more than we need, not to waste anything, and to share our harvests with others in a generous and kind way. This will allow these gifts to nourish us and be our medicine.

Our people were never arrogant; they were humble and respectful. If the animals, plants, minerals, waters and all that is in our natural environment are to remain for us, we must show them respect and treat them in the right way.

Our native foods not only nourish our bodies, they also feed our spirit.

Huckleberry is a food and medicine to our people. Our ancestors visited certain areas for gathering berries. They knew where the berries were growing, and what companion plants might be growing there too and how to use them. The knowledge of plant uses was at times handed down through generations, or a spiritual communication could be received to help the person that was in need. Our people took care of our harvest areas, never overharvesting any one area. They had choices of where to go and would rotate among them, leaving some areas alone. Sometimes families had certain harvesting areas they would go to; these areas would be known and respected by others in the community. Other times, saltwater people might trade for berries from people living farther upriver and in the mountains.

Today we continue to take care of our harvest areas so that we can go back to that same area and gather again. After we harvest, we want it to look like we weren't ever there. If we are able to gather a little extra, we share with our elders and others who cannot harvest for themselves. It's also very important to be able to serve our traditional foods at our gatherings -- it is like "rolling out the red carpet" for our guests. By sharing our native foods, we are following our teachings, and showing that we are rich in our culture.

The foods of our people, like the berries and nettles and many others, are proving to be above and beyond today's "superfoods". They are extremely rich in vitamins and nutrients. At a time when diabetes is epidemic on our Reservation, we know that huckleberries serve as one food that our people can safely eat without elevating their blood sugar level. Thinking back --- our people, our ancestors, were on the right track. They had the foods that took care of them, and provided for all of their needs.

We can't always go back to the way it was, but if we did, even a little bit, we would be healthier. There are certain things we can do to make changes in the food we eat. But what's equally important is that

we continue to carry forward these teachings and values of respect, and of taking care of our environment. As an example, think about going to the market to buy produce, like a head of lettuce. We don't say a prayer to that head of lettuce before we buy it. We don't think about that, or give thanks. That is how we forget our teachings. But by gathering our Native foods, we are reminded of the teachings, and to stay connected to our environment. We need to remember and share these teachings and values.

Huckleberries and all the plant foods and medicines were so important to us that our people included them in our Treaty! These were resources our ancestors secured for us so that we would be able to continue our way of life. We need to fight, just like they did, for the things our people use and need -- fight for the things our ancestors laid out for us in the treaty.

Approximately 18 years ago, I was preparing for a memorial ceremony and had the opportunity to go to Mount Adams to pick huckleberries. I was alarmed to see for myself that this area that was the gathering area of the Yakama Nation for generations, was desecrated. The damage was very evident. Without having to leave my vehicle, you could see plants that were destroyed to create harvest trails. There were tribal members there trying to harvest berries to put away for the year. We were told by them that there were commercial harvesters getting coolers full of berries to sell to restaurants so they could serve huckleberry pancakes or pies. I was very disturbed by this and want to be sure this won't happen here in our area on the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest.

My late husband, Henry Gobin, always used to say, "To have a healthy people, you need a healthy environment". We see where salmon populations have declined to a critical level. Henry and I thought a lot about our winter ceremonies; we did not want to see a time where we would go to a gathering and not have any of our Native foods at the table because they were no longer available. Today, it is not only important that we continue the struggle to uphold our treaty rights, but we need to campaign for the health of our resources and access to our mountain areas. I hope this report will support our work to continue the lifeways of our people.