

REMEMBERING, RENEWING, REVIVING, RECONNECTING**PAULINE WATERFALL**

Being in nature where its spirits have not been disturbed is a healing and enlightening experience. Here the distractions of daily life can be put aside, and we can reconnect with the natural world to renew perspective and balance. It is a welcomed release.

Sitting quietly on a boat anchored in a sockeye river is a perfect place to observe and remember what matters the most—our natural environment with its range of interdependent lives. A raven calls to its mate while flying in unison across the bay. An eagle sits on a shoreline rock, silently watching before it goes into the river to fetch its next meal—the carcass of a salmon whose life is now completed after its return to spawn at the river from which it came. Who would have known that an eagle can assess the elements of tide, waves and currents in order to gauge the perfect moment to harvest its food by immersing into the water that can take its life? Large schools of marine life swim under the boat as evidenced by the depth sounder. Casting a rod is a futile exercise because the creatures are not interested, leaving one to ponder about organisms that create such a mass of life and what their roles are in this delicate chain of existence. A seal surfaces near the shoreline, cautiously and curiously observing this floating oddity that has invaded its homeland. A thick fog descends and creates a tangible cloak with the hush of its embrace. Creation settles and tranquillity ensues. The calmness filters into every cell, giving rise to a sense of oneness and connectedness. The landscape, completely engulfed in silence, gives a womb-like impression of nothingness and aloneness, yet there is a continued sense of umbilical connectedness. Life awaits a renewal and revival of a new day to come. Meanwhile darkness descends and peace prevails. Night welcomes life's next shift.

This respite from the demands of daily existence renews the soul and is a reminder of the infinite threads and miracles of origins. It is likely that my ancestors paddled up this great life-giving river system with its abundant life sustenance. To ponder that I am in the midst of a place of those who came before me, engenders a sense of awe and gratitude. They knew how to harvest the rich food sources while maintaining the integral balance to ensure and sustain the yield for the future generations, of which I am now a member. They lived in harmony with the cyclical seasons of life. They adapted, survived and thrived despite changes that were inevitable. The respect for the value of all life was embodied in how they related to and participated in daily tasks and necessities. This traditional knowledge was passed on from one generation to another; yet, it was impacted profoundly by the legislated cultural prohibitions and familial displacements that disrupted transmission of knowledge and wisdom. However, the resilient determination of my grandparents and their generation helped us to remember and piece together strands to recreate a way of knowing that gives rise to hope and renewal.

As a teacher whose major is in 'western' science, I have taught biology, chemistry, botany and physics both from that world perspective as well as from that of the Heiltsuk people. Inspiring learners to appreciate science through a traditional lens is not only possible but also necessary if we are to cultivate and affirm Heiltsuk worldviews. I helped to develop a Heiltsuk science course that included the study of physics through how our ocean-going canoes and massive longhouses were constructed to utilize and maximize the forces of nature. Biology was taught by investigating how rock fish traps were used to not only sustain but also to enhance strong stocks of fish. Heiltsuk chemistry was taught through the process of smoking or drying salmon, making soap berries with salal leaf boughs, and rendering oil from oolichan fish. Botany was taught through gathering and preparing traditional medicines. Environmental studies included the teaching of ancient weather predictor knowledge such as ocean wave actions, cloud formations and animal behaviors. The final exam was for students to form cooperative teams to create a project that demonstrated what they had learned. One team built a model deadfall trap. Another built a little longhouse to demonstrate the physics of erecting massive log beams. Another team prepared traditional foods and hosted a feast. Another collected plants and demonstrated how to make Heiltsuk medicines. The students had to document their knowledge with a procedural component of how to make these projects. I taught this form of Heiltsuk science to children and young adults from grade one to post-secondary levels, simply adapting the curriculum to suit competencies.

Certainly, our collective ancestors must have lamented over the youth of their day and how the old ways were dying off and how the values and teachings were ignored in preference for 'modern' ways. That lament will continue unless we deeply educate our new generation, beginning with self, expanding to family, progressing to community, and moving to local and finally global environments. They must learn about the intrinsic value, role and place of each life form. They need to know how to be in relationship with nature and others and how to sustain wellbeing and survival. Above all else, they must be taught about sustainability and how to be a voice for nature and their homelands. If we abdicate this responsibility, we will contribute to the continued imbalance of this planet, its health and its life. As a human family, our similarities outweigh our differences. When we embrace oneness, we can unite in our quest to leave this world a better place for our future children—just as our ancestors left it a better place for us. This is how bridges are created and crossed both in the classroom and in daily life. One key is to remember, renew, revive and connect with each other and our natural world.



Pauline Waterfall (Hilistis) is a member of the Heiltsuk Nation, the largest First Nations community on the central coast. Pauline is an elder, healer, educator, and leader of Heiltsuk eco-cultural restoration projects. Known as a “keeper of the knowledge” in her community, her name means “starting a journey and staying on course to complete and coming full circle”.