

## *Planting Seeds for Mother Earth*

X'wu'pa'lich or Barb Higgins as many know her, is a respected elder of the Shishalh Nation. Her garden on band lands named "The Creator's Touch" is a gathering place where people share their seeds, plants and time to help food flourish. In the early spring starts of chard and greens begin in a cold frame porch. In early July true to her recycling and Canadian nature, hockey sticks act as supports to loaded raspberry canes. By summer there is a tree dripping juicy peaches and the weighted vines of grapes. In August one finds squash trailing everywhere and the beginnings of salmon smoking if the pinks are running. The kitchen bustles day and night with the canning of tomatoes and berries and fish.

For X'wu'pa'lich, the garden is much bigger than her yard. It is the Creator's garden where ooksalie and rattle snake plantain grow in plush carpets of moss under massive, ancient yellow cedar trees on Mt. Elphinstone. There are chanterelles and pine mushrooms in the fall and patches of stinging nettle in March. The Creator grows salmon in the garden of the ocean, without any work on our part. All we need to do is live in gratitude and as caretakers of the forests, streams and ocean.



When this elder arrives in the forest, she always announces to all living beings her presence by sharing the words "People of the forest I am here." After harvesting, she leaves a small offering such as a pinch of tobacco or sage. If you have nothing she suggests to leave a strand of your hair.

## *Tobacco Seeds*

In the spring of 2013, a messenger brought to X'wu'p'a'lich tobacco seeds that were a gift from the keeper of the White Buffalo Calf Woman Pipe. These seeds came from an indigenous healing gathering of medicine people from North and South America. It was held in Lil'wat, British Columbia. She planted them and the tobacco plants flourished so that she was able to share more seeds. A year later, in June of 2014, she travelled to attend this medicine gathering in Lil'wat. X'wu'p'a'lich herself is a healer with many gifts. One of them is that she leads prayers in our community, often bridging together our cultures at important events. She has a canoe that people paddle called, "Spirit of our Grandmothers" or S.Yewen-Them-Sila.

White Buffalo Calf Woman is sacred. The 1994 birth of a white buffalo in Janesville, Wisconsin is a sign that White Buffalo Calf Woman is returning to fulfill a prophecy held sacred by many Native Americans. Generations ago, she promised she would bring back spiritual balance and harmony.

X'wu'p'a'lich remarked, "Our lives in this universe are as tiny as these tobacco seeds." Planting these tobacco seeds in a mindful way can help bring back spiritual balance and harmony to the land. Leaving dried tobacco offerings for all of our relations after harvesting from the Earth can also be a part of restoring our human relationship with all living beings. By growing out and sharing these seeds, we can connect in peace to each other, our forests, and to the plant kingdom that sustains all life.