



TAL AND CHRISTINA JAMES

DECEMBER 2022

News Update

Dear Friends,

We often wonder on how you have been doing in this past year or since we have last heard from you. How much have you been impacted by the turbulent times of these past couple of years?

For us, as for many, 2022 has been a year of ups and downs, both in our ministry and privately. Sometimes we are discouraged and exhausted. Sometimes we are full of excitement and hope. We are so thankful to know that our hope is not dependent on human strength and emotions, but that we can *experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard our hearts and minds as we live in Christ Jesus.* (Philippians 4:7) It is because of His love and peace that we are able to not give up, even at times when we are overwhelmed, and it feels like nothing changes.

So, what has it been like for us, the Penelakut people and the other First Nations we are connected to? Let's start with the challenges:

You already know about the young man, Jeff* (age 19), who committed suicide in the summer. We struggle with his loss and think of him often. He had such a sweet personality, always a ready smile. A smile that hid his sadness and depression. We found out that his girlfriend is pregnant with his child. Her and the family's grief is heartbreaking. Many in the community are in sorrow. What if ...? What if the close connection we had before Covid wouldn't have weakened because of not being able to communicate for long periods of time? (He was too poor for having access to data.) What if we would have told him how much we care? What if I (Christina) would have had my counselling training earlier in life and been able to support him better? What if, as Tal shared in Germany, Jeff would have known how much hope we had for him, even though it turned out he had none for himself? What if ...? What we know is that Jeff had heard about Jesus, had been on a First Nations Christian Youth Retreat with us. Had loved, for some reason,



the old hymn that somehow made it onto our playlist. Had known that we are Christians and had heard about the love that Jesus has for him. All we can do is pray, that he is with Jesus now. We don't know if he ever accepted Jesus in his life. We certainly wish we would have asked him to do so. Our hearts are heavy.

Three weeks ago, another young man from Penelakut committed suicide. He was 29. His three daughters are 2, 4 and 6 years old. We are related to his parents and family. Tal is close with the dad, a close cousin to his father. We cannot even imagine their grief. There are no words ...

There have been so many deaths this fall. It's hard. And it's even harder for the community.

We are tired, emotionally exhausted. We need your prayers even if you do not hear from us often. Especially because we are often so drained that writing about it is hard. Sometimes we are discouraged. We would love to share that someone got to know Jesus and committed to Him and now has hope in their life. But we can't. All we seem to be able to share about the people we love so much is their brokenness and pain. And the worst is that it is

* All names are changed for privacy reasons

rooted in the long-term abuse by those who called themselves Christians. Please keep praying! For the Penelakut people, for the Indigenous people in general and for us.

BUT: There are also joys and encouraging news!

- A close relative who suffers from complex trauma and repeatedly tried to commit suicide over the past several years, is doing much better! S/he recently joined us when we went to church.
- I (**Christina**) have started my own practice so I could work on Penelakut. I have been contracted to be the school counsellor/trauma/play therapist for the Penelakut Island Elementary and (Young) Adult school. Two days per week I take the first ferry (leaving my house at 6:15 am 😊) and have the privilege to support



children and youth, age 5 to 19. It's been such a blessing, often challenging but also very rewarding. I (Christina) also started my own practice in Nanaimo, sharing an office with two former colleagues from Tillicum. Many of my clients are First Nations. (I specialize in EMDR Trauma Therapy if anyone knows what that is 😊. Most of my clients deal with complex trauma.) It is very fulfilling to observe and be part of the healing journey with my clients. There are difficult days, but they are vastly outweighed by the blessing of being able to help those who are suffering to put down their burdens and start a new life free of the impacts of trauma.

Other than that, I am still struggling with my fibromyalgia. I had been asked to explain how that impacts me by a couple of people in Germany, so I am attaching the explanation for those who are interested. I certainly could use prayer in that regard as well.

- Corbin and Connor are back on track after taking a break from school because of Covid.

Corbin returned to his studies at Vancouver Island University, though he changed his focus and is now pursuing a Social Services Diploma. He could use prayers as academics are not his strong suit. His ADHD brain struggles with focussing and expressing his knowledge in written format. We had hoped that the diploma program would be a bit more hands on, but unfortunately so far it is very theoretical. We really don't understand why they require students to pass course contents that have nothing to do with the work they are hoping to do one day. Corbin hopes to also become a counsellor one day.

Connor, after an unbelievably difficult journey and many disappointments has found his niche, pursuing the goal he has been born into: Working with marine life and environment. He recently graduated with a certificate as an Environmental Technician and has been hired by Penelakut Tribe for their Habitat Restoration Initiative. In this he works closely with not only the Penelakut Fisheries, Hunting and Land Management Departments but also a Nanaimo Biological and Geomatics Consulting Company, who has already started training him further. He is a completely different person since he is finally able to pursue his interests and be successful in doing so. It is such a joy to see him happy and excited.



We are so thankful to Jesus having opened these doors. It has truly been miraculous. Both our boys had been struggling and we were often heartbroken and helpless help them in their suffering. Being able to now experience their newfound hope and joy is truly an answer to prayer.

Finally, some words from **Tal**:

The year is coming to an end, the words "finish well" come to mind. A reminder of my graduation sermon at Millar College of the Bible. It has been a trying year with so much loss and pain, family and friends gone on their

final earthly journey. I can honestly say I have shed too many tears because of tragedies, but the “Owner of all Creation” holds true to His word. He comforts those who mourn.

The Penelakut community has come together in good times and bad, we are the Creators people, and He has given us ways to deal with sorrows. Alone we cannot stand, there are few Christians on Penelakut, yet we are not abandoned. In the silence of our hearts, the Creator lies in wait and lovingly anticipates the individuals to respond to His call to salvation. That is when we fully receive His comfort.

The year 2022 was not all bleak, there were some amazing times too. I was blessed to perform a couple weddings: A niece and her husband and the other, a lifelong friend from the good ol’ days. I LOST IT, to speak God’s words of marriage to someone I’ve known forever, I got a bit choked up.

Time on Penelakut was a bit different, everybody wanted to do archery, but often only few would show. It seems people became conditioned to avoid contact and are re-learning social interaction.

We had a birthday BBQ for a good friend, and she was ecstatic as it was the first time that she had ever had a birthday cake. It was her 63rd birthday. So glad our ROOTS family were able to be a part of that special day for Carla.*

Moving into a new season my continued prayer is I want to be useful to Penelakut and to the work of the Creator and I hope and pray I move in the directions of His path. Please pray with me!

Much love to you all and a Merry Christmas, Tal!

For those who are interested in some news etc. about Penelakut, here are a couple of suggestions:

CBC’s reporter Duncan McCue has explored the impact of the [Kuper Island \(now Penelakut Island\) residential school in a podcast series](#). It’s not easy too listen to, but very helpful in understanding the Penelakut people.

[Hwuy’xwet Pune’luxutth \(Opening Penelakut\)](#) is a film about a group of First Nations students at Penelakut Island Elementary School as they work with trail builder Riley McIntosh to create a new mountain bike trail in the community. The film also weaves in the stories, culture, and history of Penelakut Island and its people.

*May you have the gift of faith,
the blessing of hope, and the peace of His love this
Christmas and always.*



Huy'ch q'u Siem

(Thanks to all of you! / I raise my hands to you!)

Tal and Christina

with Corbin and Connor

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* All names are changed for privacy reasons