



"Lord, you know the hopes of the helpless. Surely you will hear their cries and comfort them. You will bring justice to the orphans and the oppressed, so mere people can no longer terrify them.." Psalm 10:17&18

**TAL AND CHRISTINA JAMES
2015**

DECEMBER

News Update

Dear Friends,

First of all we want to thank all of you who have prayed with us for DeeDee and her family, for the search team, the police and all the other helpers. God didn't answer our prayers as we had hoped – the RCMP has an ongoing homicide investigation. May questions are still unanswered, most of all the one of the offender.

It may sound strange, but despite all the heavy hearts there was also a feeling of relief at the funeral. At least DeeDee was found and brought home – so very important in the Native Culture. It is hard to believe that in the last 8 years there have been 2 murders committed on our little 450 habitant Island. As you may know the call for a "National Inquiry Into Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women" by many First Nations (organizations) has been out for a long time and it looks like it has finally been heard. For us and our family and friends the heartbreak and effects are not only a statistic but very real. As Cheryl Bear, a First Nations Christian friend once pointed out: Most First Nations have lost a family member because they have been either murdered or are missing. First Nations women are the most likely to be victims of violent crimes of all people groups in Canada – a fact we face almost daily.

Only about a week before DeeDee disappeared Micha from Germany had arrived as a Volunteer – originally with the expectation to help us out with our usual summer activities. Here are his impressions (originally written end of September):



Hello my name is Micha Remer and I will support Tal and Christina with their work on Penelakut. I'm in Canada for two months now and already settled in. The search for DeeDee started after my first week. That was a difficult emotional situation for me but it gave me the opportunity to get to know the special things about life on Penelakut. Especially the first days where 20-30 people were searching the woods to find a community member were really impressive.

I had the great chance to build up a good relationship to many people by helping with the search almost every day. I also learned a few things about the First Nations culture, for example a "brush-off" ceremony, during which the searchers were "cleaned" with cedar brushes from the negative they had experienced. When we had the sad confirmation of DeeDee's death after a couple of weeks of hope and prayer the funeral was upcoming. The funeral has to take place in four days and includes many different cultural aspects. Many things appear weird for someone who knows German funerals but once the ideas behind the different actions are explained, it makes a lot of sense. The funeral showed me as well which importance the family has in the Indian culture. The extended family organizes the funeral together and different duties are given off to community members.

The main difference for me was that the funeral starts at 6 am and has to be ended at noon followed by a lunch with the family and more ceremonies.

Because of the search the summer break went by without having a chance to do the summer program (archery, kayaking), but the support of the family through the search was more important.

Meanwhile the school started again and the daily routine is back. I had the possibility to stay on Penelakut for a week to build up more relationships and get to know the daily life. That helped me a lot to understand problems of the live on Penelakut. Part of it is for example that it is hard to meet people without having a place where you can invite people to. Furthermore meetings/visits are often changed/cancelled last minute. That makes things more complicated but it is always good to spend time on Penelakut.

I already got to know many First Nations issues. People invite me to cultural events and want to spend time with me. That is a good feeling and I did not expect to be integrated in the community so fast. I am looking forward to the next months and hope to support Tal and Christina as good as possible.

Since then Micha has established his own relationships – once a week he offers „Drop-in-Soccer“ together with a coach from Penelakut to kids of Penelakut, teaches soccer weekly in a PE class for the Grade 5-7 class at the Penelakut school, meets with young adults from Penelakut living in Nanaimo and helps out with chores for elders (e.g. splitting wood). Last weekend he played soccer for a Penelakut team in a First Nations soccer tournament. For that they even took Tal of the shelf and dusted him off – he was goalie 😊. Micha has since decided to stay until end of April.

The summer was difficult for us in many ways – most of all of course because of DeeDee, but also because at the same time I had been (unjustifiably) accused of unprofessional behaviour by a colleague. This (non-First Nations) lady had only been with Kwumut Lelum for three months and has now

knowledge or connection to the First Nation culture. To my great shock I was first suspended and then released – without ever having the chance to have a conversation with this colleague, my team or others. This decision was made by two superiors that are also Caucasian and have no connection to Aboriginal culture. Since then we have found out that Kwumut Lelum has a history of dealing unprofessionally with its employees and many former staff have been treated similar. For me that was a very difficult experience: shame, grief, anger, incredulity ... and all this on top of the search and the to that connected feelings of hope, fear, hopelessness and finally despair. I had given all of myself into the



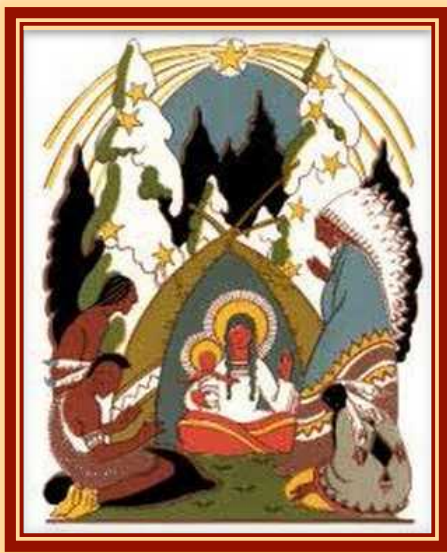
building of a cultural Parent-and-Child-Program, Tal and I had used our relationships and friendships in the different reserves, used our good names to vouch for the integrity of the program etc. I miss the children, young parents and elders so much. I felt paralyzed and am still praying for the strength to forgive. However I do feel encouraged by all the positive support from many First Nations friends and leaders. Penelakut Chief and Council even requested answers from the director of Kwumut Lelum at one of their council meetings, since they had based the implementation of the program on the assumption of my involvement. However he was evasive, telling them he was only informed that my contract had ended and had no more information.

After feeling so hurt about really such a minor offence and comparing it to the huge wrongdoing that has been committed towards the Aboriginal people in the name of Christ, I realise all anew how amazing the willingness for reconciliation by most First Nations is.

The fall was shaped by almost depressive episodes as well as a lot of work in a variety of jobs for the Christian school – always with the thought of my “career” being over before it ever took off properly in the back of my mind. However in the meantime we have come to the conclusion that it is probably for

the best that we are not connected with Kwumut Lelum and their bad reputation on many reserves anymore.

Starting in January I will focus on the implementation of the “Drop In House” again. Who knows, what will come out of all of this? In the meantime we are hoping to ready an empty (very run down) house to be used for the short run. For now Tal uses his hunting and fishing skills to deepen relationships, helps out in the community or individuals where needed and participates in community events. Right now we are considering if he should run for council as elections are coming up for Penelakut and he has been suggested from different sides. The kids are doing well, Corbin (15) and Connor (13) are typical teenagers: Tal and I are pretty much written off and don’t know nothing ☺ (Well, at least at some times.) Both still love playing Lacrosse. Corbin will probably go to Germany for 6-12 months in August 2016. He will live with my parents and probably attend the Christian school in Hamburg. Well I’m running out of space and time, so that is it for today.



*“Within a lodge of broken bark the tender babe was found;
A ragged robe of rabbit skin enwrapped his beauty round
But as the hunter braves drew nigh
The angel song rang loud and high
Jesus your King is born, Jesus is born, In Excelsis Gloria ...
O children of the forest free, O sons of Manitou,
The Holy Child of earth and heaven is born today for you.
Come kneel before the radiant Boy
Who brings you beauty, peace and joy.”* From The Huron Carol

*May the miracle of Christmas fill your hearts and
guide your steps in the New Year.
A blessed Christmas to you!*

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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