

# Peaceful Warrior Woman

By; Jan Porter

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This novel is a work of spirit world fiction with universal philosophical teachings interwoven in a spiritual coming of age journey. If any of the characters, story bits, ideas or religious-cultural beliefs offend you, consider that while we each have a unique individual life journey to trek, we are all branches of the same tree, interconnected and all our journeys are sacred; cherish them all.

Dedication

Gloria Porter, "I am always with you, Mom. We summer camped, magical ice storm watched and woey woo explored. Together we walked through the shadows of life and jig danced into the light.

'Rose' Mrs. Issac Wright, "You journeyed away from aboriginal roots, community and home for marriage to my Great Grandfather, creating a rich nature spirituality legacy our children's children.

For all my original Wild Women Soul Sisters and spirit world muses.

~

Each soul path is a divine unique fingerprint that adds to the beautiful cosmic tapestry. Life is a series of defining moments, cross roads and gateways opening. Always and in all ways, follow the heartbeat of your own soul path of most light and love.

Much love and inspiration to all, who seek and find their authentic wild natures, consciously choose to forgo a traditional lifestyle for an spiritual journey. All of you continue to amaze and inspire others.

The best of your ancestors and  
the magic of the cosmos is in your DNA!

Take the good from your past  
and carve a new path.  
Honour your gifts.

One woman is a tiny divine spark  
in a timeless sisterhood tapestry, collective;  
all of us are Wild Women.

*“Tread softly, the Wilds is upon us.”*

~ Caleb Musgrave ~

## Chapter One ~ Soul Calling

This story begins as most legends, once upon a time, long ago lived a young woman named Annish. Always respectful, yet different from the rest. We meet Annish on the verge of a great journey.

Annish stood confident alone in the light of Moon on the river shoreline. A third-generation mutation from a Celt Grandfather, her light skin and reddish auburn wavy hair had once left a burning question in her soul as to what her role and contribution to community was. "Home is where the heart is", repeated as they prepared to move camp. "Remember this always, Annish. Your connection to your people, Celt and mine lay within your own heart, no matter where you are. Home fires can be rekindled anywhere, and under any situation, if the teachings and spirit stay strong against darkness of adversity and broken lonely spirits. Your mixed blood is important, yet will seem both a curse and blessing until you know balance within your own heart.

Annish playfully watches her breath puffing out moist white mist balls that dance and hang in the chilly evening air. Eyes crossed, engrossed as glistening smoky balls gently rise, sparkling against the black backdrop of dark night and twinkling stars. Eyes uncross, shoulders slump, trails of greens and yellows hum and wave within Northern Light streams. Spirit World dancing in communion with the all that is. The late autumn's cold dampness sinking into shivering bones. Lazily tightening her robe, her head tilted, nose upward, sniffing and sensing the onset of winter. Again, a deeper breath in, eyes closed and attention on odours, the chilly breeze carried decaying musky scents of trees, plants, evening fires and dinner's cooking.

Rebellious to attending dinnertime chores, her eyes fixated on radiant Moon splaying of a brilliant sparkling light path across the dark river water's surface. Magical mist hung thick amongst the offshore tiny islands and rocky shoreline evergreens as cold air met river water warmed from the day's sun. Barking Geese migrating to the far south on evening stop over, dropped one by one away from their massive V. Annish splayed her arms, legs, fingers and toes in communion, watching geese adjust wings, jut legs straight out front with webbed toes wide open and skid over water surface creating gentle waves. Their barking settling, waves rose as birch bark canoes slapped and bounced off the sandy beach tugging against ties around a protruding old cedar tree branch. The old branch spanned out over top of water's surface, a youthful perfect swim diving platform and day bench for lounging, for the old.

Her ears twitched, tuning into a distressed Loon echo from the north shore sounding alarm and looking for its mate. From a nearby island bay, Mother Loon and nearly grown chicks excitedly reply. A large hungry fish had disturbed father Loon's late evening feeding. Unlucky and frustrated, hungry fish flipped, breaking surface rippling water as it meandered off in search for dinner elsewhere.

Smoky odours stung the inside of her nostrils, turning attention to communal campfire smouldering, slowly smoking the last of the day's meagre river fish catch. Aside the fire, bundles of willow, sweet grass and juniper branches lay ready for lodge frame repairs, mats and baskets. Medicinal plants gathered fresh earlier in the day, had been cleaned, trimmed, sorted, now hung to air dry on an open rack.

Auntie alarmingly scolds little niece as their dwelling door flaps rudely open. Abruptly, Auntie hurls a small water snake into the air which belly flop splashes into the river. Annish smiles, knowing that little Niece has neglected to leave Water Snake in its own river water home.

All ten family lodges have grown quiet as cool moisture night air heightens the sweet smell of birch-bark lodge coverings. Boy cousins carefully groom two prized horses while chattering of trade routes and beautiful far away girls to be wooed. Uncle loads his arms with all-night logs from a woodpile for Elder Council Lodge's late night meeting fire.

"CHICK A DEE DEE DEE DEECHICK A DEE DEE DEE DEE DEE, CHICK A DEE DEE DEE DEE" interrupted Annish's reverie. Looking upward, following the unusually loud and deep song of Chickadee for its source high in a Tamarack treetop, she grins and interjects, "Aha, Grey Jay I see you! You do not fool me and you do not fool Mother and Father Chickadee." Gray Jay cocked his head to one side, sizing the girl below. Annish returned the head tilting curious gaze. Silly Gray Jay's choice of camouflage in the Tamarack with its seasonal needle colour change and drop simply lacked Chickadees known camouflage preference for the all green all season attributes of evergreens. Oblivious to Gray Jays lame attempt to woo Chickadee parents out of nest for a fine chick dinner; they remained quietly sleeping with young ones well protected. Hearing and seeing no response from adult Chickadees leaving their nest, frustrated Gray Jay with hunting tactic lost, fluttered its wings and flew off north along the shoreline.

'Ahhh, all is good on my Turtle Island home.'

Annish gazed into the fire, 'How it had been for her ancestors, her Great, Great Grand Parents to leave their beloved home on the big water shores far in the East? Following the great migration from the far north land bridge, they had settled in the region, their prophesied new home now for many generations. Joining a massive journey with extended family of many clans in ten thousand canoes, her ancestors had travelled many moons inland into the great unknown. Following the setting sun inland where the great river ended, her Grand Parents clan had turned north, seeking a new home where the rice food grew on water surface, while other clans headed south deep into the interior of Turtle Island. Many clans had diverged into new territories, each carrying a new role in both history and mission. It was a legacy of great adventure, courage and brevity to which Annish was proud to be a part. Communication between the clans had remained open, through mindful prayer and trade route messages, connecting each other mentally and physically. Occasionally, clans travelled great distances to re-unite for small social gatherings. Long ago, thousands of extended families gathered for days and weeks at a time to share, trade, dance, feast and pray together.

The many families, who had long ago ventured south, eventually to return north, as intruding white people swelled in numbers. Most intruders were content to build their square lodges and stay swarmed around big water bays, but stragglers ventured inland and north looking for metals, wood, large game animals, land and medicines.

A glimmer of Grandmother Moon's light danced on a large communal wooden water bowl surface catching Annish's attention. Kneeling before it, Annish's face and upper body perfectly mirrored in the light beam reflection. Carefully running her fingers through long loose hair and caressing two thin braids, Annish remembered that her red wavy hair came from Grandmother's husband and his people.

Grandmother's story shared, told of her daring departure from community. Her Celtic husband was only eleven, a boy who came across the big water in a big canoe. After his family, had passed into Spirit World during a famine, his community elders had sent him away, a child, all alone in a strange land, abruptly entered manhood. Grandmother occasionally shared his story that had been unlike most whites. She proud bragged, seeing only their similar cultural kindred spirit-world communication and communion. Yes, odd, yet a farmer by natural inclination, he quickly built a new life and by fourteen had fallen in love with a native girl, Grandmother.

Coupled, he could not adapt nor assimilate into her world, so she walked away from her community to live with him. In love, and both in tune with nature and the Spirit World, they built a life

together bearing only one child, Mother. White people were wary of him and his native woman, so they left them alone. Sometimes, people would give them money, Celt Grandfather was a water diviner, using two twigs, and he could find river water below ground, under Mother Earth's surface. White people who did not live near water, routed underground river water to the surface to bath in, and feed their plants, animals and families. Obviously, a magic man, yet Celt Grandfather could not conjure magic to avoid his passing into spirit. Mother was born during their last hard and cold winter together. Alone with a child, Grandmother returned home to her people and community life.

Gently running her fingers over eyebrows and downward along cheekbones, she noticed that her childhood pudginess was being replaced by the stronger lines and tones of womanhood; like Mother. Standing, now with full body view, she was comparatively shorter than most girls her age, not nearly as muscled except in legs and calves like Father. Yet despite having Mother's shortness, she too was amply agile and strong when willed to be so.

Kneeling, 'what else is it exactly that sets me apart from the others? Oh, Annish had no doubt that she was of her people with Celt Grandfather's blood mixed within, yet a different unknown longing lingered within, a feeling that she was indeed different. Mother and Father did their best to assure her that all would be made known in good time, that all would be well and as it should be. In springtime, Mother calmly and quietly listened once to a long and frustrated rant, delivered by Annish. Finally exhausting herself with a heavy sigh, Mother calmly responded without batting an eye or glancing away from her embroidery, 'You will know, when you know, daughter'.

One late spring afternoon, Annish approached Father in attempt to gain clarity about this curious sense of difference, of who she was. Obviously muddled in delivering her query, he cut her off abruptly in mid-sentence, physically averted his eyes and slowly stepping backward. Annish was in the uncomfortable position of having to clarify that she was indeed not enquiring into the mysterious moon-time bleeding cycles of womanhood; she just wanted to know the higher vision of who she was becoming. Both were slightly embarrassed for days afterwards, until Father was sure that she would not ask any more private women questions. He relaxed and assumed a normal Fatherly role. His embarrassment was a side of him that she had rarely seen. Normally strong, wise and charismatic, he was only rattled and thrown off balance during heated discussions with Mother. Couple harmony was always restored as burning issues were eventually solved, and only when Father saw and honoured Mother's higher wise point of view. Their soul mate tenderness and unspoken communication returned to normal.

Gazing deeper into her watery-mirrored Annish eyes, and into her own soul, she saw days of boredom mixed with child play; magical warrior fantasies and boring womanly chores. Annish sighed and leaned her head sideways, resting on one arm and made tiny finger swirls in the watery face, making the image of the Crow feather tied in a hair braid, swirl and dance.

Imagery danced in her mind of Crow Bird companionship and of their hide and seek play in the woods, of his perpetual stealing of shiny beads and sinew strips for cache nest binding. Finding his cache once, Annish retrieved Aunties treasured embroidery beads and replaced them with two smelly rotten Robin's eggs. Smiling, she recalled one warm summer afternoon when Crow had sat on her shoulder, gently tugged out the Grouse feather bound into her thin hair braid and purposefully shook a wing, dropping one of his own. A gift to be treasured.

Perhaps her claim to fame would be to adopt Grandmother's gift for charming the Bee people. As a youngster, Annish once stood covered in a protective layer of mud from head to toe, while Grandmother chanted, slowly approaching an ancient Maple Tree. Within arm's reach, the trees' natural branch spilt in an enormous V where a massive swarm hovered over a hive. Seemingly invisible. Grandmother's calm magical chanting soothed the groggy Bee people and ever so gently, one arm in and dislodged a large dripping honeycomb chunk. Unscathed, the two sat dipping toes

into river water, sucking honey from comb bits, basking in warm summer's afternoon sunshine and giggling; two young girls in cahoots and away from adult eyes. The older Grandmother got, the more mischievous the smile and the more fun she was. Barefoot most of the year, playing hiding tricks on Father and opting out of dinner for Maple and Honey treats.

A cold night breeze shiver rattled her bones and wrapping robe tighter, Annish turned towards the lodge.

Peeling back the sweet grass flap door, kneeling, she crawled into the family lodge. Proudly aware that she was now moving with the grace of a woman, she stood and promptly tripped on a robe left lying on the floor. Free floating, falling through mid-air, cascading loose hair caught under a knee, as a hair braid pinned under one hand and her other hand and elbow pounded on hard earth. 'Oohhhh'. Rolling over to set hair free, she tucked in her smarting arm and rubbed the pulsating pain in the elbow. 'Oohhhh'.

Out of a fold in her robe, a handful of carefully chosen autumn leaves spilled out in a warm display of colours. Still soft and supple, alive with vibrant colours, shades of yellow, orange, reds and brown. It would soon be up to the evergreens to hold vibrant green colours against the white blanket of snow whom also offered valuable windbreak shelters during long winter storms. Soon the cooler shorter days would bring long cold snowy nights, with indoor campfires that needed tending throughout the long dark nights.

Taking a tiny branch from the smouldering indoor fire pit, Annish lit an oil-bowl lamp taper that illuminated the inside of the lodge, adding a cozy warmth. Stretched high, she carefully tied each colourful leaf to a dangling cascade of tiny branches, Grouse feathers, and stones. The precious treasures artistically bound by deer sinew woven into a circular spider's web design, hung from a juniper ceiling pole. The sacred web design, she thought, signified the strands of life force that connect all living things. It twirled and swayed in the taper's glow; casting moving shadows on the walls.

It occurred to her, that despite the clumsy tripping free fall, her body movements were indeed becoming more woman/maiden-like, as opposed to those of a child entering her thirteenth season. Closing the entry flap behind, Annish glanced around their home abode, remembering that Mother and Father would be in Council long into the night. Having the space to herself this night, it was freeing, for the first time. She would not miss them, as a young child would miss their parents. Scanning the inside of home, as though for the first time with adult eyes, she marvelled at the ingenuity of its upside-down basket design. It was a brilliant easy construction, cozy warm in winter and simple to allow airflow through flaps on warmer nights. It was Mother's domain, as home lodge is for all mature women that flowed her calm gracious nature, a welcome embrace to all visitors. All visible traces of Mother's once wilder youthful nature, before Father's arrival from the far north, showed only in mischievous smiles, when the Aunties shared their youthful stories.

Community gravitated to Mother like moths to a flame. Gifts of tobacco and food treats in hand, their problems of the soul spilled out onto Mother's ears. Rarely is a counselling word shared in response, their soul solace was found in her loving acceptance. With simple wisdom, Mother instinctively knew that people most often solved their own problems, given a calm and caring audience.

Annish picked the robe childishly left on the floor, maturely folded it neatly and placed it with the others aside the bedding. Content, she took a pinch of dried cedar and tobacco from a medicine pouch and sprinkled it onto the glowing taper. A tiny swirl of scented smoke and sparks rose into the air. "Thank you, Creator, for this day."

Sitting cross-legged on her bed, fur piled high over soft pine needles and mosses, she untangled thin long hair braids, careful to keep treasured Crow feather intact. Annish smiled, remembering how Crow companion managed to find her again every spring.

From the distance, the glow of Council's lodge fire and the murmurs from therein, distracted her routine bedtime thoughts. Annish slid beneath the soft warm hide of an Elk, its Spirit freed by Father, many moons ago. Sensing tension from within the Council lodge, she anxiously curled towards the glow and murmurs. Perhaps the curiosity of a disrespectful child, yet for the first time, she found herself drawn to and wanting to be an adult part of this meeting. Annish strained to hear Father's voice clearly, but could not. Council members would be chatting late into the night. Each Elder member would respectfully offer options and discussion explored. A unanimous decision and action plan would not likely be announced until morning. Each Elder and attendee was amiably and respectfully allotted time to present a point of view, yet in the natural flow of life, only one choice and one plan would evolve, supported by all. In the days ahead, volunteer hunters would purify themselves of body, mind and emotion in Sweat Lodge, followed with group invocations and prayers to Creator and Spirit World for guidance and assistance.

When many pray for assistance from Spirit World, visions, all discuss direction and strategies. This is the clan way. 'I could help', Annish thought 'somehow.' It was a mature 'knowing- feeling' sensation. An adult's tangible heart solution; rather than childish nose- seeking. Fantasy images dreamily danced in her mind, as a grown woman, boldly seeing herself as a valued role in the Elder's Circle, wrapped in a stunningly beaded white robe from a wondrous distant place. Old ears listened carefully, as Annish's powerful Spirit Guide spoke forth words of wisdom and inspiration through her lips.

A Moth fluttered and zigzagged tickling her nose, and drawing her attention. Lightly flicked it away with a gentle hand, as not to injure it, "Go away Moth! I want to hear what they are talking so seriously about." Unabated, Moth continued to flutter, tickling a cheek. Waving a gentle hand, she sighed in submission, "okay, my little winged friend, you win. I won't disrespect the Elders by eavesdropping." Satisfied, Moth fluttered out of sight. Announcements would be made known in time, without her participation and not likely until Grandfather Sun had long rose above the horizon to address the morning. 'Yes, Grandfather Sun will bring balance to the day ahead.'

Rolling over, Annish infant curled in a ball allowing Elder voices to fade. Ears sought the pale slapping sounds of nearby river water over smooth rocks, amidst a chorus of Crickets singing their babies a lullaby.

A hint of Father's cedar oil scent, residue on a nearby cattail mat drifted into sleepy consciousness, bringing heart tingling childhood imagery. A young, Annish was acutely aware of Father's natural hunting and fishing prowess, reflected in the faces and body language of the men and boys. To the inquisitive souls pointing out the obvious higher skills; addressing the air of magic and grace that pervaded his every task, he merely gave a wide grin and said, 'It is the Cedar Oil; I only use fresh'.

His people far to the north carried sacred scrolls containing history and prophecies of the first peoples, as well as to the principles of a spiritual path. 'Will Father share his sacred magic with me some day?'

A Raven hailed from a distance, 'Magic is upon you, young one'. Dreams of sacred medicine Spirit People imparting their magical knowledge mingled with hunting.

Sensing early morning light, Annish sat quickly, shaking off dreams of warrior-hunter adventure imagery. Bombarded by sounds of chatter rippling and buzzing outside, hands rubbed sleepy eyes

and her ears tuned into community chatter. Sitting, scanning inside the empty lodge, neither Father nor Mother had returned through the night.

Scurrying out into the cool crisp morning air, she hurried into bush seclusion to relieve a full to bursting bladder. Grass, wet and cool against bare feet and exposed bottom, a cold breeze sent a shiver up her spine. A wide lazy morning yawn of outstretched arms released an empty stomach gurgling burp followed by a self-satisfying childish giggle. Bladder satisfied and robe pulled in tight to ward off a damp morning chill, Annish turned to greet Grandfather Sun cresting over river landscape treetops. Warm sunrays slowly burned away a chilly morning mist, sending shafts of light through tree branches. A deep inhale brought the smell of late summer mornings changing to moist pungent autumn and breakfast fires cooking.

Bee zipped past her face, swerving and ducking in a stumbling zigzag. Confused from a teasingly cold night and not yet in hibernation, intent on foraging for intoxicating nectar of rotting fruit. Drunken Bee buzzing mingled with community prattle. "Aha, Grandmother would have followed you to your hive and alleviated your honey load." Another day perhaps. Annish giggled with the childhood memory.

Annish's ears returned to buzzing tid-bits of conversation, "meat stores are low. Many animals have already travelled south to winter-feeding grounds and white hunters have emptied our traditional hunting grounds. Yet it is too soon to travel to winter camp, ground too soft. Volunteers must step forward to form a hunting party." 'No plans have been announced. Elder Council is still going,' thought Annish.

Having just settled on the jutting cedar bench, toes dipping cool water with a delicious bowl of wild rice, squash, apple and maple syrup, Annish's Auntie announced that it was time to prepare hunting party food bundles for a journey, count fruit and medicine supplies and mend winter clothing. Annish knew intuitively that stores were already in good order. Checking would keep the younger women occupied for the day, and in a way, teaching them the seasonal process of transition to winter and their role within it.

Attention returned to the Elder's call for a hunting party, to which Annish's soul responded with a rippling eagerness up her spine and within belly. 'I want to go! I want to hunt! I AM a Warrior Woman! I could even protect our community!' It was a conclusion that she had haphazardly proclaimed to herself once while tending to womanly chores and dismissing the notion as the inevitable elder rebuttal arguments assumed in her thoughts. Emotions swirled. She was 'just a girl', not of mature age to be married and still not spoken for. Was she simply to follow Mother's footsteps as all women before her did? Accepting this, of course, meant looking after family, community and preparing to have a family of her own. This is custom's way, yet another soul calling was growing. She had no clear vision of what contributing skills she could offer community. During childhood and early teens, this 'knowing' of one's gifts was pronounced to community with an Elder's consent, approval and blessing. Everyone during childhood, without exception, had an awareness of their own contributing skills and talents; some held this knowledge from spirit world, before birth. When the time was right, individuals were introduced with unique skills, attributes and contributions openly acknowledged and assigned an Elder mentoring guide. Growing into adulthood, each gradually became an integral and valuable contributing part of the community.

Thoughts deliciously slid back into imagining herself as Warrior-Hunter, Annish heart danced in a stunning white beaded robe, from a wondrous distant place, for all to admire. Father offers his magic secrets that she easily masters, stealthily willing animals to give their lives to her, their bodies offering food, tools and warmth, for the good of all.

'Ah,' Annish sighed heavily. If she had a special gift or skill to contribute, it remained unknown, and unnoticed by the Elders. She longed for her uniqueness to matter in a good way, perhaps even

an adventurous life path, a life esteemed and honoured above womanly chores, and an important higher mission of her own. Yes, an exciting journey, bringing a future of many stories to entertain and share. Otherworldly hunting journeys slipped into her own soul while watching the coming of age boys train to hunt, fish provide and protect. She had tried making her own hunting tools once; now she frowned with the adult knowing of how wholly inefficient and childish they were in practical use. 'Toys,' her thoughts expressed.

Oh, and yes, there were stories of Warrior-Hunter Women ancestors of long ago, before she was born. Thinking of it now, she could not recall details, other than the fact that they existed. Reflecting, it annoyed her now that she always seemed to be playing with smaller children during story time or warrior-woman daydreaming, instead of listening.

'Oh well, what is done is done. Hmmm, it is enough to know that they were there! Yes, they did exist and now live in the Spirit World with my Ancestors.' Annish noticed at the periphery of her vision, an apparition female warrior disappearing as fast as the image invoked. 'Ah, I saw you and you saw me.' Images of a solo hunt by the intriguing woman flashed in her mind's eye, noting that while young, the woman seemed wise, brave, and strong and moved with graceful agility. 'Respected,' Annish added.

Thoughts turned to Father and Mother's practical disapproval and rationalizations. It was dangerous enough for men, said Mother's responding facial expression. 'Still, I wish I could train with the boys. It would be so exciting and make my heart beat proud.'

'No.'

It was an argument that often arose, arguing to anyone who might tease, "no, I don't want to be a boy!" Comparing others, those girls did not have warrior adventure daydreams and the growing chasm of them not relating to her, left her feeling 'different'. The community girls seemed silly now, only interested in boys, marriage preparations and competing for best embroidery handiwork. 'Who cares?' Annish's clumsy handiwork and food preparation often needed additional repairs and adjustments from Mother.

Mother was calm and quiet by nature, living the way of the heart, seemed satisfied and humbly proud of her community work. An honoured council member amongst the Elders.

Father had come to community on a trade mission from the far north. He had taken only one soulful look at Mother and stayed. A calm jovial man, wise and always respected. An observer, only speaking seriously when he had words of importance to share. Hence, people listened carefully whenever he spoke during council.

While Annish did not feel parental pressure, pressure did arise from within, in an unknown yearning. And so it was that she often wandered off to be alone in a special place in the woods. Far enough away to be alone yet close enough to still be community safe.

Following the way of the heart, meant contributing in whatever way an individual felt brought out the best in themselves. The challenge for some was in finding that higher way of being, loving and honouring not only one's self but also, all of life. Best solutions were in alignment, with one's thought, heart and soul. With the assistance of Creator and Spirit-World, the best choice was for the highest good of all, community. There was no higher aim than to contribute one's gifts for the good of the community.

Annish saw this gift knowing, in all others, except two young male cousins. Oh Auntie, whose manner mimicked Porcupine, jabbing offensive quill insults flying and embedding in some unsuspecting soul. Yet those who looked deeper, saw her soft loving underbelly, and thus paid no attention to the jabs.

One cousin had become Storyteller during last spring's social gathering. Her gift for remembering and entertaining shone like a newborn star. By late summer's social gathering, numerous boys took

new names and roles. Fraternal twins took new names; the boy became Fire Keeper, his sister, Wisdom Keeper; and both were assigned to work with medicine Elders.

A young Annish, as a babe of four years, wracked with fever, and semi-conscious, found herself with Mother and Grandmother in Spirit Caller's Medicine Lodge. Spirit Caller's Lodge was smaller, compared to others, and essentially bare of normal personal belongings, except medicine bundle, gifted blankets, a sitting stone and two bed furs. Her illness ravaged eyes had curiously fixated on a stuffed Owl who perch-supervised atop a painted red and green cedar post. Spirit Callers' calm caring and fatherly nature added comfort to both Mother and Daughter. Drifts of strange soothing sounds and smells had mingled with drumming, rattles and Grandmother's chanting. Whilst images of a Crow, Celt Grandfather and a White Wolf with yellow, eyes stirred within her soul. Four days later, Annish awoke in Father's arms in an icy lake bath.

Bare foot all seasons offered a continuous joyful connection to Mother Earth, save for wintry snow and ice. Mother had scolded often, following the great fever and long since given up. Porcupine Auntie had picked up where Mother left off, with random maternal scolding. Words rolling, like water off Beaver fur, Grandmother defiantly flipped off her moccasins one day in support of Annish. Their kindred defiance, both donned footwear consisting of a simple yet intricate beaded sinew lace wrapped around big toes and ornamentally knotted around ankles. It was sufficient foot covering in Annish's mind, despite occasional slivers and insect bites.

Annish watched on, imagining following Father into Spirit Caller's Lodge with four Elders participating in a secret meeting, her own warrior-woman training.

Pretending to be busy with womanly chores, intentionally often positioned herself close to male gatherings. A small part of her mind focused on the womanly tasks, she agilely split attention and awareness to important hunting moves and strategies. Her heart raced with excitement watching the men train younger boys prepare for hunts and gathering hunting parties. Although straining to listen, she could not get quite close enough to hear clearly what was said.

Working alongside women and listening to their chatter, was like being in the middle of a large flock of squawking Geese. Of course, she respected the women, despite the irritating noise.

Annish envied the men, by how they exuded a different kind of power, and by their shared mysteries of Warrior-ism. She admired the good hunters in the clan.

'Sigh, chores done well enough for the moment.' Annish stood and scanned the Community. Rather than the normal gravitation to small children this time of day and seeing everyone busy about their own chores, she slipped off unnoticed. Out into the open field, following the river, she ambled along, lost in thoughts, toward her own special place in the woods. Stopping, she broke off a long strand of grass, chewed on the moist sweet end and flicked it at the air as if to flick away paltry tasks expected of a female. Lost in a myriad of conflicting thoughts, she imagined proclaiming to Mother and Father that she was ready to become a hunter warrior. And not having fully convinced herself, nor, supporting a mature proposal as to why and how this would be so, the rebuttal was, as always and simply, 'No!', followed by Mother's dismissive and terse facial expression. Warrior imagery in her mind was followed by a face flush of humiliating imagined laughter from Community. Annish angrily dismissed the conflicting images, tossed another long grass stem away and ambled along to a fork in the river. Willow, a giant tree bowed over the water, leaves dipping into its coolness. Bubbles formed and broke on surface as Turtle buried itself in the mud below in river bottom.

Barely aware of dragonflies fluttering in the afternoon breeze and of a playful Otter lazily swam on his back, Annish continued along the path. On another day, she would have noticed them, spoke and played with them.

As though an internal choice was slowly forming, she practiced making the same moves as the boys did with their bodies when training to hunt. She imagined her own first Warrior–Hunter celebration, the Rite of Passage into adulthood with a huge feast and gifts given in honour. Her belly tightened, the persistent daydream intensified.

Fantasy faded, when a tickling sensation on a foot sent a shiver up her spine. Shaking the foot, a frantic Ant zigzagging shakily over tiny toe hairs. It climbed one hair and hesitated for a moment, gazing directly into her soul, it spoke, ‘See girl? You see us often alone. We are not alone. We are one Community. We work as one mind for the good of all. The good of all! The good of all is paramount to the survival of each of us!’

Feeling a pang of guilt, an internal argument brewed, ‘I just know that I can be a good warrior. Nevertheless, how do I tell Mother, Father and friends? I am a small girl who has not shown skill to be so. An occasional Rabbit in a snare does not a Warrior-Hunter make’.

Thoughts drifted back home to the Elder Council meeting as a surge of concern excitement washed within. Unable to align personal desire with community mind and protocols, she angrily dismissed Ant.

Sighing, she hesitated squinting upward to Grandfather Sun, extended open palms, as though symbolically handing the whole dilemma over to him. She did not want to take the chance of having warrior dreams entirely crushed, at least not yet.

Noticing a brilliant red and yellow leaf intact, Annish lazily nudged it with a finger; disturbing its underlying nest of tiny winged insects. Annoyed, the swarming frenzy cloud darted around her face and dissipated. Annish gently placed the leaf back where she had found it; watch waiting for the tiny winged creatures to find their way home.

It would soon be dinnertime, and while consciously aware that she should be home assisting, simply was not ready to return.

Annish foraged for firewood. Kneeling to gather branches and kindling, and with arms full, again hesitated, allowing the infernal argument to arise once more. Again, a tickle drew attention to her foot. An Ant scurried over toes, who led a stream of Ants scurry zigzagging. Annish stood watching with concern as they swirled around one ankle, some crawling in between toes, a few crawling up one leg while another raced inside a thigh. The tickling sensation released a tickle shiver giggle.

‘ANNISHHH! Pay attention!’

“Arghhhh...Ant People...Off!!!! I get it. I get it. I know what you are telling me.” With arms, still full of kindling, she kicked and shook her right foot, hoping they would fall off. Defiant, each clung and continued to scurry here and there, dashing in between standing hairs over skin. She outstretched and shook one leg harder. Ant fell onto the other foot, while another scurried in and around tickling toes. In frustration, she fully extended the right leg straight out to one side, nearly losing her balance and dropping a branch. Holding tighter onto the kindling, she shook the leg harder, wildly while pivoting on the other foot while trying in vain to maintain balance. Suddenly she smiled, recalling a Coyote Dog once shaking urine off its leg while still peeing. She squatted on the grass and cradling the kindling tightly in one arm, scooted them off with the free hand. She addressed the Ant people, “Aha. I learned a new dance today Ant People, ‘Coyote Dog Dance’. It is what happens to you when you refuse an Ant lesson”. (She would share this later, with others.) “All right, I will go home now.”

Satisfied with the wood gatherings for a late evening fire, Annish turned and headed home to finish chores. Meandering along the path, playful images of hysterical laughter from the Community floated in her thoughts, them laughing with attentive audience to the Coyote Dog Dancing antics. She smiled, happy to entertain the community of Ants.

Attending to finish touches on a soft deer hide for winter clothing and placing gathered wood on Mother and Fathers' evening fire, she contemplated her role within the family and community. Her clan family, were strong, brave, loving and wise, and she is heart proud. A part of growing older also meant having more understanding of the adult world. Boys had mysterious private conversations with old men, their mentors. Most girls learned womanly skills from their Mothers and Aunties. It was the way it was. She would, however, given the opportunity, choose to train with Father, like male cousins. Forming a hunting party was not normally a big deal. Drought, summer's heat and infringing white hunters, had proved it a bad year for community hunting, and many had already been discussing new strategies. There was the added discretion that unpredictable white men could be encountered, whom often over harvested big game in traditional hunting grounds before hunting parties arrived.

She would go quiet and listen to Wind, call on the Spirit World, the Animal Kingdom, and the Ancestors. They would show her a possible way, certainly.

Suddenly, a change of power surged within as a warrior power surged from a gurgling belly into her chest, pounding within her chest.

'I can help'.

'I could hunt with the men.'

'I would hunt big game. Food for everyone.'

'Buffalo.'

"That is, it! The 'Beast of Plenty' will feed many."

"Yes!"

"I AM a Warrior – Hunter- Woman!"

She envisioned herself returning home with a great beast bundle in tow, to a cheering clan, with an evening feast in her honour.

Thoughts of magnificence faded, unable to rectify the inner calling with practical community protocols, emotional weariness tears welled in disappointing eyes. 'I am just a small girl, doing daughter chores when Community urgently needs a good hunt to re-fill food stores'.

A Dragonfly flitted and came to rest on top of her hand, catching Annish's full admiration. Its luminescent wings sparkled light; like a winter's mist of cool air bouncing off of sun beams with indigo shades of fresh blueberries, and brilliant greens of fresh grass in springtime. Its head tilted to one side, bulgy eyes focusing in on hers.

"Allo little winged friend. My, you are a beauty".

Annish carefully carried Dragonfly, recalling essence from childhood legends of the magical winged creature. Dragonfly spoke, 'Illusions, Annish. Who are you trying to fool? What are you are trying to prove?' Thoughts of hunting alone without Community consent came to mind. A tiny breeze blew between them, breaking eye communion and carrying Dragonfly into the wind. He, joining his mates, circulating and swooping for insects.

Chores done, Annish scanned community to ensure that no one was watching and wandered off again, through stocks of tall grass, to a clearing. She stretched out under the late afternoon sky. She imagined Trees thirsty roots working their way deeper and deeper into the earth, gathering nutrient and moisture that in turn made its way inside and expanded out into sprouting branches and leaves. Looking high, tips and leaf edges gently caressed each other. At the top, branch tips touched and blended with each other, sky and clouds. One with each other, Earth Mother and Grandfather Sun. Tree whispered when the Wind blew, carrying messages from the Ancestors in the Spirit World.

Lazily enjoying a space where no one would bother to demand doing chores, she is left alone to think deep thoughts, inspiring Warrior dreams.

Pulling a blade of grass to chew on as she thought, eyes watched clouds slowly drift through the sky. Her mind drifted back to hunting rituals. She knew it all, had watched the boys perform them a hundred times. She knew how the older boys and men prepared for a hunt and she knew what to do. There had to be an honourable way to prove to Creator, Spirit World and Community that she could perform required hunting feats. 'How?' Suddenly, a lightening sensation shot through her heart and stomach.

'That is, it!'

Annish jumped and shouted aloud, "THAT IS IT!"

"Yes, tonight I will prepare to hunt Buffalo beast!"

"I can do it!" At the thought, a surge of Warrior power pumped within her that set her heart free. Her back straightened and her chest expanded to the notion in her mind. Plump alpha male Turkey popped its head out of underbrush, eyeing Annish in affirmation. Turkey, the giveaway Eagle, fluttered shiny brown wings and resumed his amble pecking of seeds in the grass. Sensing danger, he suddenly jutted his head forward and quickly disappeared into the scrub brush. A prepared hunter Annish may have added Turkey to tomorrow's menu. The missed opportunity only served to validate lingering doubts.

"CAW. CAW. CAW."

Her attention shifted to a nearby tree where Crow sat watching. Annish smiled at Crow companion.

"Allo, my winged friend."

Crow fluttered its large shiny black wings, tilted its head and blinked. Crow's sound was obviously a message of confirmation from the Spirit World.

Gazing into Crow's pulsing eye, Annish instantly found her mind inside of Crow's body. Wings spread, expertly adjusting feathers and body formation, flying high above the community. Tiny clouds zipped past as they gained speed. Rivers became tiny snake lines on the ground below and trees grew smaller while they gained elevation. Together they rose upwardly, ascending toward brilliant Grandfather Sun. Rapidly shifting wings tucked in, catching wind under tail feathers into a graceful descent.

Back, Annish and Crow resume their eye gazing at one another. She saw an image of a small Buffalo herd mingling along a tree line that edged a vast open field. "Ahhh, I have Spirit World support."

'There is a higher order of what is right, as opposed to Community expectations, Annish. Think on this.' said Crow.

"Thank you, my winged friend." Crow tilted his head from side to side watching, listening. She gratitude smiled in return, 'I can do this with help from the Ancestors and the Spirit World. They say it is so. Crow has spoken it so. Father and Mother will not argue when I bring home Buffalo.' she affirmed to herself.

Crow stretched and fluttered wide wings and flew to the ground in front of her. Hopping toward her foot and playfully pecking at a shiny shell bead. "Ayyy, that tickles" Annish playfully responded, feigning annoyance until sinew split. Crow triumphantly hesitated with bead in beak and flew off to a distant Treetop.

"Yes, tonight I will prepare for tomorrow's hunt" Annish confidently stated, whilst retying the sinew.

Bolting toward home, Annish ran with Deer speed and agility through the tall grass.

Hesitating a moment at the edge of the encampment, she surveyed the Community; lodges, smoking fires and women milling about finishing chores, while Elders sat lazily catching the last warmth of afternoon Sun. Father downriver, tended to canoe repairs. Mother sat outside the Council

Lodge, head bowed, waiting for elder meeting to resume, yet engrossed in needlework; as a chattering young woman whined tales of woe.

Sure, that she arrived unnoticed, and mindful to avoid Elders, Annish slipped into home. She quietly tiptoed about, conscious of not wanting the mission thwarted.

Holding Father's medicine bundle in hand, she stopped and listened for sounds of his approach. Heart-pounding blood into both ears, she knew his permission would not be granted in this manner. Untying the sinew string and unrolling it, exposed Grandfather's knife. Four small herb mixture pouches, a small bowl, an assortment of oil paints, an Eagle feather and Annish's baby tooth wrapped in a strip from Mother's embroidered marriage buckskin. The latter, she tucked under a bed bundle, to be replaced upon her return home. A quartz flint stone and prayer smudge stick gathered she hesitated, thoughts of Father's preparation routines.

'Father would use bow and arrow', she considered studying his fine collection. 'No, I am not strong enough nor skilled enough in practical use and intuitively Annish concluded 'another way will come to me, I am sure'.

'Father, this is too important,' she said in a thought, should he find her taking his medicine bundle. Knowing his response, she would be strong, 'No, it is not for childish play, it is for hunting preparation.' This is a statement of fact, as though she were already an adult. Sometimes he forgot that she was a woman.

Catching awareness of an untruth rattling from within, Annish stroked a shaking hand over her own medicine bundle. Neglecting its upkeep, and obvious lack of adult hunting tools, was further proof of childhood rather than mature adult. Crimson faced, Annish angrily dismissed the acknowledgement, promising to tend to it in two days' time.

'Father will forgive me' she thought, rummaging through the food cache; picking out dried fruit and maple syrup treats to appease the growing rumbling in her tummy.

'Should I tell Mother what I am doing? She may worry.'

'No.'

'She will know.'

'She will understand later.'

'She will be proud of me.'

'She will brag to the Aunties.'

It is common for youth to slip off into the periphery of the community, to be alone with their private thoughts of becoming adults.

'Yes, they will know.'

She was still not so sure of being able to take an honourable stand with the Elders, and certainly did not want her alone hunt plan dismissed. Ignoring the truth, she just was not ready to hold a convincing adult stance and favourable argument. That due process could take hours, days, weeks, months or years.

She was almost an adult, an adult and therefore, could make her own decisions. She would achieve her own adulthood accomplishment and they in turn would respect her choice. Dismissing a guilt pang, she slipped quietly out through a back-door flap.

Bypassing Father, Annish stayed close to River, allowing sounds of water dancing over rocks to soothe weary senses. The last of afternoon sun sent dancing sparks of light across the surface, mingling with bubbles and surface foam. Water spiders zipped and zigzagged amongst the reeds, arousing comical like ability images of herself sliding over the top of frozen water. Beaver head bobbed and floating with a branch in mouth, eyed the girl observing and dove to dam entrance.

Community builders, Beaver People like Ant People, worked in unison for the good of extended family.

While Annish filled a water skin, Frog perched upon a rock, gronk beckoning a swimming companion. “Yes, a cold-water swim could wash away muddy thoughts and cleanse this soul. Though not today, my friend, I have much to do before this day ends.” Frog flicked a long tongue mid-air, catching a groggy insect and plunged in, swimming just under the water’s surface, creating decorative ripples. Watching the ripples expand outward on top of the water and disappear, Annish heard Grandmother’s distant voice in a childhood moment say, ‘One little thing done by one person ripples out into the world and beyond, affecting many lives’. Watching the last ripple slowly vanish, a moment of intense guilt drained from within.

A tiny flash of light; moisture drops glistened and sparkled in the sunlight atop a cluster of May apple canopied leaves on the side of the path. Underneath a canopied leaf dangled a tender fruit, salivating, Annish rolled it over in hand checking its maturity. Squirrels normally devoured the delicious fruits long before edible ripeness. Humans had to wait until the poisonous green had distinctly mellowed to yellow and become soft, safe to eat.

“Thank you May Apple that is a good gift”. Grateful, Annish savoured its juicy flavour. ‘There is always something good to eat at hand, when you know how to look’, she quoted Grandmother. Despite the long hot summer and drought, die off many favourite plants, there were other plant families readily available to fill the gap.

Enjoying the last of the May apple, its after taste lingering on her tongue as another of Grandmother’s teachings came to mind, ‘Take only what you need, no more than half of what any plant or cluster offers. Many other animals depend upon the same food and taking too much could mean the death of that plant and many animals’ food source’.

A sun streamer danced through a Pine tree, and onto her face. Annish recalled stories of famine where long season hot or cold extreme weather conditions resulted in many plant families dying off, making the variety of nutritional sources dangerously sparse. ‘Most animals, fish, winged creatures, nuts and vegetables offer important nutrients needed in order to thrive. Too much of one or not enough of others, can make even the strong, sick. Celt Husband’s people across the big water had all passed into the Spirit World hungry, after too many long cold seasons had turned their root vegetables black with rot. White skinned people who held power over his people refused to share other food. In a moment of sad confusion of the atrocity, Grandmother straightened her back in higher alignment, added, ‘Food is everywhere and for all of Creation’.

In the knowing of the basic gathering of food and medicinal sources all around her, a mature confidence was solidly taking hold.

‘Thank you, Grandmother, and thank you May apple.’

## Chapter Two ~ The Vision

Arriving at a favourite spot in the woods, Grouse stood waiting aside the campfire pit, watching her approach. Calmly turning to glance at her, he spread tan coloured wings half way out and chest puffing, he slowly danced in the familiar circular pattern emitting distinct drumming sounds from within his puffed-out chest.

“Allo Grouse. You have come to share my fire this night? Ah, it will be dark soon and we will need the light and warmth of fire.” Grouse lowered his wings and pecked at seeds and groggy insects, while Annish pulled away invading grass around the fire pit.

The Grouse circular spiral movements were a clan favourite Spirit World dance invocation. She could hear the clan drummers mimicking its puffed chest drumming sounds whilst dancers moved as Grouse. It was the enchanting feel of rhythmic drumming vibrating from within, its fluid motion, first low, slow and circular, upward movement, losing awareness of this world and giving way to Soul communion, all of creation and the Spirit World. Hearts beating in unison.

The sacred spiral movements imitate the cycles of life, from Spirit world to mother’s womb, through childbirth, moving through the stages of life and life defining moments and through physical body’s death back into the Spirit World; back to earth life. Dancers and watchers became one lake-wave movement, one with Soul and Spirit, each other, yet never one lone spirit. A meeting of minds mingled with Creation and Spirit beings. Through the body’s continual spiral fluid motion in the Sacred Spiral Grouse Dance, the mind quieted, allowing Spirit Visions to bring harmony, insight, and spiritual growth.

Grouse cocked and bowed its head at Annish, in honour of a mutual gratitude shared. She responded in kind with a similar bow and head nod. Drumming sounds faded from her inner ear and attention turned to preparations.

After gathering twigs and branches for a fire, Annish emptied Father’s medicine bundle to the ground. Surveying each item carefully, she respectfully organized them into order of preparation.

‘First, I will smudge to purify my thoughts, body and prayers.’

A young toddler Annish sat half listening as ageing Grandmother expertly tied a small bundle of dried sage, preparing to smudge. ‘Little Granddaughter, always take your time and offer your prayers of need in a good way. Give gratitude first approach the Creator and Spirit World from your heart and with your mind. Come to the Creator in a good way and always clean out bad feelings and thoughts from your body and soul, so that the prayer can come through in a good way. Mindful that alone or with community, prayer is approached in a good and sacred way so that you can work, walk, dance and sing; allowing your soul to enter the Spirit World.

‘Ah yes Grandmother.’

‘I paint my body. I make tea with these maple syrup treats for strength, and the tobacco I will offer to the Creator, Ancestors and Spirit World.’

Lastly, she picked up the knife and remembered that it had once belonged to Father’s Father, who had been renowned for his courage and hunting prowess.

Its deer antler handle, still rough enough for a good solid grip, while smooth enough to spare its handlers own skin. Big for her small hand, admiringly she ran a forefinger over its metal blade. Annish imagined a teenaged Grand Father or one of his ancestors, bartering for the metal piece in trade

from some distant place and skilfully attaching the deer antler. Afterwards, carefully sewing its ornamental buckskin sheath.

Annish tied the sheathed knife, with a lace, around her left forearm, hesitating a moment, she thought, 'Is it supposed to be the left arm? Hmmm, right arm, No! Left arm makes sense. I can grab it quickly with my right hand.' She flexed forearm muscles watching the knife move, yet staying secure. It was good there. Tomorrow, would surely guide and assist with the hunt.

"Ahhh, it is good!"

Annish's attention turned to the setting of Grand Father Sun. Brilliant colours of oranges, yellows and pinks painted across Treetops. "Ahoohoo", she cooed, breathing in the wondrous colours.

"Magnificent."

It was growing darker. Clicking a small quartz flint rock against another, sparks became smoulder in a handful of dried moss and bark shreds. Making short puff blowing breaths, a tiny flame shot upward. Care taken that the growing flame would be big enough to work with, and not so big as to spread. In the distance of her mind, Mother scolded for having a fire during a dry season without an adult nearby. Arching her back in indignation, she argued that she was a woman and knew what to do and how to manage it. Dismissing the feeling of being disrespectful to Mother in this way, she conceded by pushing dirt around the fire pit, snuffing it smaller.

Back straight with prideful defiance, she imagined arriving home with Buffalo meat bundles dragging behind. Annish tossed a massive cedar branch on top of the fire. A crackling flame shot high into the air, making tree branches sway from the heat. She gasped as sparks flew, tickling upper tree branches and dance floated beyond, into the evening sky.

Annish hesitated, panic washed through her; remembering a fire that once engulfed ancient dry trees surrounding their summer campground. After a long hot and dry summer, Wind had caught flames from a campfire and in a flash, had blown them directly into the sky. Worse, Wind and carried the glowing orange flame bolts to surrounding trees, the forest instantly ablaze. With the earth bone, dry, the Fire and ate inside the old Tree people, into their roots, and rapidly travelled underground to other tree roots. That fire had instantly swept through the woods and around the Community in a matter of minutes, sending everyone into rapid action. Summer Camp River had been almost dry and people scrambled to protect their loved ones and belongings. Hours later, from a safe distance away, Annish and others watch relieved, as the first rain in many days, slowly smothered glowing embers and smouldering earth. Mud and black stumps, the forest seemed colourless and lifeless as far as the eyes could see. Silence in the breeze, and void of four legged and winged animals. The Pine Tree People had left, as they always do, an abundance of cones within the Earth's surface, waiting for just the right time to spring forth. Heat activated, the small cones burst into blossoming action, Wind, Rain and other forest creatures carried numerous other seeds. In time, the re-birth of new forest exploded with new life.

That Fire exemplified the natural order of life, death and re-birth.

This Fire, this night, was of her own careless.

Annish head tilted back, eyes to the sky. No rain in sight and the river too far away. What to do? Scrape more bits of dirt from hard earth? Men could spray their urine; tempering the flames. Annish could not think of a way of dampening the big fire. She stood holding her breath, heart pounding, waiting and watching for the fire to settle. Threatening sparks jumped onto dried autumn leaves. "Spirit friends, please help!" she pray-begged. A panicked scrambling of residue dirt haphazardly scraped onto the fire did little to affect the blaze, the heat repelled her backwards. Talking, directing to Fire, hands motioning, willing flames down, firm yet soothing, "Down, calm, Fire Spirit.

Flames slowly subsided and sure that it was safer, her tense body calmed. Kneeling, grateful Annish stared into the flames, listening to crackles, and watching tiny sparks float and dance off into the sky, home of the Spirit World and Star Nations. Head tilted back further, eyes upwardly scanned the sky, "Allo, I am Annish and I come to you in a good way this night. I give thanks that you hear my words, guide me and know the longing in my soul. I give thanks to you now."

Eyes wide, gazing into the flames, Fire Spirits formed, danced and faded. A fevered childhood Lone White Wolf appeared in the flames, its yellow eyes gazed into Annish's soul. Lone White Wolf faded and turned into a Lone Woman Warrior. This unusual Woman was hunting on foot, tracking a Buffalo while a Crow companion companioned beside. The mysterious woman was not of this Community, hair and clothes were different. A familiar calmness and grace exuded her being, resembling Mother. Perhaps she had once walked the Earth, an ancestor in a distant time. Long still moments, following dissolving images, leaving stunning visions replaying in Annish's mind and soul.

She chanted ever so gently and quietly at first, slowly building in passion and determination.

"Spirit World, hear me now.

I call upon you, my Ancestors.

I command a good hunt, an honourable hunt.

I command your will with mine.

Hear me.

I AM Annish, Warrior-Hunter Woman.

I AM a good Warrior.

I call forth a willing Buffalo.

I will a Buffalo to come to me now.

I have a Buffalo, food and goods for all.

I thank you for this gift."

Nagging doubts dissipated, Annish was good, strong and confident; at peace with the mission. Knowing that it was for the highest good of all and had proclaimed herself, a Warrior now overrode childish doubts. Somehow, all would be acceptable with Mother, Father and Community. The acknowledgement set her Soul free and triumphant Spirit to soar.

The last of the sky colours of orange, yellows and pink dimmed and turned to shades of darkening blues and to black. Arching back, she stretched and tilted her head, taking in the expansive night sky with her eyes. Night's blackness brought forth first one and two, many Star Nations. Moon crested on top of distant trees.

"Allo Grandmother moon."

Gazing at brilliant full Moon, a new appreciation of the powerful spirit mother of all and a deeper understanding of her feminine qualities and gifts. Grandmother Moon was Womanpower, who controlled the tides, the rivers within and on the Earth and within all women.

"Aha."

Star Nations filled the expanse of the sky. One particularly bright Star shot across the sky.

"Hmmm, the Star Nations have sent another, a good Soul is born this night," she quietly acknowledged. "Welcome, and blessings little one, on your earth journey." With a deep breath in, eyes and senses filled with awe. "Ohah!"

Gazing lost, into the night sky, Annish saw the Creator. A wash of bright, clear light vibrated behind Stars, sending skin hairs goose bump standing on end and tickling followed with a familiar warm love.

"Ahhhhhh."

As Creator faded, her eyes drifted back to fire sparks and tunnels of oranges that flowed animating the smoke as it rose. Ancestor images drifted in and out of view within the smoky fire. They danced

within strands of white light, pulsing and fading, radiating strands of vibrant indigo, magenta, greens and yellows. Happy tears spilled as Annish's eyes, remembering, reverence and thankful in the knowing that she was part of Creation, a good soul and Warrior strong.

Moon gradually ascended into the dark sky above. A new mature inner power was growing from within, a sensation of soul alignment that straightened her spine and heart butterfly flutters.

'Woman power. Yes, that is Moon'. Annish strained to recall more of the teaching. Imagery of watching Grandmother during one full moon woman's ceremony, pointing to Moon: 'Granddaughter, even when it is dark, your darkest moments, she is there, Moon. Remember Granddaughter, she is always there. She controls the Earth waters, tides, rivers, lakes and even the bowels within the Earth Mother herself. And so she controls all of the waters within all women and female creatures that walk, crawl and fly.'

It was time for the next step. Annish reached for the dried smudging mixture, broke off a pinch, rubbed it between fingers and dropped the bits into the small wooden bowl. Taking a burning twig from the fire, she lit the smudge bits and a small trail of smoke rose from the bowl. Pulling Crow feather from her hair and in hand, she stood. Unsure of exactly what the hunting ritual entailed, she hesitated and gently fanned herself with the feather, ushering smudge smoke over her body,

"I see with eyes of Spirit."

"I hear the voice of Spirit."

"I speak my truth."

She fanned the smudge smoke over long wavy hair and around her small slender body to complete the cleansing. Feeling complete, she tossed the last of the smudge into the fire, and watched the dancing bits of crackling sparks ascend into the night sky. Crow feather carefully slid back into a braid knot, 'Spirit World is pleased, I am pleased, Ahhhhh.'

Hesitantly reaching for paint selection, unsure of what exactly to do with them. While it was important for each person to have their own individual expression, acknowledged and honoured, hunting painting and ceremony painting were different.

Unsure of which way to paint, she considered both hunter and warrior painting intended to illicit fear in the enemy. Personal painting was more to magnify or further express those individual unique gifts, which were already within a person. This coming into one's own honour normally came after a vision about a person's life path, to signify the transition from childhood to adulthood, or a feat of bravery, a coup, or a new skill. All of which contributed to the community. Either way, both applications seemed appropriate for the task. In both, designs and expression were born of the person's own intuition and creativity.

Annish chose to trust that the hand of the Spirit World would guide, the whispered singing incantations and prayers would come. She dipped a finger in the Yellow, rubbing the dab between a thumb and finger, admiring the brightness and depth of hue, feeling the Bear grease oil that bonded the mixture together. 'Hmmm, Bear can take a Buffalo, good to have some Bear power too.'

Facing east, she painted a yellow squiggly line across her forehead, above her eyes, "I see with Spirit vision a smooth and abundant journey ahead, and of providing for my community. Lightning bolts on the tops of my feet, quick and powerful".

Turning to the West, she dipped and painted a black dot over her heart, "I mourn your life Buffalo beast with honour and gratitude. I follow the will of Creator. I am no longer discouraged by childish thoughts.

Facing south, she painted a thin reddish-orange line the length of her nose, "I follow the path of the Spirit World with all of my being." On a whim, she painted three upright squiggles atop each eyelid, "For Fire power. I am fierce".

Turning north, she painted seven white circles, one at the top of her forehead tipping her hairline, one on her throat, another circling the black dot on her chest, and four on her belly. "I ask of my Ancestors and Spirit World to show me the way and work through me as one. May I be one with the Spirit World, that I AM a good Warrior."

Blue lines dabbed on arms and legs "for Water power, I am stealth and I move like the currents."  
"Ummm."

Brown circles covered her chest "Earth power, I am solid and I am strong."

White spirals etched down her legs "Sacred hunt and oh, um, Wind power, I move like the wind."

Thick black lines underlined bright eyes "Crow and I am one with the Animal Kingdom".

Mouse skittered across the ground and disappeared into the thick grass. "Ohhh, yes, Mouse medicine. Too much, focus on detail and I miss hungry Hawk circling above. Hmm, yes, that is enough."

Bundling the paints, it occurred to her that in the process of painting, changing her appearance, she had become aware of another transition, another solid step closer to being a Hunter – Warrior Woman.

It occurred to Annish that she had no idea how the painting ritual was to be. She imagined people laughing uproariously at the sight of her painted expression, which brought a wave of new conviction. Within her mind's eye, Annish stood her ground this time and smiled. 'I will bring home Buffalo. So maybe the painting is not quite right, but it will work.'

Kneeling in front of the fire, she raised both arms towards the sky. "Spirit World, I thank you for guiding me in my actions, showing me the way and gifting a Buffalo to feed my people."

Annish rose, twirled around, breathing deeply in and out, feeling the powers of the earth, tides, winds, waters and Spirit World enter. She practiced warrior-hunter moves, approaching Buffalo, weighing Grandfather's knife in hand; ready for action. The deed was done and with honour.

Kneeling again close to the fire, gathered a water pouch and poured more water into the herb bowl and added a pinch of the special blend of mixed herbs that would nourish physical strength and fortify endurance. Honey and blueberries mixed into tea in the herb bowl. 'Sip it slowly' and praying in between sips. She did not know what the official prayer was, so decided to make one up.

"Um, Creator, Spirit World, Ancestors, ah, Earth Mother, oh and Elements, Mother Earth, Wind, Water, Fire Spirits. No that is not it!"

She lazily stood and faced north.

"Um, Spirit World, please guide me to my kill."

She turned facing east "Ah, Ancestors, please guide me in my hunt."

She turned to face south and stood with mind blank.

"Hmm."

Scratching sudden irritating invisible itches on her head, she searched her memory as to what to say to the south.

"Oh, I think, oh, Earth Mother, and Elements be with me."

"No, I already said that. Oh well. Close, I think."

Next, she turned west and feeling more confident with the made-up prayer, blurted, "Oh Spirit of the East, oh, er, I mean west, please single out and show me the one big Buffalo beast and have him offer his life over to me."

'Yes, that last one was good,' she thought, praising herself.

Pausing for a moment, she reflected, although still unable to recall the incantation right, satisfied that basics were covered, it was close enough. Respectfully, she tidied and bundled Father's Medicine tools.

Annish sat cross-legged gazing into the fire. What to do next? For the life of her, the next step in the Hunting Ritual could not be recalled, or if parts had been missed. Yet, she knew that an important part had been missed. Exasperated with not having paid better attention to the rituals, she gathered the last of the herb mixture and tossed it into the fire, sending crackles and scented smoke into the air. Leaning way back to avoid sparks and flames, letting lungs fill and nostrils flare with the strong odour.

“Yes well, Spirit knows what to do anyway!”

By the fire light, Annish lovingly ran hands and eyes over Fathers medicine bundle. ‘Father, you will be proud of me thus far.’ In the moment, she was sad that Father and other men were not here and would not outright approve of the solo hunting mission.

‘I must do this!’ affirming her stand to the Elders now. ‘I know I can do this.’

Her hand caressed Grand Father’s knife tied to her forearm. It was right there and she was right to be here and preparing to hunt, even without the men. She would prove worthy to Mother, Father, Elders and Community, by bringing home food. All would praise the mission later.

She slid Grand Father’s knife out of its leather sheathe and held it in different postures, testing the feel of its weight, feeling Grand Father’s presence, her own spirit rising. She danced, making a path around the fire, holding the knife, displaying prowess-hunting moves, while talking to the Buffalo beast.

“I command you, oh worthy Buffalo beast to lay your life to me! For my people!

I AM more powerful!

I will it so!

It is time for you to lie down. Your time to make the Spirit World journey!

Many people are growing hungry!

You are to be honoured and thanked for your life.

You know it must be so, Buffalo beast!

It is your time for you to be honoured amongst my people and by the Spirit World!”

Staring into the flames, Annish saw Lone White Wolf with yellow eyes calming gazing into her soul.

‘Allo my friend. Ahhh, my Teacher and Path Guide.’ Annish was filled with calm strength.

Wolf quietly spoke ‘Alone in your power space woman-child is where you find your true self and the answers that you seek’.

Annish nodded in acceptance of the teaching.

In a vision, Wolf turned south and after a distance, hunched low and stealthily walked through a field of tall grass, to a cluster of trees where many Buffalo mingled and grazed. Singling out an old weak male, Wolf silently circled to its rear. In a flash of agility, Wolf swiftly and deeply nipped both hind legs and half-circled to nip the beast’s nose. Herd anxiously scattered away in all directions. Focused Wolf teeth sliced, ripping an open wound in Buffalo’s neck and plunged her fangs deeper again, allowing the blood to flow. Buffalo wavered where he stood, unable to bolt and unable to roll and finally, lunged forward under his own weight.

Wolf pack cautiously approached, circling and waiting for permission from Lone White Wolf to feast. Buffalo downed, Lone White Wolf fed first then they ravenously descended upon the beast in a flurry of alpha order. Lone White Wolf stood in the background, calmly gazing back to Annish. This imagery of Lone White Wolf’s hunt replayed in her mind’s eye.

Annish nodded, in the teaching with White Wolf Spirit’s guidance. She imagined adding magical will power, singling out a prey, and with sheer will, coaxing the Buffalo to give its body and life. This was to be the first large kill yet sure that the beast would give itself willingly, honourably and with

little resistance. Any physical struggle would be purely for her benefit, to demonstrate her hunting prowess to the Spirit World.

'It will be an honourable and memorable hunt.'

Curling into bed fur beside the campfire, sleepy hunter-warrior woman eyes watched tiny sparks mingle and dance with fireflies in the dark of night. As the flames paled, she drifted into dream-state.

## Chapter Three ~ The Hunt

Annish awoke to greet the cool crisp morning with a shiver that rattled through her body. Nose breath hung with the heaviness of white fire smoke. She opened a warm mouth and made puffing blows, watching blasts of white mist float into the air. Stretch rolling over, she yawned as cool morning mist shivered, realizing that the fire had expired in the night. This would not have happened at home, fires were always attended to on cool autumn and winter nights. Fighting an urge quickly to relieve a bursting bladder, she rolled over and watched Grandfather Sun cresting over the eastern horizon.

A finger length salamander poked its head out from under a brown maple leaf, in chilly confusion blinked at Annish and retreated into its cozy warm nest. Grey and black chubby Nuthatch scurried down tree trunk in search of bark embedded insects. Above, southbound Geese in massive V formation honked into alignment as its leader fell back to the end of a line to coast and rest weary wings. Condensing mist tingled wet against skin. Out of the corner of her eye, Lone White She Wolf's comforting yellow eyes mirror gazed back.

Breathing in deeply, the smell of fresh grass hung heavy in the air. Another deep breath filled all senses with the pungent smell of Earth and Trees. She breathed deeply repeatedly with eyes closed, anchoring the sensation to be recalled on cold wintry nights. 'It is a good day; Lone White Wolf is with me.

Filled beyond acceptance, a bursting bladder caught her attention. She scurried to a release spot amongst a thicket of bushes. Bladder satisfied, attention turned to an audible rumbling pang of hungry stomach. It was better to hunt hungry. Hunger pangs would motivate success. She would feast on the success of a Buffalo hunt.

Annish stood and slowly turned in all directions, which direction would provide a sniff of Buffalo in the air? She heard Crow beckon cawing from the distant South. 'Come now, come south'.

Annish's intuition agreed "Allo, my winged friend. Ahhh, yes south was the way that Lone White Wolf went. It is good. I go south" stretching the last sleep out of her body and folded Father's cedar oil pouch into a fold in her robe. With bed fur rolled and Father's medicine bundle packed, she tucked belongings under a low Cedar Tree branch and out of sight.

Standing tall and confident, "I AM stronger than yesterday" she flexed powerful muscles, enjoying the quick surges of power. Morning cold wet mist elicited a shiver that was quickly shaken off. Soon, rapid walking would ignite inner body heat as morning sun rose to warm the outside.

Taking a pinch of unburned smudge from the fire pit and blowing it into the gentle morning breeze, Annish offered gratitude "Thank you Creator, for this day".

Grandfather Sun slowly peaked midday, without breakfast, a fasting stomach growled. Annish slowly approached a grassy clearing, scanning for safety and privacy. Spine erect alert and peering past the open rocky field, tall grasses led to a wooded knoll with a forest thick backdrop in the distance. In stillness and safety sure, she paused to rest. Crouching aside a bush, she finger-snipped a handful of near weather-dried blueberries and popped them into her mouth. A watery mouth softened the berry into a mush bringing flavour to tongue senses and nutrients into her body. Savouring taste sensations and picking more filled an already bulging mouth.

Annish hesitated, ears and eyes alert, immediately looking for fresh signs of Bear. 'Where there are blueberry patches, there are Bear People'. Old bear scat and a bark torn maple tree indicated that it had been one moon since their travel this way.

A short time before Grandmother passed into Spirit World the two had been contentedly picking blueberries when Annish noticed a young bear cub watching them from a short stone's throw away. Instantly realizing that Grandmother, lost in distant memories, was directly in between Mother and cub and unaware of Bear Mother and Cub. Heart pounding, what to do, Annish rose slowly as not to startle Grandmother nor alarm Mother Bear. Mother Bear stood on haunches sniffing the air, sensing for threats, and ascertaining none, called to her cub. Cub playfully bounded through the blueberry patch and joined Mother Bear. Annish, relaxing, glanced back at Grandmother, who seemed oblivious to the close encounter.

During their walk, home, Annish recalled Grandmother's narrow escape. Had the old woman had lost her mind to spirit world? It was dangerous spot to find oneself in between a Mother and her Cub. She Bears were fiercely protective of their young. Grinning, Annish imagined later sharing the incident with Mother and Father when Grandmother prattled.

'Granddaughter, the Bear People remind us to go into the womb cave to find our connection to the Creator, the Spirit World and our Ancestors. I went to the Spirit World to visit with my Mother while we were picking Blueberries. My Mother and Celt Husband are calling me home to Spirit World. I have decided that I will go soon, before winter snows come. It will be good to be home and warm in Husband's bed, no more; snowy chills, in my old bones.' Grandmother delighted with her pending journey home to spirit world smiled at Annish, brilliantly happy with both homecoming and of course, having one last wit over her Granddaughter. Annish smiled, knowing the old woman was in full capabilities of her mind. More so, had masterfully played out the entire scenario. What magic, what otherworldly mystery had Grandmother conjured in the Bear situation?

Annish beamed prideful admiration and gratitude for all that the old woman was as she continued, 'I miss Celt Husband. I miss what is under his kilt.'

Catching the youthful glint in Grandmother's eye, Annish knowingly waited for more. When Elders talked, listeners settled themselves for an often long and winding story, a long one-sided discourse. It was not a sharing time, but one of listening with acute awareness for multiple levels of messages and lessons weaved within and behind carefully chosen words with just the right amount of pauses to allow a listener time to anchor the points made.

'Granddaughter, Husband's clan and ancestors were once not so different from us. Remember this in the days to come child. Call on the Creator and the Spirit world to know those whom know Creator and the way of the heart.'

A light warm breeze faded Grandmother's words into whispers, stirring soft hair and caressing a crimson face. She sniffed the air for Buffalo beast. The last of late morning mist hung lightly over tall wet grass. Wind breezes weaved through tree branches. Spirit whispered 'Magic Annish' as a wind breeze gently bowed and bobbed field grasses. Squat crouching to rest and allow blueberry nutrients to fortify both body and soul, acknowledged as silent Crow perched on a branch on the path in front. Tilt bobbing his head to one side in agreement, Annish thought, 'Ah, it is a good day Crow, I am glad that you are with me this day.' Crow slightly fluttered its wings in agreement. As Always, they often intuitively understood each other's heart, mind and soul.

'The Ancestors are with me.'

'Great Spirit is with me.'

'All of Spirit World is with me.'

She caught a distinct smell in the air. She perked her head and nostrils flaring open, sniffed into the breeze.

"Can it be?"

Back straightened, ears alert, she sniffed the pungent air again to be sure. Yes! It was unmistakable. Buffalo dung carried in the gentle breeze. The odour stung nose hairs. To avoid the

harsh smell she switched to mouth breathing while stealthily rubbing Father's Cedar oil over skin, hair and clothing. 'I only use fresh' she giggled. Father was convinced that aside from concealing human odour, its insect repellent properties averted insect swarms that could blacken the sky far in the north. They could empty a moose of its body fluids in a day leaving only bones and hide.

Crouching, inquisitive eyes surveyed the field. The last wisps of morning mist had evaporated. There, there along the forest fringe, just as Lone White Wolf had shown Annish in last night's vision, six Buffalo calmly milled amongst trees with four hands more in the open field, lazily grazing on tender grass shoots. Scanning the small herd closely, her attention turned to one old male; it stood out from the herd as its spirit glow radiated. Yes, it was obviously the one whose spirit had volunteered to give its body to her this day. Large and old perhaps, yet still healthy and without obvious signs of sickness. Yes, by the look of its stance, solid structure and aging matted dark brown hair, he was ready to make his journey home to spirit world.

'Yes that is the one!'

Her eyes and ears kept a symbiotic mindful awareness for alarm. Skittish young ones nudged and mingled amongst their Mothers. Another old male shook, shedding summer growth tufts of hair onto a nearby juniper bush. Chickadees flittered over Buffalo heads, darting in and out of a tall pine. Higher above in the pine, Porcupine munches, while keeping a watchful eye.

Annish slowly backed away with eyes locked on the one. Crouching again behind brush, she slowly pulled Grand Fathers' knife out of the leather sheath tied around her forearm and placed it horizontally between her teeth. Stealthily, like Lone White Wolf Woman, crawled on all fours, gaining momentum toward a rocky knoll and through the tall grass.

'Buffalo, I am invisible in your eyes. My scent you do not smell. You are calm within your surroundings,' Annish expressed in thought to Buffalo. The beast lazily glanced her way and sensing no alarm, accepted that all was normal.

With Wolf agility, advancing steadily, agilely moving into the open field, Annish kept mindful focus to maintain will power and eyes locked on the Buffalo.

Sensing strangeness in the vicinity and a presence unnatural, the beast lazily turned into the direction of the advancing aura. Annish now visible to the beast, stopped in mid cud chew, frozen. His ears twitched, scanning for sounds. Hearing nothing unusual, continued to casually graze, munch and chew. Annish's nostrils winced as the rank odour of wet grasses mixed with his old beast breath greeted her heightened senses.

The beast was still where she wanted it to be, willed it to stand still. Maintaining will power focus, she half walked, and half hunch crawled slowly forward through the tall damp grass. Her eyes locked to its large black brown eyes. If her focus shifted even slightly, the Buffalo would surely bolt, alarm the herd and the hunt would be lost. She held a locking gaze, while keeping a physical awareness of moving through the grass gracefully without tripping. Buffalo odours and dung stung her eyes and nose, challenging her focus. Avoiding a wince, she switched breathing from nose to mouth. The pungent odour had grown more powerful as their distance decreased.

Using other worldly awareness, a skill she had not known existed or that she had possessed, Annish willed her inner power to extend outward and form an impenetrable barrier around the entire hunting area, thinking it will contain the herd from stampeding. Another wave of power extended outward, a strong bubble containing only Annish and Buffalo, and invisible to the rest of the herd. Now they were alone and contained.

Annish heightened full awareness on the Buffalo. Their eyes locked, her heart beating simultaneously with the beast's heart, the beating of her own heart controlling the beasts' heart, calming.

A Chickadee landed on its horn, oblivious to the power bubble and pecked a loose strand of old Buffalo hair and fluttered off. Momentarily distracted, she almost gave way to snorting laughter at the sight. Massive Buffalo stood passively still.

A warm powerful feeling deep within rose with such a force, Annish's chest pounded and swelled. The outside of her body accepted motion from the internal power surge and found herself leaping, bounding forward above the tall grass. Annish was now Lone White Wolf, running like the Wind, one with spirit world and all-powerful warrior-magic in one fluid motion.

Morning mist had evaporated, leaving damp wet grass clinging to Buffalo's legs. He had seen many summer endings, and judging by the changing season's scent in the air, it would soon be time for the herd to move to winter-feeding grounds. Tall prairie grass was becoming woody after seed pods had long opened and lost its juicy sweetness. In the weeks to come, grass would dry out. Buffalo savoured each mouthful, mildly distracted by a small Bird that had perched on a horn, pulled a hair out and fluttered off. Flicking insects away from ears, he casually paused to listen for danger sounds. Eyes roamed the field area for possible predatory animal movements.

An odd apparition was moving in the grass, slowly advancing forward. 'What kind of animal slinks unnoticed?' It resembled a small dis-coloured Coyote Dog. Coyote families often milled about in trees coverage and open field at the edges of the Buffalo herds. Coyotes were more often curious than dangerous, often carcass scavenging the fallen among the herd. Even if a sickness affected a Buffalo's behaviour, it could easily kick, stomp or roll on an annoying inquisitive Coyote. Coyotes were hardly a cause for alarm. Sensing no threat, Buffalo lazily continued grazing, ever watchful of the approaching odd Coyote Dog. 'Why do you stare at me?' he thought, 'you must be mange sick, therefore weak and not dangerous.'

In curiosity, Buffalo opened nostrils searching the air for the approaching coyote dog's smell, and detecting only the scent of cedar oil, 'Curious little beast,' Buffalo lazily continued to graze.

It occurred to Annish that the beast seemed indifferent, merely lazily chewing cud and shifting ears to swish winged insects away. 'Buffalo Beast, did you have the same hunt vision as I this past night? Do you know that you have volunteered? You are certain and willingly giving of your body and this earthly life? Are you good to go now, to make your passage journey to the Spirit World?'

Had the Buffalo accepted fate?

It only occurred to her now, that in reality, she had never hunted nor trapped an animal bigger than a Rabbit, and was about to descend upon a massive and powerful beast. She savoured new exciting sensations of thrill and exhilaration. 'This, yes this, is what I have dreamed and longed for. I AM a Hunter Warrior Woman.' A resolution within, knowing this moment had come to fruition because it is what she had come to this earthly life to do, had willed it so. Out of the eyesight periphery, Wispy smoky spirit people and animals surrounded them. Supported, empowered by Ancestors and the forces of the Spirit World.

Time seemed to have slowed, as though, all around the world, was a blur of motion. Time, space and thought merged surreal.

Under normal circumstances, Buffalo would have a strong urge to bolt, yet under the spirit will power of Annish, he remained frozen. 'Coyote Dog moves like Wolf, but is not Wolf. So odd. Barely a predator, a strange curiosity, it is moving closer now. Faster. Is it hungry? Sick? I should retreat, bolt, run and alarm the others. I feel odd, as though the world around me has disappeared.'

Coyote Dog Annish were held in a surreal slow motion battle.

In mid pounce, Annish gracefully took Grand Father's knife from mouth to gripping its bone handle solid in hand. With one swift movement, she sliced both hind leg tendons behind his knees and

rapidly circling to his front, slice cut deep into firm muscle and tissue. Her knife hand arched upward clipping his nose and punctured a jugular. As the beast slumped, she swung onto the beast's back. One hand held a firm grip to thick hair while the other hand embedded Grand Father's knife deep into its side between the third and fourth rib, penetrating and puncturing his heart and lungs.

Startled Buffalo shiver shuddered in burning pain, in legs, neck and chest. Panicking, he reeled, but could not move. Dark eyes widened and mouth huff gasped, labouring heavy, only to emit a saliva filled gurgle. Instinctively he tried to bolt, buck and roll, but could not. In shock bewilderment, he paused, gathering force. All physical power ready for bolt action into motion seemed absent. Sensing the cause, the predator, Coyote Dog still upon his back, instinctively he swivelled his massive head to impale catch the dog with a horn, and failed. Weak, dizzy, suddenly tired, his life force slowly drained out of hooves and into the earth below.

This pausing moment of still time, Annish took the opportunity to rest, to slow her pounding heart and gather power further heightening all senses. Hand and body gripped tight on the panting beast.

Without rebuttal, the beast expired one last huff and lay still. Heart stopped, blood gelled, breath ceased his spirit gave way.

Buffalo lay still, vacant of body, his mind and spirit rising to the animal Spirit World.

Grasping its hair tighter in one hand, Annish's small legs tightened their straddle hold along the beast's spine, holding on, anticipating another bolt. Slowly, she relaxed her grip. Calming her pounding heart, her attention shifted to watch the beast's Spirit leave his earthly body.

A bleat distress alarm sounded within the surrounding herd. Annish's invisible hunt cocoon dissipating, panicking buffalo herd frantically bolted in many directions.

As exhaustion and the shock of having killed him washed through her body, her own spirit momentarily left her physical body, followed by a pain so profound; it threatened to consume heartfelt emotions.

A broken heart and conscious mind dissolved all urge to kill, and tears filled disillusioned eyes. A hand shakily released its finger-cramped grip on his coarse hair, suddenly aware of how the darker downy under layer was. His great body still warm under her body.

For a moment in time their spirits had become one, memories emotions and senses intermingled in swirls. In a flash of light, she saw a myriad of Spirit Animals and his Ancestors. The majesty of it all brought waves of awe washing through her body and soul. Though humble, she was powerful. A multitude of both of their Spirit Guides and Ancestors surrounded them. Acceptance of the natural order of life, she was whole, complete and one with all of Spirit World. She was drawn, comforted and warmed by the sense of old familiarity to the Spirit World. Magnetically gravitating toward the loving higher and powerful force, Annish let go of her own spirit, allowing it to travel to comfortably slide into spirit world. A powerful invisible wall slammed her backward, bounced once and anchored itself back into her physical body.

Spirited Grandfather, Grandmother, white Wolf and the Warrior Woman standing close in front, she focussed trying to hear their words within her mind, saying words she could not quite hear. The meaning understood, it was not her time to go home to Spirit World, Annish agreed.

Turning attention back to the beast, she released the painful grip of aching fingers and legs. Annish slid from the Buffalo and slumped to the ground, weakly facing the animal. It almost seemed as though he was indeed accepting, of the giving of his life. Her mouth opened to speak, to converse but coughed, clearing a dry mouth and throat, "Thank you! Your body is a gift to my people."

An old female Buffalo appeared alongside of them, nudged his carcass, looking for life signs and seeing none, huffed and bolted away. Once mates, a couple, now she would finish her life without

him, alone within the herd until she made her own spirit world journey. Buffalo's spirit loomed over his own carcass and Annish. Ancestor Spirits and various animals continued to appear and fade. Buffalo and Spirit World and without remorse toward Coyote Dog kill, it was what it was, a part of the natural order of life. A warm calm and comforting wave washed over the scene.

Yet, Annish was utterly heart broken, devastated with willingly taking a life. She stared at the beast through tears that welled from within and rivulet spilled over soft young cheeks. An emotional knot formed in a dry throat. The power of the hunt had dissolved and left a compassionate heartache in its place.

The beast's vacant death stare held firm into her eyes. A white light from its heart carrying the spirit beast penetrated her sore aching heart, comforting her. The beast's sharp pains that she had inflicted upon him, his laboured and rugged breathing slowly ebbed and dissipated within her body. Their hearts calmly became one in harmony and shared with the Creator.

In that moment, Annish understood the profound mysteries and oneness of the Spirit World. Everything upon the Earth Mother and in Spirit World was indeed inter-connected, living within one powerful life force. Ultimately one great living spirit, one massive family and as one community. Grandmother's poignant words reiterated, 'What one soul does, ripples out into the world and beyond affecting many other beings'.

Annish watched, as a Spirit Buffalo Elder appeared beside the beast, his Mother. A cold yet loving white misty breeze blew between Buffalo spirits and Annish, sending a shiver through her small young and weary body. For the first time, Annish truly understood the life and love of Buffalo, of all living beings. She and Buffalo beast were both of the Creator. She had shared a oneness moment, physically and emotionally. Like her, he breathed, lived and loved.

Annish wrapped arms around its head as she had done so many times with Father and Mother. She and beast's spirit blended and melded, as one being. Her heart was breaking with reverent pain, yet at the same moment, knew the joyful presence of the Creator, within.

Buffalo's still dark eyes glazed over, its massive body twitching no more, his body growing colder in her embrace. Her heart expanded with a new kind of love never known before. She, Buffalo, Spirit World and Creator had become one Spirit, one powerful life force.

Buffalo's massive heavy head slide out of her arms and rested on the ground. With the back of a hand, she swiped a last tear.

"Ah, no!" a faint panic residue echoed, wanting the beast to his earthly life.

Ever so gradually, a cold white vapour surrounded Buffalo's body. She saw it nuzzle Buffalo's head and felt its love. 'With my body, my Spirit, we are one,' it whispered within her mind. Her heart fluttered.

Conscious of Buffalo Spirit now within her own soul, Buffalo's entire life unfolded in images. First, a spirit light entered a baby beast's body. A gangly and awkward youngster lovingly nuzzled his mother. Agile and mobile, it romped and played with sisters, brothers and cousin playmates. A fully-grown beast rolled in dirt, basked in the warm sun light and once gazed skyward to Grand Father Sun. It sniffed breezes and noticed winged ones soaring in the expansive wide-open sky. At all times, it maintained a safety awareness of community, Annish saw the beast's conscious awareness of family and female mate. She saw all of the beast's life unfold and now, a part of her own soul and living memory.

She brought hands to still a sore and pounding heart, feeling the beast's heart beating within her own. Strong and good.

Annish understood now that somehow and somewhere at the pinnacle of death, the Buffalo had given its life and soul to her, a gift, and a great gift.

She had not heard the Elders speak of just how profound the animal spirit exchange was. Annish recalled how Grandmother had giddily chatted openly about her intentions to prepare for her journey into the Spirit World. Calm, content and consciously aware of the process, she had openly chatted with Celt Husband, Ancestors and a myriad of Spirit People. With Mother and Spirit Caller on hand, smudging and gently pray chanting they acted as midwives as Grandmother other lay still on her bed. In the periphery, Annish had watched her rapid transition, allowing spirit to smoothly withdraw and free itself from old body confinement into bright light. Having attended many loved ones passing that Grandmother lovingly termed as re-birthing, an individual's spirit naturally and rhythmically left the physical body transcending into pure spirit. A white breath of cold air from the Creator, Grandmother smiled, and beaming joy and was gone. 'Loved ones are never gone; they merely exist in spirit form. Once in the Spirit World Granddaughter, Ancestors have the freedom to come and go at will, with just a thought or intention. Just as we come to Mother Earth, we go to watch over those still in human form and return as human when the time is right. All of life is a sacred circle.'

Observing and attending to those in the death and re-birth process was a natural part of the sacred circle of life. In sharing spirit exchange with Buffalo, Annish had lived the profound experience.

Annish sat motionless, absorbing the teaching. She had had no idea that the taking of life would be so profound, almost more than one heart could bare.

Yes, for a moment in time, she felt what the Buffalo had felt, the deep burning pain of knife wounds, the shock and surprise of having been taken by a small Coyote Dog girl. Her mind reeled intuitively knowing that as death approached, the beast consciously understood that her people were growing hungry thus gave his, no longer needed, physical mass to feed many. She gently and lovingly stroked the beast's crown, along the bridge of his nose. His under layer of hair surprisingly soft to the touch, despite outer crusts of mud. She ran fingers over its blood-encrusted nose and relaxed jowls.

The beast's large black eyes lay open and foggy, vacant of life, of spirit. His Spirit had long left its body and journey joined animal Ancestors in the Spirit World. She gently closed his eyelids for sleep. Sitting cross-legged on the ground, another wave of tears spilled and trickled over cheeks to the fringe of trembling lips, cooled in the afternoon breeze.

No, Annish had had no idea that hunting was such a serious matter and only now understood why hunting braves were so secretive and serious about their task. She understood that it took a strong heart to withstand the pain inflicted upon an animal. 'Yes, it takes a strong heart to do this in a good way, with honour.'

It was done.

A shiver rattled through her bones, suddenly ashamed and embarrassed by her actions, self-importance, and thinking that she was brave enough to hunt big game alone.

From a distance, she heard a voice calling out her name, "Annish. Annnnnishhhhh."

## Chapter Four ~ Home

Anxious eyes turned to scan the field and surround forest toward the source of the sound. A voice grew louder as a familiar man advanced closer. She stood, labouring against weakness, hunger, and exhaustion, to see Father and Uncles hastily walking toward her.

Father paused, stood still, his normal pride of seeing many hunting adventures, gave way to the shock of seeing a strange creature, a strange Spirit apparition standing beside a still Buffalo in the distant field. With senses alert and through straining eyes, he sought clarity to fathom the Buffalo with a strange small two-legged creature at its side. 'A Spirit apparition?'

Sensing no threat and familiarity, Father raced ahead of the others. What spirit animal this was that had obviously taken the Buffalo? There were no Wolves or other predators to be seen or heard in the vicinity. As he approached, slowly a consciousness came and registered in his mind that the wildly painted spirit apparition standing beside the Buffalo was his own Daughter, Annish. Shock compounded bewilderment, immediately followed by a visual inventory of possible injuries she may have sustained. Seeing none, Father intuitively read her emotional state. Seeing no danger in his peripheral vision, Father turned his awareness to the image before him. A fearful yet proud smile emerged from within as he consciously understood that Annish had single-handed, taken this Buffalo.

Annish watched the men's eyes, as they silently approached. Without spoken words, all curiously viewed the scene of a girl and a still Buffalo. Tears welled again in Annish's eyes, and freely spilled emotionally out over her cheeks. She could not swallow the knot of emotion in her throat. She read Father's face for reactions, and that of the men. Their eyes bounced back and forth from beast to the painted face of Annish. They assessed and registered the magnitude of the task done. Tracks in the dirt and bent grass told them that the rest of the herd had wildly bolted, likely gathering herd to the west and headed south. They could be easily tracked in the days to come.

Time seemed frozen as Father and Uncles stared at the sight, bewildered, concerned, happy and angry. Surmising that the ordeal had been overwhelming for Annish, so left the ensuing parental repercussions to her Father. Silent, Father merely acknowledged that his daughter had just experienced a climax and emotional impasse between success and sorrow. She would need some quiet time to process the experience and lessons.

Her tears of expression told the men that she now knew just how dangerous and powerful a kill could be, especially a first large kill. The men paused, silently recalling their own first hunt experiences and ensuing ordeals.

Large kills have been and continue to be initiated by each and thus, intuitively understood Annish's emotional reaction to her own. It is a powerful sacred rite of passage to become a Hunter-Warrior, to ensure a community's existence and could not be undertaken lightly. Her higher intention to provide for community seemed valid despite the dangers of hunting alone, and as such, there would be no punitive consequences. The entire experience contained many profound lessons, and she would be learning from this one for the rest of her existence.

Father, sensing Annish's lingering heart pain, scooped her in comforting arms. She was too grown for little girl hugs in this way, but childishly took advantage of the moment and buried her face into his neck. She silently sobbed, allowing Father's comforting safety and calmness to settle within her weary soul.

Settled calm, Annish turned to watch Father summon the men to gather around the Buffalo. Uncle opened a medicine bundle and knelt beside the beast. He burned a mixture of herbs while reciting Prayers of Gratitude for Buffalo's gift of self for food. He sang a blessing for its journey to the Spirit World and the joining of animal Ancestors.

Releasing Annish, Father joined the men. They swiftly set about the task of removing the thick hide, which would make new coats, bedding and winter foot coverings. Uncle cut a slice from Buffalo's heart and handed it to Annish. Warm nutrients seeped into an exhausted body. They rapidly carved and divided chunks of meat into easy to carry bundles. Bones selected for nutritional marrow and tools. Horns to become scoops and spoons, bladder; a waterproof container. The tail, a paintbrush, and fat for cooking grease and lamp lighting. No portion would be waste discarded; each part had use and purpose.

Meanwhile, Old Uncle carefully spread the hide out flat on the ground and binding two freshly cut cedar poles, made a stretcher. Quickly, bundles were heaved onto the stretcher, strapped to shoulders and began their quiet walk home to Community.

Father held out a hand inviting Annish to his side. Strong arms held her small tired frame firmly, sharing his strength and calm. It was only now that thoughts turned to homecoming, community, and Annish was providing food for all. Her heart fluttered with joy and humble pride blossomed. She had forgotten about the Feast of Honour, 'would there be a celebration to honour this Hunter's first kill? Thoughts of celebration, of being a Hunter- Warrior celebrity, no longer mattered. She no longer cared about the want of its childish distinction only one short day ago.

Annish understood that the path to becoming a Hunter Warrior, the way of the heart, came from within one's own soul and could not be forced with physical strength or will power alone. It could not be rushed, for it would grow strong only by walking through life experiences. Yes, she was becoming a woman, had completed an adult task, yet clearly, she was simply, not ready. With this thought, she decided, 'Tomorrow, I am content to do chores and play with the little children'.

Upon approaching home, Annish saw Mother inquisitively walk forward followed by Porcupine Auntie and instinctively stopped and waited as the community gathered to watch their approach. Evening would soon descend and there was much to do. Annish closed tired eyes and leaned into Father's chest, unprepared for the gathering awaiting. His arm drew her close, sheltering safety, protection, and love.

'Thank you, Creator, for protecting me and helping me today. Thank you, Lone White Wolf Spirit, for showing me the way. Thank you, Buffalo, for giving of your body to feed our clan. I will always remember you.'

Father stopped and took Annish's hand, and sitting, he motioned for her to sit across from him. Taking his cue, the others walked on into welcoming arms of the community.

Without words, he lovingly wiped paint off her face with dampened fingers. Annish sensed his curious gaze searching deep into her soul. She sensed that he saw and noticed an image. "Ah", he solidly whispered, leaving her feeling excited, honoured and impatiently waiting for his words to follow.

Father first pulled back a bit, spine erect, spoke a prayer, an invocation to the Spirit World and the Ancestors for assistance, for clarity in discerning his daughter's gifts and to acknowledge her contribution to the community.

Quietly Father sang an invocation that she had not heard before. Annish's skin tingled, drawn into the mysterious world of the Ancients. Father cupped both hands around his mouth and made rhythmic blowing sounds. Sounds of Wind Spirits circling the inside walls of a hollow cave drew her

mind and soul into a trance-like calm. Skin hairs stood straight, followed by a sensation of oneness with Father. With hands still cupped, he placed them on her forehead and made the wind breath whooshing sounds again.

Annish's spirit-self slid, carried away to a different place and time. She rapidly found herself standing in spirit form, on the top of a hill, as Grand Father Sun splayed magnificent oranges, purples and pinks across the horizon, blending with the first of the night Star Nation People. Looking below, a great Lake surrounded by vast valleys of trees, splayed out before the precipice upon which she stood.

Crow companion swooped around in gusts of Wind, cawing.

With arms raised to the sky, as though she could touch the Stars, and an early evening greet to Grandmother Moon, Annish proclaimed;

'I AM the light of creation. I AM the light in creation that I now see within all living creatures.'

'I AM the light of Grandfather Sun, Gran Grandmother d Mother Moon and the Star Nations.'

'I AM the Tree with roots in the earth, and branches, that dance and sway with the Wind and touch the Sky People. I AM the breath and words of the Creator, carried in the Wind and in my Soul.'

'I AM the Lakes, Tides and the Rivers that dance over the Rocks, flow upon the Mother Earth, within me, and within all.'

'I AM the Creatures that walk Mother Earth, swim in Waters and fly in the Sky.'

'I AM Stone and Rock that hold the history of the Earth and all Walkers upon her.'

'I AM the carrier of sacred Spirit Visions from the Creator and the Spirit World.'

'I AM a bridge between Spirit World and Mother Earth.'

Father's hands grasped firmly onto hers and instantly she saw him before her. He placed a hand upon her forehead and instantly she stood in an open field, beside her Mother.

Mother lay on a bed hide in post childbirth rhythm, Father holding a squalling newborn while a shooting Star slowly and boldly crossed the night sky above. 'Annish, good soul has come this day to walk the Earth journey. Spirit World, Ancestors, walk with Annish, guide her in a good way' he proclaimed, and it was so.

Annish found herself standing in the open field of the Buffalo hunt. Grand Father, Grandmother with Celt Husband, Crow, Lone White Wolf, Lone Wolf Woman and Buffalo Spirit appeared among them. Buffalo Spirit joined them.

Images of herself as a woman passed before her eyes. Here, she was not as much as a Warrior Woman, but Teacher to the small children. She was Teacher of the Spiritual Path and Seer of the gifts, talents and challenges of each child. Yes, Annish would know their path and guide each along life's path.

Awareness returned to the present of sitting cross-legged with Father.

From the Buffalo experience, Annish was learning and integrating Spirit World mysteries. She saw herself; teaching and playing with children, saw herself as a married woman on a great journey, a mission. Giving birth to her daughter alone, rescuing two small children from a faraway land to the south. Holy children, record keepers of tradition and sacred rites. A strange red haired man, a Celt like Grandmother's Celt husband accompanying them home, staying, becoming her husband, mature and growing old together.

She would continue to learn and work the way of the heart, becoming a good strong Elder Adviser within the community, as a peaceful warrior, wise and mature woman. Celt husband would support her role and their children to come, would inherit their gifts.

In an instant, she saw Ancestral Warrior Women in times past. Lone Wolf Woman was in her genetic lineage. She spoke to Annish; 'I will guide you Great, Great Granddaughter along your path'.

Spirit Ancestors gathered. Grandfather's Spirit moved forward and spoke, 'Granddaughter, you carrying the two spirits of two cultures and must always speak truthful words as a bridge between the Spirit World and the Earth World with honour and integrity. Teacher of the sacred way of the heart, you will be called upon to rescue two holy children and one day, advise many others in need. Their world is about to change drastically, many of your people will enter a long dark night of the soul and lose their spirits for many generations to come. You must always seek to maintain harmony within community. Then and only then, will you be called upon as Council Adviser. You are always guided and supported by Spirit World. Your intentions must always be for the highest good of all. You may speak with spirit world confidence but only offer advice as Spirit directs you to do so.

Many more lost soul white skinned people are coming in big canoes bringing many, many generations of strife. You must ensure that the children in your care grow strong children to withstand waves of wars, soul sickness and grief. Know that many generations from now many coloured skin people will seek our knowledge. Their souls will long for lost knowledge of their ancestors, of Spirit World and return to the old ways, wisdom and sacred medicine of all our ancestors. Those who are strong in soul, compassionate, wise and of forgiving heart will be the way showers. They do not see skin colour nor seek power over others. They too are Peaceful Warriors who know that the Way of the Heart is the only path.

Allow the guidance of your Earthly Father and Community. Lone Wolf Woman and I will always answer your call. Buffalo will always be with you, within you, sharing Spirit gifts of abundance through you, for the good of all. Elders and Spirit World watch and wait for children to come into their own path.

The children in many generations to come will not see skin colour nor seek power over others. They will see and know Mother Earth and all its inhabitants as one community, many will not. Our children and their children for many generations to come must be taught how to be strong of spirit and soul in the heart way of the ancients. Many, many people will not be able to weather war atrocities and life away from their homes, communities or know their Spirit World connection. All must journey darkness and all must find their own way. One day all must come together in one great community; a new path will be born in adaptation to a changing world. Strong spirited children are the way showers, and our sacred path to the future.

Welcome and we give our blessings to you on your earthly journey woman-child.'

Annish's full awareness returned to Father. Each smiled at the other in mutual understanding of the gravity of the information. Annish's path, gifts and contribution were finally known to her.

"Thank you, Father."

Father bowed his head in acknowledgement; placing comforting hands upon her cheeks, held his forehead to her forehead. She whispered, "Thank You Creator for this journey, your gifts and your lessons."

"I AM of Buffalo, Wolf, Crow spirit and I am Peaceful Warrior Woman.

"I AM Peaceful Warrior Woman."

Reflecting on this for a moment, Annish considered the seeming opposing dichotomy within Peaceful - Warrior. Knowing one's gifts and skills contributed to community, brings a mature yet humble confidence, and there is no higher purpose than to assist others for the good of all. Battles that are the hardest to win are those that arise from within. It is not the end goal of achievement that matters as much as the growth and insights along life's journey. Thus, the way of the heart brings true fulfillment and contentment.

Children grow strong through knowing their own inter-connection with Spirit World, in sharing their gifts and skills with others. They grow in a good way with mutual respect of all of life, strong and

positive mentors and resilience. Soul alignment with these points indeed brings true peace of mind and soul. It is the power of the human spirit in action.

Celebration cooking ensued as Grand Father Sun dipped below the horizon, leaving a display of oranges and purples tinged against the evening sky. Glancing at the preparations of which she had so longed for in her honour, Annish calmly turned and meandered away to join a group of children quietly playing.

When she approached, their tiny heads turned and smiles spread amongst them. Arms begged for hugs. Annish was home and expressed joy in knowing that she belonged with the children. She had much to share, while exploring the world and life with them.

Holding a tiny child in each arm, rather than sharing the Great Woman Buffalo Wolf Crow Peaceful Warrior Hunter story that they begged to hear, she danced the Coyote Dog Dance. Little eyes widened with anticipation. Annish extended her right leg straight out and shook it, pivoting and feigning losing balance. Little ones in her arms wrapped tiny legs and arms gripping tighter around her. She shook her leg harder. An imaginary Ant fell onto her other foot and scurried across toes. In feigned frustration, she extended her right leg further out to the side, nearly losing balance and pretending to almost drop a child. Holding the little ones tighter, she shook the leg with all her might, pivoting on the other foot while trying in vain to maintain balance. Children rolled in fits of laughter. Inquisitive Elders passing by stopped to watch, smiling, at both Annish's antics and the pride of seeing a teacher in her element among their children.

Suddenly, the children squealed and slowly moved backward, scattering in all directions. Elders gracefully retrieved children. Annish watched and smiled as a wandering Skunk zigzagged through the small play area. Skunk frantically searched for an opening, through the circle of onlookers. Finding itself surrounded, it attempted to backtrack backwards through the motionless crowd. Annish took in the sight, grinning until laugh lines hurt. Skunk was given a wide berth out of respect for not spraying vial-smelling odour. Yet to another Skunk, the odour is pleasant and attractive.

Skunk turned to escape only to find its self-facing Annish. It hesitated, gazed at her and said 'Ahhhh Annish. Skunk medicine is being with like scent or in your case, like mind and soul. It is good medicine to be with like-soul,' he meandered into the fold of squealing children. It was confirmation that she was indeed home, doing what she loved to do in her own unique way with the children.

Annish stepped aside and the community watched Skunk meander away and into the Forest.

## Chapter Five ~ Honour

Proudly standing beside Father, amongst the Council Elders, Annish humbly downcast pleased eyes. She struggled within to graciously accept the honour that was about to be bestowed upon her. Praised sounds of gentle drumming and fire crackling was all that was heard. Even the smallest children sat quiet, eyes wide in anticipation. Glancing little by little, she viewed the community sitting with eyes fixed on her. From the corner of an eye, Grandmother with Celt Husband, Lone Wolf Woman, Grandfather, White Wolf, Crow and Buffalo Spirit gathered in the periphery of the crowd watching. Annish shifted from foot to foot attempting to stand strong with humble adult grace. Mother slowly made her way through the crowd with a small gift in hand. Drumming stopped as a hush encompassed the gathering.

Without words, Mother placed a necklace around Annish's neck. A small yellowish brown amber stone hung encased and tethered to a fresh Buffalo sinew string. On closer look, it was more than a stone.

Annish glanced at Mother searching for information and back at the stone in hand. Running fingers over its smooth surface as Mother's warmth emitted from it. She noticed that there was an Ant encased in the burnt coloured amber. 'Ahhh, Ant Spirit'.

Mother hesitated, ensuring that the community mind lesson of Ant and that the gifts of the experience had solidly anchored within her daughter. Annish smiled, allowing the amber to lie comfortably around her neck and rest over her heart. Mother cupped ageing hands around Annish's humble cheeks.

Fighting back a bust of tears, Annish watched Mother pull a working knife out of tuck in her robe. This straight blade knife with its bone handle had been handed down from generation to generation, Mother to Daughter to Daughter. With the knife laying flat in up turned palms, Mother presented the inheritance to Annish.

"Peaceful Warrior Woman," was all Mother said. Annish was so proclaimed.

Mother turned and joined the others, pride beating rapidly in her chest. Annish stood before Community in silence, presenting grace, humility, confidence, strength and foresight. In soft words, she proclaimed to the community,

"I AM Annish, a good soul."

"I offer you a humble Teacher."

"I offer you a humble Buffalo, Wolf, Crow, Peaceful Warrior Woman."

Annish's place among community became so.

Later that night, Annish lay cozy in bed basking in the warmth of home, Mother, Father and community as the day's events gently replayed behind sleepy eyes.

In becoming a Peaceful Warrior Woman, she had acted to fulfill her dream, thus facing all challenges that came with the day's events. If simply she had only alleviated youthful restlessness through hunting preparations, the last two days would have been satisfying enough. In taking the Buffalo, in seeking resolution and boldly facing her own inner battle, she found soul peace in knowing the authentic truth of who she was; a rightful contributor to Community, just as she was. In summoning personal courage and invoking the aid from Creator and Spirit World, Annish faced a challenge that could affect the entire community's well-being, that could have also meant great

danger to all and personal harm. In the process, any illusions of grandeur or fear for personal safety became non-existent.

To Annish's thinking now, a Peaceful Warrior in the way of the heart approached all situations with unconditional love, which obviously had more power to transform, than any act of aggression or will power over another. Yet there may well be times ahead of having to pick a knife or other weapon to defend and protect. She hoped otherwise.

Through spirit world awareness, she found freedom from self-imposed limitations of her role within community and an innate ability to work with the Spirit World as well as children. Children were closer to spirit world than many adults. Will, heart and soul aligned for the love of community and all of life, is the key to service and in her case, teaching and the long journey away from home to rescue two children that lay ahead.

To love and respect Mother Earth and all of life. Sharing the same air, water, and food sources is the sacred path to living in harmony, fulfillment and peace. In gratitude, and following the natural rhythms of life she must somehow, journey forward, despite foreboding and ominous circumstances yet to come from swarms of the soulless and wars. An important new inner challenge was taking form within, how to allow the warring and soulless others to be who they are and as they are. How to teach other skin colours to thrive while taking only what is needed, leaving only positive imprints, was somehow integral to ensuring harmony within generations to come. It seemed an unfathomable challenge, both ways.

She was only one tiny drop of rain, one tiny pebble tossed in a big stormy water, yet her rippling affects might somehow make their way out into many generations to come.

A weary Annish was still more child than peaceful warrior woman. There was comfort in knowing, so much, yet there was still so much more to learn. In exhaustion, Annish surmised that while it was humbly good to know that she was on the right path and while she was just one young woman, it was good and it was enough.

And so, it was.

"The Earth does not belong to man,  
man, belongs to the earth.  
All things are connected,  
like the blood, which unites us all."  
~ Chief Seattle ~

## Chapter Six ~ The mission

Annish slid into her bedding exhausted without undressing or untying hair braids, just deliciously warm and cozy fatigued and looking forward to a lazy night's sleep. She shifted the exciting day's events out of mind, knowing that there would be many opportunities for processing in the days, months and years ahead.

No sooner had she thought this, when she dreamily found herself standing upon a rocky precipice, shrouded in late night mist aware of Spirit Grandfather standing aside. Crow companion swooped and perched on a nearby branch as Grandfather stretched a hand outward, pointing to a dark cloud above. Ominous images unfolded. The long journey travelling far to the South played out in dreamy apparitions.

She was oh so weary of the day and strained to reject and dismiss the thinking of what was to come, asserting that there would be plenty of time to think and prepare in the years to come. Yet, the dreamy thought space continued as Grandfather insisted. He turned and placed a hand on her forehead. Instantly a wave of invigorating calm energy flowed throughout a hunt weary body, mind and heart. Taking notice of his obvious insistence her heart sank in realizing that the time had already arrived, she would be leaving immediately.

Distracted, a slow mind and soul strained to fathom how she might navigate to such a far southern location. There was the blatant danger of encountering white and other coloured skinned people, strange peoples from far off lands. Solution seeking, she imagined wearing Grandmother's white woman dress and decided to include it in the travel bundle. Annish relaxed in borrowed Buffalo hunt confidence, it was possible. Thinking on it further, strategizing, she could easily adjust her attire and mimic body language to that of a young man.

Patient Grandfather shushed her adolescent thoughts. Relaxing into his comforting wise manner, Annish dreamily stood alone on a Grandmother Moon lighted shoreline adjusting and aligning to a long journey ahead. As a third, generation mutation from a Celt Grandfather, her lighter skin and reddish auburn wavy hair had once left a burning question in her soul of uniqueness and as to what her role and contribution to community was. Now, she understood that the seeming accidental variation from her people's appearance made perfect sense. She could mimic as Grey Jay mimicked other birds and for a short time, blend with or confuse others while hiding who she was and why she was travelling with two small native children.

"Home is where the heart is." Grandmother's soft firm words repeated," remember this always. Your connection to your people, Celt Grandfather and mine lay within your own blood and heart, no matter where you are. Home can be rekindled anywhere and under any situation, if the teachings and spirit stay strong against darkness of adversity and of a grieving broken lonely spirit. Your mixed blood is important, yet will seem both a curse and blessing until you know balance within your own heart. The Earth Mother loves all of her children; no matter how soul sick or cruel they behave. You will one day see many atrocities and much devastation of spirit in many people's; you must keep your soul eyes focused in heart, do not judge or let your spirit slide into that grief which you cannot fathom. Your responsibility is to embrace those children you must rescue; the community ones that you care for, your own children to come, yes, but also in allowing Creator to love the unlovable."

Haunting words reverberated in warning. What hardships were coming that could possibly make her extended family and people lose their spirits and their way?

Conscious of wavering in and out of nighttime dreaming and the journey departure day ahead, Grandfather gently shifted her awareness back to menial preparations, which would include a travelling companion, a trail guide. Her dreamy vision shifted to images of stealthily approaching the children's pickup meeting spot as arranged, her camp hidden and out of sight and the donning Grandmother's uncomfortable white woman dress. Crow companion keeping eye from a branch behind, she first observed other white women's demeanor and boldly mimicking, venturing forth. She saw herself removing a slice of birch bark and engraving a map, identifying her hidden location, a dead body at the bottom of a ravine, a drawing of two small children haloed in light and an arrow pointing north toward a mass of tiny lakes and trees, home. Unnoticed, she rolled the birch bark map, tucked inside the bosom of the uncomfortable dress and boldly walked to the strange white building with the wooden cross atop and tucked it under the back-entryway door. Invisible, unnoticed, she avoided temptation to look at others close, to explore and wander amongst them.

The vision turned foreboding as an image of a night rainstorm wailed on her makeshift dwelling; companion guide and coupled husband had yet to return to camp. Sensing his death, Annish sent Crow companion ahead to scout him out, intent on averting his trouble. Through roaring winds and pelting rain to the far end of the forest and as Lightning illuminated, she stood overlooking his twisted body in the ravine below. Hunting alone, husband had perhaps slipped on a rocky shoal and fallen. 'Too treacherous to go after him now', Annish returned to camp, to dry and to think.

As morning, broke, comfort assumed, knowing that a white man, the right man had received her map note and she would have to wait in silence, unnoticed and in dangerous place.

Annish wobbled in a moment of fear and doubt, feeling Grandfathers comforting hand on her shoulder, saw Father busy with preparations, she would leave in the morning.

Father and Mother had indeed been in council with the Elders since dawn and now stood at the edge of her sleeping mat. He motioned for her to dress and follow; his serious demeanour negated any adolescent protest. Dressing quickly, she emerged from the family dwelling to be greeted by Mother, the Elders and a pudgy young man in a marriage coat. Annish quickly ascertained this young pudgy stranger was about to become her husband. In an instant the dream became reality; what she had thought was a someday and far away mission yesterday, was happening right here and right now.

Annish gawked at the pudgy travelling companion guide that stood grinning before her. He was compliant ready and willing. She dismissed the urge to bolt and run, rapidly sufficed her immediate lot in life and humbly acquiesced to the call of duty, and stood compliant yet reserved. Her travel bundles had already been prepared, obviously by both Mother and Father lay at her feet. Her perpetually uncovered feet shifted where she stood, only now aware of how sore and cut they had become from yesterday's solo Buffalo hunt.

Crow companion fluttered wings from a branch above, confirming his accompaniment on the long journey ahead.

She did not catch new husband's name, everyone's voices but a murmur in a not fully awake Annish mind, she had to pee and was hungry for breakfast. Her feet, fingers and legs still hurt from yesterday's adrenaline rush and physical overexertion. At last, the murmuring voices paused as the young man hands and hers were joined and held together by Father who and recited an Elder's Marriage Blessing.

Mother standing aside, wiped tears of prideful joy mixed with parental concern.

Porcupine Auntie appeared carrying a beautiful new pair of Buffalo hide foot coverings and a small bundle of prepared Balsam Fir medicinal balm. Interrupting Father, she barked spouting last minute marriage advice, while shoving the foot coverings into Annish's arms. Hesitating, hands on hips,

mouth pursed indignant disgust of the waif before her and briefly ranted the proper care and maintenance of the newly gifted footwear. Porcupine Auntie had a strange way of demonstrating her love and care of others. Obviously, she had worked through the night to make the foot coverings, 'her best embroidery work thus far', Annish thought, feeling the loving care and so bowed in gratitude. Despite Porcupine Auntie's gruff demeanour and outward behaviour toward others, she too followed the way of the heart. 'It is not always what people say or do, it is how it feels that is the indicator of where their intentions lie.'

The small marriage and departure gathering dissipated as rapidly as it had formed. It was most certainly not the long drawn out journey preparation and sharing of higher mysterious teachings that Annish expected in her newly assumed role. There was obviously no time to waste, instinctively surmising that the winter weather was quickly approaching, making some aspects of the trek ahead, dangerously difficult and community needed to depart today for winter hunting grounds, without her.

Father hesitated, offering map to husband, "The first two days walk to the first great river, you must arrive on time before winter ice covers water surface. You must keep steady walking pace, without new couple distractions or Annish needing to rest. A canoe has been left at River's beach, hidden under Cedar branches. Travel the River all the way to the South, it will empty into a bigger lake, stay close to shoreline and follow the next river South West, it will snake until you come to the next River lake system. The lake will take you to your location. It is fast and manageable. You do not know these waters but they are easy to navigate if you do not distract each other, you will be safe. Annish can rest for many weeks within your canoe."

Unhinging herself from the new name-unknown husband, Annish dashed away to pee, and relieving herself took the moment to adjust to what was happening.

After this night of dreaming vision, they would be travelling until the first completion of the seasons. 'Husband eh?' She remembered him now, from a neighbouring community to the northeast. While known as gifted hunter tracker, she saw the value in the Elders choice, his skills appropriate for the mission ahead and was grateful for his skill as well as the companionship.

Finishing her morning pee and carefully applying the medicinal Balsam Fir Tree sap balm before sliding tender feet into soft foot coverings, Annish and paused to connect mind and soul to Spirit World. Closing her eyes in heartfelt acknowledgement of their presence, Creator, 'Spirit Friends, I, Annish thank you for guidance, support and direction for the many moons ahead.' A myriad of spirit companions arrived, White Wolf Woman, Buffalo, Grandmother and Celt Grandfather made themselves smoky visible in show of support and faded. In a lingering concern vision as events to come, Crow swooped, cresting the rocky precipice where new husband might fall to his death. Loon's morning call to its spouse and babes distracted the foreboding vision back to the day ahead. It was confirmation that all was well and safe in community home this morning.

Annish and her husband companion guide swiftly left community home without a warrior hunter's farewell festivities or other community farewells. For days, they traveled comfortably by the brilliant light of full Grandmother Moon and follow river shorelines in the darkness of no Moon nights. Avoiding white people settlements was a priority. In wilderness, they trekked through early mornings until dusk, safe and unseen by white eyes.

Annish imagined the day when a first white man encounter would occur. Spirit Grandmother, sensing her fear, gently warned that while he would smell strange, look odd, it would not be difficult to read his heart and trust his words. She imagined herself leaving the strange land accompanying the two small children, willing Spirit World forces to ensure a safe journey. Language barriers would have to be dealt with when the time came. Dismissing the natural angst reaction, she shifted her body, allowing the concern to rise with each out breath and into the Spirit World for care.

Looking away from the strange journey visions before her, eyes drifted to Grandmother Moon, surrounded in glowing pulsating rings of pale green, orange and blue. Cold nights lay ahead, a warning of colder snow days ahead. Seeing a map in hand, provided by traders, she understood that they would first travel for at least seven moons to the edge of the land of no winter, to destination and wait another full season travelling back home.

The map must be memorized and only adjusted as any further visions indicated so.

The River and Lake Waters journey was filled with new scenery, landscapes and the comforting quiet companionship of trail guide husband. Annish could not help but think of her people's great migration from the far north land bridge, their prophesied new home now for many generations. She sensed Ancestors presence, her canoe joining the massive journey with extended family of many clans in ten thousand canoes, into the great unknown. While her Great Grand Parents clan had turned north, seeking a new home, she was now following South to where other Ancestor clans had travelled deep into the interior of Turtle Island. Many clans, many new territories, each carrying a new role in both history and mission.

Each day, they stopped along the shoreline; he easily provided Deer or Rabbit meat and Fish daily. In his calm quiet companionship and rarely spoke until the day came when Annish felt the first swirling tiny fish like sensation within her swelling belly. With a motherly caressing hand soothing baby within, cooed "ohhh, aha, Husband, we have a gift from the Creator."

Instinctively, Standing Bear arched his back, grinned and announced, "Aha, a Cradleboard to make. This is good Annish. No matter what lies ahead on our journey, it is good to know that my contribution is more than a trail guide."

Standing Bear immediately took his wood knife and set off to hunt for just the right Cradleboard, to support baby's back. A happy contemplative Annish took inventory, ample Rabbit fur for lining and Mullen for catch absorbing baby's urine and scat. There was certainly ample Deerskin for the outer coat layer and cut into strips for lacing. Life had taken a turn; today was a life-defining day, feeling the magic of creation indicated a spirit entering, the baby gently stirred.

Annish's conscious mind strove to assimilate and process the events yet to be. 'My how life can change', she thought. Days ago, she could not possibly have imagined completing a solo Buffalo hunt let alone travelling a great journey while carrying a child within.

As her belly grew, instinctively, her hand caressed babe and cooed within, recognizing instantly who it was, "Oh, allo Grandmother, what shall we name you this time? Ah, perhaps Bee Charmer, ha" The baby gently pushed a foot into her naval in affirmation.

'How dangerous this journey might yet be?' Yet any confidence gained within one day of solo Buffalo hunting humbled under the seriousness the task. While it had been easy to stay clear of white settlements thus far in community life, she was aware of their odours, scents and sounds, distinctly offensive. Once, curiosity might have had the better of her, as Spirit Grandfather had warned, and she caught herself wandering too close. Curiosity for wanting to know more of Celt Grandfather's people, the strange whites and other coloureds. Danger of mission lost, Annish reigned in curiosity now, dismissing any lingering childish and selfish curiosity quest distractions. The task ahead was clear and serious. It seemed that the finding of and taking of the two sacred children, had already been accomplished in Spirit World, she would merely walk through it all. It seemed simple enough.

Clear images unfolded before her eyes of her past and future missions to come. It had only been months since the day that her childhood had passed into hunter maidenhood and in short time, into Motherhood. In sleepy vision dreamtime, she would later train with Father and Spirit Talker; who

both perpetually gave lessons on the importance of following Spirit Guided intuition directives without hesitation.

It had been during their first night together that she recalled her travelling husband guide and companion's name, 'Standing Bear'. During their first coupling, he grunted like Bear. A good Elder chosen husband who had known of his future years ago. An unlikely hunter, his pudgy bulk could not carry him fast, yet, his slower and methodical manner made him a particularly gifted tracker. It was only now that Annish recalled noticing that during extended social gatherings, his discreet yet constant observance of her.

Anticipating the life defining events ahead, the birth of her first child Bee Charmer, Standing Bear's possible death and the meeting of the two holy children. Standing Bear seemed oblivious and without concern to his possible demise, content to walk out his earthly role with Annish, such as it was. Grandfather warned that if it were to be, it would also be clearly unsafe for her to retrieve Standing Bear's body and as such, must perform Spirit World Transition prayers a safe distance away. The white man who was the holy children's messenger could respectfully care for his physical body. There would be little time to grieve; her attention must remain on safety and the mission at hand.

Another image unfolded foggy, she strain-focused through a late night drizzling rain mist, set against a vast black blanket of twinkling stars. Her nose turned, drawing a strange multi coloured shawl in tighter for warmth. Sniffing gently, nostrils flaring, head tilt turning slightly to the East, added details advising what tree, plant and water lay in the valley below and beyond. Mind mapping the imagery for continuing journey home. She would have to rely on Crow, Spirit guidance and intuition to take them home. Ears constantly tilting in expansion, tuning into distant sounds of two-legged life. In constant awareness of just how far away from home she would be, far away from the safety and familiarity of home.

Winter had passed, bringing torrential rains. Standing Bear wandered off to scout for the best campsite and found an abandoned Bear's Den. Easy access to the rivers and lake water behind its rock mound, surrounded by dense forest, not a likely hunting ground for whites, yet offered much in the way of food staples. Standing Bear estimated that their contact person lived only half a day away with a small lake and a small canyon in between which further offered deterrents to two legged intruders.

An anxious Annish tended to food preparation while Standing Bear scouted the area, there would be several options escape or alternative backup camps should they be found by intruders. She was restless and uneasy in the foreign place.

Anxious too, baby nudged and womb muscles contraction twinged, the day of birthing was coming early, she thought. Tending to makeshift camp chores, a mature Annish turned to Spirit Grandfather, asking for more information on what was to come. Immediately the image of two white men were beginning to hunt the two precious young ones about to be in her care. In her mind's eye and heart, projected a protective barrier around her entourage beyond into the journey home. A powerful barrier, invisible to two legged eyes, much like the Buffalo hunt.

Standing Bear assured that all was well despite Annish's sensing of an eerie Spirit presence, bidding unwelcome air to the unfamiliar place. There was nothing in her experience to relate to the sensation, her uneasiness as strange as the Tree People that hovered far overhead. It was not that the Tree and Plant People or the Creatures of the area rejected them, it appears as a dark Spirit watched in foreboding anticipation.

Husband spent the evening scouting and hunting the surrounding area. Annish prepared for her walk close to the white people's village the next morning, she did not want to stay a moment longer than necessary in picking up the children, as agreed.

Standing Bear had left before dawn, returned briefly with a fresh Rabbit to slow cook over fire coals for the day and was off again. Crow companion had made his way to makeshift camp, caution caw, landing stealthily in a branch. Shifting eyes validated her wariness of the place. "Oh, allo my friend, I am happy to see you and I thank you for coming here. I must go to village now, join me."

Annish sifted through her travel bundle and unrolled Grandmother's white woman dress. Naked legs slid into white bloomer stockings, worn intricate lace dangling below her knees. Stiff uncomfortable grey brown, the gown must have been white once a long time ago. Clumsily, her fingers secured and its' numerous back clasps followed by a layer of outer lacing from back waist to upper neck. An apron layered the front and tied above her protruding baby belly. Pausing to run fingers along the thin lace that curved her bosom, she tried to fathom Grandmother wearing the uncomfortable ensemble as a matter of course, day in, day out. A matching stiff white shawl over shoulders, she untied her braids, Crow feather in travel bundle, hair tied into a bun knot and a hat bonnet secured under chin, she reached for the hard-stiff black shoes. Curious, Annish held them, eyeing the footwear contraptions and trying one on, standing, hobble walking, removed it and tossed it aside. As a youngster once, Grandmother had unpacked the dress and worn it for a day, missing her Celt husband. The next day, she helped dress her Granddaughter in it for play. In the heartfelt reverie, missing the old woman, Annish affirmed that she would this day, do the dress honour. She would wait until village to wear the shoes.

Annish sat camouflaged for over an hour under a brush by village edge, expecting to observe the woman's body language, posture and walk before venturing forth. It seemed more of two wide pebbled and dirt paths crossing each other with four massive wood building structures on each corner, two horse drawn wagon tied to a wooden pole in the front of one. There were no women to be seen. Smoke puffed from their inside cooking fires, it occurred to her that area was void of trees and river water. How they survived exposed and without these necessities of life?

At the far end, judging by Father and Spirit Grandfather's description, she spotted the connection location; a small rougher building with a large wooden cross atop. It was the only dwelling with Apple Trees, Plants and a small side stall containing two well-fed and groomed horses. Backing, she walked around the periphery of the village in safe forested coverage and nestled behind a urine stinking out house.

Annish moved to put on the white woman footwear, heard a wood door snap opened and froze. A white woman, wearing a similar dress, exited with basket of clothing in hand. Unaware of Annish merely an arm's length away, hung wet clothing on a sinewy string that ran the length of the dwelling.

Another white woman joined her, chattering words and stopped abruptly to watch a horse drawn wagon approach and pass. Annish strained to comprehend the sight as a white man in a dirty black suit, snapped his horsewhip above the heads of a black man, woman and young boy and girl, their hands barely hanging onto the side of the wagon. The black woman's dress ripped at the bosom, her back skin exposed, streaked blood red lashes, fresh. Her eyes drifted to the white man, his eyes blue stone icy lake cold and jaw flinching with grinding teeth. The black man's eyes blank and empty of spirit. Their children's soulless eyes, vacant of life and spirit, hopelessly stumbled to keep pace. The woman beaten not near death, but in obvious submission to her lot in life.

Annish stifled a gasp, fought the urge to run and rescue, her eyes wandered to the white women, surely, they will intervene, rescue. They stood still, hearts extending outward, yet frozen in hopeless inability. The washer white woman covered her eyes and face with a lacy cloth, turned and entered back into her dwelling, the other remained, staring, gawking. It seemed it was not a new occurrence.

Sitting back, eyes wide, gasping for calm, compassion tears rose from her stomach, balled in her throat and spilled out of her eyes. Mind racing, adrenaline pumping, heart aching, she strove for inner balance, Spirit World comfort and direction.

Calming, Annish forced the horrific scene out of mind, the terrifying fear attached to it and shakily fumbled for the birch bark map in the bosom of her dress. Spine erect, tears and fear stuffed, it made perfect sense to run hard, fast, and far away. She did not want to return to this Creatorless place, it had to happen now, right now. Hard black uncomfortable shoes on, Annish conjured the invisible protection wall around herself. Mind and eyes focussed on the back-entry door of the white man's church dwelling, slid note map sketching of her general location and arrival confirmation under the door and back again in one breath's time.

Shoes off, Annish Deer ran with lightening agility all the way back to camp, baby bob bouncing within, pounding on her bladder, peeing as she ran.

Annish immediately hid in the back of Bear's Den under Standing Bear's cold weather robe waiting breathless, listening for sounds of being followed, tracked, hunted, heart thumping wildly, Mother's knife tight in hand, ready to fight for her life, baby's life, to defend.

Standing Bear had not returned, Crow companion had not returned, she was alone with her fear and horrors witnessed. A Night Owl screech screamed to its dinnertime prey, Raven flew low across the front cave opening and Bat People emerged from inside den crevices, flitter zig zagging out into the dark.

Dusk had descended quickly and grateful that she had somehow found her way there and back before complete darkness had settled in. The Strange Tree People hid Grandfather Sun's late evening colours turning to dark clouds that Snake covered into the black of hidden Grandmother Mood. Snake crawled out of dried scrub brush and slid out into the night.

Annish, terrified and alone, ignored hunger pangs, too afraid to go out to hunt for food, waited for husband's return.

## Chapter Seven ~ Death and Rebirth

Annish, waited for husband who had taken the last of their nutrition mixture, seemed unaware that she was trauma terrified and alone. Ignoring hunger pang stabs, still too afraid to go out to hunt or rummage for food, brewed cedar tea and waited for husband's return. Annish wanted to go home now, wanted Father, Uncles and boy cousins to come rescue her, now. She body mind shifted the childish longing away, stiffened her spine and sought the familiar hunter warrior confidence found having hunted the Buffalo. Sensing the familiar spirit World comforting presence and calming somewhat, she partially dozed, remaining alert to predators.

Grandfather stood looking upon his frightened beloved, "Woman, run if you must from that which is dangerous, do not run from the fear of it, stand and face the fear with a brave heart. Remember what soul sickness grief and pain is for the experience is a gift of compassion towards those who are blind to the Creator, to each other. You must aim your heart and eyes to the task at hand and go home. Do not allow fear and the behaviour of others to distract you. Remember who you are, where you came from and where you will soon return."

Dreamy Grandfather words dissipated, leaving a hint of hope that she may prevail. Vulnerable, she wept for her youthful self, deeply ashamed of her own self-importance, of having the audacious want of killing a Buffalo and of wanting a mission of importance, fame and celebrity status.

Unworthy thoughts turned abruptly to a wrenching stomach cramp followed by womb waters draining the inside of her thighs. Thunder Beings and Lightning People bellowed under a darkening sky, bringing forth Wind power, each preparing for rain.

Bee Charmer had chosen this rainstorm night to make her entrance onto the Earth Mother, at least one moon, too early. Fear for the tiny life, physical body likely not yet fully developed was quickly interrupted upon hearing Mother's comforting words, "Babies come when they are supposed to, it is their choice, from Spirit World".

Drifting in and out of sleepy rhythmic contractions, Annish would have instinctively prepared for baby's arrival, with Standing Bear husband at hand, nutrition, water and medicine tea. Without time to attend to those traditional basics, she adjusted her body, ready to ride out contraction waves. To ensure silence, she slid Mother's knife in between her teeth and calmed. In between piercing contractions, Lightning illumined images of husband Standing Bear laying crooked upon a canyon's dried riverbed.

As dawn crested, Annish squatted into position, recalling many other women doing so. Bee Charmer slid smoothly out of an exhausted Annish's womb. Quickly swaddling the quiet murmuring baby, she cut and folded the umbilical cord and washed her clean of fluids. Babe content in her own little fur, Annish released the last of the amniotic skin and washed herself. Both tired and hungry, babe nursed while Annish scrounged the den floor and walls, snacking on fortifying grub worms and cedar tea. The hours rapidly flew by as Annish and babe adjusted to each other and fortifying themselves as best they could, with what they had.

Keeping busy, tending to baby helped to keep the fear shadows at bay. Strength regaining, by noon, Annish was certain that she heard Horse voices nearby. Terrified all over again, Annish retreated to the back of the den, knife in hand, ready to defend. Hearing nothing more, she contemplated Grandfather's warning.

Crow returned without Husband. Something was wrong and if the rainstorm vision was true, she had to find him and tend to whatever had to be done. Crow companion scouting ahead, Baby swaddled in Cradleboard and amidst post childbirth contraction cramps, she gingerly made her way toward the canyon. Sure, that it was safe, she stood babe in Cradleboard against a tree and crouch crawled closer to the precipice edge. Grandfather Sun illumined the scene below. As the vision imagery indicated, Standing Bear lay twisted amidst dried riverbed rock. Thunder Beings rumbled distant as dark cloud cover blanketed Grandfather Sun. Another storm encroaching and sensing danger, she retreated, it was clearly unsafe to retrieve his body.

Back to makeshift camp in the den, Annish attended to Spirit World transition prayers, knowing that Father and Spirit Talker would join in from home. There would be time to grieve in the days to come.

It occurred to her that the white holy man, the white man who was the holy children's messenger might respectfully care for his physical body and perhaps add his own sacred rite.

She would have to go back to the village and leave another note. Now.

Annish was tired, childbirth sore and still hungry for more sustenance. Weighing possible outcomes, the only option seemed the most difficult and spirit challenging. If she ran all of the way there and back, she might, just might make it back to camp before dark. She slid Grandmother's dress on one more time, ignoring the primal fear rising within, straining to aim and focus on the message delivery and back. Baby moss quickly changed and Cradleboard covered on her back, Annish ran, invoking Wind, Lightening speed, Deer and Wolf agility too afraid to notice spirit White Wolf Woman running along beside her.

She did not stop to notice anything except a clear path to the white holy man's back door. Cradleboard off and hidden under the brush, Crow standing guard, she had gone and returned in one breath and had babe back aboard and deep into the forest by the next breath.

An eerie chilling presence in the breeze sent skin hair standing on edge. Baby sleeping from her long entry enter the world squirmed sleepily and settled. The makeshift camp was suddenly cold, empty and dark. Void of husband and his safe providing and protective companionship, it was only now that Annish realized how comfortably safe the mission had been.

So engrossed in maintaining a strong and focussed invisible barrier of protection, she had not truly noticed just how different the Tree, Rock, Water and Creatures were until now, the Spirits of which now seemed to shout, "Get out! Go Away! You do not belong here!" Sensing danger near, intruders and predators, her eyes scanned the periphery of camp for animal and two leggeds. Disconcerted, her emotions dropped into the pit of her stomach, suddenly overwhelmed weak from child birthing, lack of fortifying food, trauma and grief. She was alone, sick and isolated.

A rush of prickly heat rose up her spine and dripped rivulets from her brow that trickled, tickling chin.

Storm clouds gathering above sent Lightning shards across the horizon as cold wet Wind whipped through camp den. Gathering energy and focus, Annish cleared camp and slid into forest cover. Instead of seeking another empty Bear den or Tree root burrow that may leave her and babe vulnerable to predators, she slung her bundles over a high Balsam branch and in a massive V branch formation, erected a tight-fitting hammock covered in branch bows for warmth and protection. Hoisting baby bundle, she gasped in sick exhaustion, fighting a swirling dizzy nauseous wave, secured both to Tree's solid body, safe.

Mother and babe nestled in, the storm raged below, essentially clearing away any last indications that a lone woman and baby had ever been. Fever rising, she nursed Babe and searched Spirit World for comforting assistance. As though alone in an abandoned cave, unanswered prayer

invocations echo reverberated back, she could not see, feel, hear a single familiar Spirit Guide. Calling Crow companion, bounced back in Wind, leaving her gasping. Bladder relieved in a Wind gust, Annish's spirit slid away from her physical body into a dark void.

Nightmarish murdering two leggeds tracked, tortured and killed Standing Bear husband and babe. Thousands of black, yellow, red and white women and children with lost spirits wailed, moaned and hunger cried. The Church white man had led the two leggeds to Standing Bear, had participated in his murder, had trapped the two holy children and was about to torture and murder them. The connecting Celt man possessed an evil heart, using her curiosity; he wooed her into his clutches and killed her baby.

A furious Buffalo stampeded home community, killing all, seeking revenge. Forest fires raged, entrapping the last of her people and Buffalo in fiery inferno as possessed flames wickedly laughed. Annish fought against the nightmarish imagery, seeking equilibrium and wakefulness. Too sick and weak, imagery returned to thousands of her people, extended family and clans, wandering with spirits lost in utter darkness. Without the holy children, the dark sky filled with fireballs, spitting destruction upon Mother Earth's barren surface.

Stirring in sweat-filled bedding, safe, hungry Bee Charmer shifted, searching for Mother Milk. Annish shifted, allowing the connection, grateful the nightmare had ended with the storm.

Still shaken and rattled from post fever weakness and wide-eyed fear, Crow companion fluttered wings from a branch above, startling nerves. Conscious mind registering his presence and sensing safety of day light, she slid back into an exhausted dreamless sleep waking only long enough to nurse and clean babe.

Annish woke the next morning, still shaken and weaker, yet a little more normal than the day before.

Without doubt, the heartbreaking loss of a loved one, isolating loneliness and survival fear is a dangerous combination. She had never known this kind of isolation or fear and struggle fought its deathly grip within. If not for Bee Charmer, it could be oh so easy to allow her spirit to slide away in a Wind gust to Spirit World. Wanting only her own Mother, Father, home and community, she wept and wailed openly.

She was little, a small child lost, abandoned without care and comfort of the ones she loved. It had been too easy coming to this place. It was a ridiculous mission to think she could get down from the Tree let alone complete. She was obviously, unsuited, unskilled and incapable of completing the mission. She had utterly failed. She and babe would likely die where they hung; alone and hungry, left to unfamiliar animals and two legged predators. The world without the holy children would end with fireballs falling from the dark sky. She hoped the end would be quick and free of suffering.

Annish awoke mid-day, still feeling teary emotional and nervous, yet feeling oddly rejuvenated. The strange dark nightmarish fever seemed to have done its worst and passed. Nursing babe, colostrum complete, milk now flowed from sore nipples into a hungry gripping tiny mouth. 'Survival first, must find food before dark'.

Sliding to the ground with a contented full-bellied Bee Charmer bundled on her back, she took inventory of what worldly goods were on hand, what herbs and small game hunting tools could achieve the fastest response. Standing facing first North and turning West, South and East intuitively discerning direction to food sources. In the opposite direction of her accustomed routine path, behind and over a rocky ledge, lay a small meandering creek, alive with water creatures. Pausing at water's edge, she knelt to hand scoop and drink fresh gurgling water when a basket tucked under a nearby

Tree caught her eye first and the two horses from the white holy man's paddock stall. Startled, Annish crouch froze, reaching for Mother's knife, searching.

Hearing nothing, seeing no one, realizing that they and the basket had been there for more than a day, Annish relaxed.

Attached to a wooden handle was a rolled birch bark note. Unfurling the aged note, the basket had been left, for her. The image sketched indicated the white man's church building with a stick person with one hand over his heart, smiling. Another sketch indicated a stick woman, with child and the two holy children standing aside of a stick man with red scraggly hair.

Thrilled excited she opened the basket to find a myriad of dried fish, breads, teas, cheese and a honeycomb. Gratitude tears welled from within and raising hands to Grandfather Sun and Spirit World, spoke the most thankful words she had ever known.

The gift token of food validated not just her survival, but of the mysterious workings of Spirit World and through a stranger in a strange land.

Annish quickly rolled the food items into her robe and gathering a stick, added an etched image of a stick woman smiling with one hand over her heart, babe in arms. She hoped the man would come back for his basket and find the thank you note intact.

Rested, fortified, Annish awoke on that fourth day alone to see a young red haired white man appear at forest edge, with two native children hiding behind.

'The Celt man?' Sensing her caution, he respectfully waited for the woman to acknowledge his presence by calmly sitting on an ancient Tree stump and casually whittled a stick.

Annish bundled babe on her back, slid down the back side of the tree and crouched safe, brush camouflaged eyeing the strange white skinned red headed man. Waiting, crouching still, content to allow time and confirmation within her soul and conscious mind to adjust to the situation, to assure safety, sensed the man's heart and soul. Annish waited, heart pounding in nightmarish fear residue and excitement. Scanning, gawking, she sensed that the two children stayed back, silently hiding not too well and waiting for an adult cue to emerge.

Crow companion perched on a branch aside the red headed man and calmly fluttered his wings. Celt man grin acknowledged Crow yet remained where he sat; knowing that she crouch-observed him, gauging the situation. Finally, to break through her wariness, the man waved a hand and a young boy of seven and a small girl of four appeared beside him. The girl casually lay her hand upon his shoulder, the boy squatting in front of him, both casual in calm familiarity with each other. Clearly, the children did not demonstrate fear of him nor mistreatment, in fact seemed comfortably familiar.

From behind, the horses whinnied, blowing her cover.

Standing, reaching into one pocket he removed a small metal flute and blew, fingers twiddling with one foot tapping to the beat, he bellowed a strange squealing noise. Raising her hands to cover her ears against the strange sound and hesitating to scan the surrounding woods for dangerous intruders and seeing sensing none, she relaxed, listening and watching the strange sight. The children erupted in playful dancing, in between his legs, on his back, tussling his hair, pulling beard hairs as they all tumbled to the ground in one massive laughing, squealing play ball.

Relaxing, Annish smiled, recognizing the love play antics with the same familiarity as the children back home in community. Baby calmly murmured, stirred slightly and settled back to sleep.

Sensing that the native woman had sufficiently relaxed, the young Celt man stood, unpinned and removed his multi-coloured blanket shawl from around his shoulders, into his bundle and wrapped something into it. The children watching smiled and nodded. He stood motioning his arms and

bundled cloth outward toward her, saying strange words, held it out to her in gift offering. "Take. Take. Gift. Gift for you. Take."

Slowly Annish and babe approached and hesitated. On closer look of him, he did not look so ugly as she might have imagined. He smelled of Earth, Forest and Cedar Oil.

Perhaps, he was not so ugly because he seemed familiar, as though they had known each other all their lives, merely a happy re-union. As Annish slid the shawl over her shoulders in gracious acceptance, a stunning Crow feather slid sideways. Catching it, she admired its beauty and marveled at the appropriateness of the gift, another who honoured Crow. Sliding the feather aside, the one already in her hair, Bee Charmer murmured in seeming agreement. The strange shawl, she graciously wrapped around her shoulders enshrouding babe in acceptance.

The children scrambled to her side, smiles peered into her baby bundle and each taking a hand, in instant affirmation that they were now a loving family of five and ready for a long journey to their new home.

In the hours following their meeting, they easily slid into synchronistic cooperation. 'Like Ant people', Annish recalled the lesson, 'each intuitively sensing who needed what and when for the good of all'.

Walking comfortably and quietly north, Annish motioned to the back path and paused beside the river basket. Unfurling the Birch Bark note, she added to her gratitude image, the Celt man and the two holy children on horseback and her precious Crow companion's feather and attached bead.

"I am done with this place. I go home now", Annish murmured.

The curious entourage and instant family of five, each with their own language that was foreign to the other, rapidly adjusted to each other. In the days and months ahead, she would be learning their basic words and customs while teaching her people's language. Much birch bark drawing and sketching would assist in explaining where each had come from and who needed what when.

Celt man drew pictures of his big water travel to a new land, as a boy, explaining that the white man of the church had raised, trained and educated him. One day while hunting alone, he had received a vision that indicated a mission involving two small children and a beautiful young native. He first rejected the notion, not wanting to be involved in such a risky journey but in time, understood that the mission would bring a new life and new home, and yet meant to be. Unable to fathom his real name, she proclaimed him 'Coyote Dog'. His new name stuck, bearing the lesson as well as the peeing leg stretched outward in pivoting dance continually sent the children and Celt man into fits of laughter.

The girl child took a small stick in hand and hand waving over sand and drew eloquent images of a baby orphaned at birth who travelled North with an Elder across a big desert. To answer the curious onlookers, she empathized desert, a place without trees, only scrub brush, little waters and all year summer heat. Holding two fingers to her eyes and pointing to each of their eyes, they gathered that she was a seer and becoming a medicine woman. She was simply called, 'Seer' yet, her calm quiet demeanor exuded so much more. She was grace and love of which powerfully rippled outward, permeating all; Seer was love incarnate.

Amidst a descending soul sick darkness upon the Earth Mother, Seer spoke of the importance of not losing one's heart attention to it. It was paramount, no matter what, to aim for Spirit World assistance prayers, for joy despite tears of grief and atrocities. There will be many times when this is all one will have, yet can be the most powerful force in the universe. The women cannot forget this and the men cannot forget this.

Annish recalled only days earlier, when steeped in post childbirth and grief fevered vulnerability, her own spirit could easily have slid permanently away. It took a strong heart and wise mind to carry onward amidst devastation, heartbreak and loss.

Seer, sensing Annish's painful reverie, took Celt man's shawl and wrapped it around her new mother, baby sister and herself and invited the boy and Celt man to join in. The gesture lesson was understood; the shawl represented so much more than a gift of warmth and protection from the elements; it symbolized womanhood, sisterhood and more so, nurturing the nurturers. As we care for ourselves this way, as we care for our loved ones this way, we can extend our prayer intentions outward and perhaps one day physically, emotionally and soulfully embrace the unlovable into healing wholeness as well.

Annish turned away from the child and busied herself making cedar tea. The girl child unwavering busied herself as any normal child would, she tease-tugged and pulled at Celt Mans wiry face hairs. Given the traumatic viewing of the soul beaten black people that lingered and the nightmarish fevered night of worst case fears imagined and the sheer depth of the prophesied atrocities and devastation Annish had tasted against her will, she could not fathom how Seer's teaching could possibly work en masse.

Perhaps, she was concluding, it was not her business to comprehend it all. Perhaps, it was simply her business to have come on this journey, to have mingled Standing Bear's blood and lineage within her own, creating Bee Charmer and assuming a parental role, all safe in their new home. Unable to align her conscious mind with the prophesized outcome and still feeling cynical, she recalled her own childish notions in preparing for Buffalo hunt. Invocating and willing powerful Spirit World forces for a higher good seemed to pale in comparison.

Wandering along the periphery of their night's camp, she carefully gathered Grandmother style of small fire sticks; tiny branches, yet best yield for cooking heat and warmth without smoke. Annish imagined a ferocious hungry Bear or Wolf in altercation, or worse and murdering white man trying to threaten the child Seer. In her mind's eye, the girl child merely stood her ground, projecting a powerful yet graceful loving force field, the predator stopping abruptly and toddling away. Indeed, she demonstrated that love in action. Void of fear and doubt, was not soft and compliant to threat, but a powerful force that could not waiver, no matter the threat.

Celt man seemed to know Annish's internal frustration. He too had lived and seen all manner of atrocities, his own people violent amongst themselves in a free land, many colour waring against another and amongst themselves.

Holding his hand as though to say Stop, it does not end here, though it will continue for some time he motioned.

Drawing images of beautiful women and men haloed, some with swords in hand, some kneeling in prayer. His people, his Ancestors she assumed. No, he motioned, all peoples everywhere have the ancient teachings and heart pathway within their own blood. Most blind, he motioned covering his eye, most deaf he motioned covering his ears to the good of the world, to the good of Spirit World. He pointed to Seer, smiling pointed to his own heart to Annish's and to the boy.

Celt man was joyfully reiterating Grandmother's teachings. Raising his hands in claw formation, he pretend-growled at Seer and wrestle play pummelled her, pretending to pull her chin hairs out. To fits of snorts and little girl giggles fading, she slumped into his fatherly arms, sleepily wiping away a strand of snot.

Taking cue that it was his turn, the boy drew in the sandy campfire soil, motioning with hands and using simple words to emphasize key points. His story was a long journey from the East, his home deep in a mountain range. Before that, as a newborn baby, he too had travelled far from the South. It appears, he had known of his destiny since birth, an old wise soul, a respected Elder in a boy's

body, a living Spirit Guide, knowledge intact. He simply unrolled his multi-colour beaded belt, revealing strange symbols and tiny maps. Clearly, a sacred record of his people and their teachings. He knew them all, each symbol, story, teaching and every aspect of each map. He pointed to his own heart, indicating that he was 'Whirling Rainbow', keeper of the sacred healing arts. His people spoke of a similar ancient prophecy and heart teachings where one day many generations ahead, it will be the heart path that brings all of Mother Earth's children home to their own soul, full connection and communion with Spirit World and each other in equality and unity, one extended family and community.

Gawking, Annish waited for more. Did both children know more? Were they capable of more than Father or even Spirit Talker back home? It seemed unfathomable that anyone could surpass their Spirit World prowess, let alone two small children.

Whirling Rainbow, rolled his belt and tucked it back into his travel bundle, yawn stretched and bed curled aside her, head on her lap. A boy child needing his Mother's love. Celt man snore snorted awake, scratched his crotch and beard, adjusted Seer in his arms and slid into a sleeping curl.

Wide-eyed Annish, surveyed her entourage, slid her sleeping babe aside the boy and stretched out her legs. Grateful for some quiet time sacred space to herself, she sighed content recalling another campfire night of visions in Buffalo hunt preparations. Smiling, soul adjusting to just how much of her life had changed, that old longing of wanting to become a warrior hunter so long ago, so childish, yet so powerful. Indeed, now longing for home and familiarity, she eyed her worn and tattered foot ware, once gifted by another odd form of love demonstrated by Porcupine Auntie. She rummaged a hand into her bundle and mend embroidered as though discovering that she had the skill to do so.

In the eyes of Celt man, Creator and Spirit World, the children were just children, no more special than any other was. The dichotomy of their childhood needs seemed a striking contrast to their old soul demeanor. Annish understood this balance of walking two worlds simultaneously and instantly, a deep abiding parental protection of them. In a sense, they were now her children, so providing and nurturing their growth was gracefully assumed.

Foot wear mending complete, Annish considered the strange Celt man. Heart pattered in responsive familiarity of like soul and mind. Her hand gingerly ran fingers over the gifted Crow feather and over the strange patterned shawl on her shoulders and fell upon Mother's gifted Ant amulet. Celt man seemed to exemplify the teaching, gracefully assuming his new charges with grace and community mind. Indeed, Coyote Dog was an endearing nickname. Untying the sinew strand, she slid the boy's head off her lap and onto his bedding and knee crawled over to the snoring red headed man. Tying the ant Amulet necklace around his neck, she recalled how concerned, proud and wise Mother had been in the giving of it and was sure that she would approve of its new owner.

Annish sat back, contemplating those last two days at home and realizing within her own mature mind that both Mother and Father could easily have negated her solo Buffalo hunt, yet instinctively, they allowed her the solo journey. She could not possibly have been hunter trained or prepared enough for this mission had it not been for that solo hunt. 'At times, life's most difficult challenges and mistakes are our greatest teachers. Experience is our best teacher. It is in the living of life that we learn and grow.' Mother and Father had wisely understood in their parental wisdom, they had already prepared her for life as best as they could, finding her own way was hers and hers alone and in the hands of Spirit World.

Yawn stretching, tilting head in Spirit World communication, she asked for clarity and invoked information of what was yet to come.

Grandfather calmly appeared. 'Much will forever remain unknown to you Granddaughter. The prophecies of soul sickness and disruption to our people and the many other coloured peoples

beyond, are indeed the likes of which fell beyond your comprehension and yet, it is almost upon us. The two children will carry the history, the prophecies and teachings within their bodies and spirits for many generations to come. In many generations to come following the great soul darkness, when you are an Ancestor in Spirit World, your journeys will one day symbolize not the onset of darkness but a return of nurturing all of Mother Earth's inhabitants.

Images unfolded of standing on the far southern rocky precipice perch overlooking an expansive foreign landscape. Details slowly registering in consciousness from the traumatic village visit, fevered nightmare night dreams and emerging shapes of many strange peoples and cultures first battling, wandering lost in dark soul sickness, dark sky fireballs and one day, living in harmony. In aftermath, fireballs cleaned the air and waters bringing clean new growth.

Annish sleepy sighed overwhelmed. It was not hers to fully comprehend and carry, it was hers to survive, heart and soul intact and bring her entourage home.

## Epilogue ~ Home

The days turned into weeks into months and despite the added burden of a baby and two small children, with the gifted horses they made steady pace until one late autumn day, Annish sensed anticipation; a grand homecoming would soon complete a long journey away from home. Ears tilted backward in expansion, she cautiously tuned into distant sounds of two-legged life. The landscape was growing familiar.

As Bee Charmer took her first solid running steps, Annish grinned in her timing. It seemed appropriate that she would take charge of her independence on familiar home landscape. As her new family entered the old solo Buffalo's hunt ground, instead of rushing home to community, she dropped her bundle and drew shared the Buffalo hunt story with her charges.

A mere half a day away from home, it registered now, just how far away from home, she had travelled, how much of her life had changed; leaving with Standing Bear, essentially alone and returning with a family of her own. Glancing wearily backward, eyes brimmed with tears of relief. Allowing guarded focus down, intuitively Annish understood that the two white men hunting the young children had wandered lost and given up.

Following the homeward trail along the river shoreline, she stopped, dropped her bundle, handed babe to Celt man and wandered off and away from her charges.

It seemed a thousand years ago, since she had been here, her once time hide away from community home sacred space now seemed tiny and childlike. Annish aware of the Spirit World presence of White Woman, Buffalo, Grandmother and Grandfather's spirited, listened carefully as he spoke. "Granddaughter, your earth journey is made of defining moments, cross roads and gateways, and as each door closes, in time, new ones will open, as you have found. Always, all ways, continue to follow the heartbeat of your own soul, which is the path of light and love. This will carry you through the days and challenges ahead. Blessings on your journey Granddaughter."

The two children in her care had been acknowledged as halloed because of their inner heart light wisdom that exuded their beingness. Sacred, simply because they knew who they were; Spirit Guides in the flesh, it was a matter of fact. Their importance was not more than Annish's innate and provider protector and teacher contribution to community. Their importance was no more or less than Porcupine Auntie's skilful embroidered footwear nor Spirit Talker's medicine. No than Grandmother's Bee Charming, Fathers hunting prowess and Mother's listening ear. Each skill that was honourably used to contribute to community wellbeing was equally as important, each skill and talent was a gift and an integral part of living life in cooperative oneness. Their haloed beingness and sacred knowledge was fundamental to the survival of future generations, of all colours and walks of life. As such, their mere existence had made them a target and in the rescue and relocation meant a positive ripple effect would ensure the eventual evolution into one big multi-coloured community upon the Earth Mother.

All of the Earth's people had ancestors and ancients who were once clan or tribal and communal, living in oneness with the Plant, Animal People but had lost their way as well as the teachings of the way of the heart.

Indeed, the Seer and Whirling Rainbow's existence, knowledge and teachings would eventually contribute to the many other people's new world community.

Annish returned to her charges, taking Celt man's hands in hers, spoke loving, "Celt Husband, is how I present you and these are our children, I have proclaimed it so. We are family, we are one." Celt man understood and smiled in acceptance, gracefully assuming his new community and many their missions still to come.

Dusk was settling as they approached community camp, an autumn cool breeze swirled in a chilly welcome. Annish playfully watched her breath puffing out moist white mist balls danced and hang in the chilly evening air. The children giggled, following her lead as her eyes crossed, engrossed as glistening smoky balls gently rise, sparkling against the black backdrop of dark night and twinkling stars. Eyes uncrossed, shoulders relaxed they paused, taking in the expanse of community and surroundings. Trails of greens and yellows hummed and waved within Northern Light streams. "Spirit World is dancing in communion with the all that is", she lovingly said.

The late autumn's cold dampness was rapidly sinking into travel weary shivering bones. Lazily tightening her Celt husband robe, she head tilted with nose, sniffing and sensing the onset of winter. Again, a deeper breath in, eyes closed and attention on odours, the chilly breeze carried the familiar decaying musky scents of trees, plants, evening fires and dinner's cooking of home.

Her once rebellious to attending dinnertime chores now excited. Her eyes fixated on radiant Grandmother Moon's brilliant sparkling light path across the dark river water's surface. Magical mist hung thick amongst the offshore tiny islands and rocky shoreline evergreens as cold air met river water warmed from the day's sun. Barking Geese migrating to the far south on evening stop over, dropped one by one away from their massive V. Annish motioned to the children and joining her, they splayed their arms, legs, fingers and toes in communion, watching geese adjust wings, jut legs straight out front with webbed toes wide open and skid over water surface creating gentle waves. Geese barking settling, waves rose as birch bark canoes slapped and bounced off the sandy beach tugging against ties around the protruding old cedar tree branch. Grandmother had once shared honeycomb on a warm summer's day on that old branch.

Taking Celt husbands hand in hers, she pointed, motioning to him and the children to listen. Their ears twitched, tuning into a distressed Loon echo from the north shore sounding alarm and looking for its mate. From a nearby island bay, Mother Loon and another generation of nearly grown chicks excitedly responded. As it always is, another large hungry fish had disturbed father Loon's late evening feeding.

Smoky odours hung in chilly air, turning their attention to a communal campfire smouldering, slowly smoking the last day's river fish catch. Aside the fire, bundles of willow, sweet grass and juniper branches lay ready for lodge frame repairs, mats and baskets. Medicinal plants gathered fresh earlier in the day, hung cleaned, trimmed, sorted to air dry.

'The more life seems to have changed for me, the less things seemed to have changed at home'. Auntie alarmingly scolds little niece from within her dwelling. Their door flapped rudely open and abruptly, Auntie hurled a large Bull Frog into the air which belly flop splashed into the river. Annish smiled, knowing that growing little Niece had neglected to leave Bull Frog in its own river water home.

All ten family lodges were evening quiet as cool moisture night air heightened the sweet smell of birch-bark lodge coverings. A new lodge had been erected aside her parents, Annish noted her old mobile attached the front door flap. 'Thank you, Father, thank you, Mother', she murmured. Boy cousins carefully groomed two horses while chattering of trade routes and beautiful far away girls they have wooed. Uncle loaded his arms with all-night logs from a woodpile for Elder Council Lodge's late night meeting fire; there was much to discuss. Tomorrow, Annish would travel with Bee Charmer to Standing Bear's family to pay honour and Annish would be home.

And so, it was.

“The best of your ancestors and  
the magic of the cosmos  
is in your DNA.”

## Authors Note

We are rapidly growing into one big global community. In generations to come, our gene pool will be thoroughly mixed and with that, I reckon, racism, war and all human atrocities will dissolve into a sad mindset of antiquity. We must change, adjust and evolve, change and evolution is inevitable.

If we base our worldview on media reports only, we see only a world filled with violence and strife. Without media, with innovation and social maturity at our fingertips, we can mature into the kind of world most of us long for and strive toward.

As the disclaimer in the front of the book states, this novel is a work of spirit world fiction with universal philosophical teachings interwoven in a spiritual coming of age journey. If any of the characters, storey bits, ideas or religious-cultural beliefs offends you, consider that while we each have a unique individual life journey to trek, we are all branches of the same tree, interconnected and all our journeys are sacred and must cherish them all.

I am mindful that while this story surrounds two colliding cultures in one era, there is not one culture that has not been invaded and assimilated, and typically, with grave atrocities in the process. On this note, this is a global issue that all of us who have knowledge of our ancestral lineage, can relate to. Most of our Ancestors fought for Peace and Freedom, not for capitalistic or materialistic oppression.

Yet it is in the amazing resilience of the human spirit that we do carry on, adjusting our sails in healing while navigating our evolution as a species into a border global community.

DNA throughout history and especially now, is muddied with phenomenal inter-racial coupling, so yes, we are growing into one multi-cultural community and I pray, a cohesive and cooperative one.

The original and higher intent in sharing this story arose out of my own campfire story telling time with my own young children, of wanting to share in story form a mysterious missing piece of my own heritage, a seemingly lost sense of nature spirituality communion and the all too often untapped spiritual potential that lay within and around us. I wanted my children to know and honour their own nature connection and to know and honour their own Spirit World relationships as well as their own inner heart power.

OM, home is where the heart and soul resides; within each one of us. It is a sacred alignment with whatever or however we perceive the divine; one's self, and with each other. Whether you call it OM, God, Goddess, Creator, the Matrix, Divine Force or Allah, it is that living breathing feel good life force that exists beyond our normal day-to-day consciousness. It is a wise, intelligent and unconditionally loving force that lives within all animate and inanimate life forms. It is a force that affirms our inherent goodness, as we are. It unites us all, through sisterhoods and brotherhoods, and time transcends all cultures, religions, philosophies and schools of thought.

Our conscious knowledge of Spirit World has almost been lost to the majority and it is my fondest wish to participate in that re-wakening. We are not alone, we have never been alone, Spirit World support is there for the allowing and holds not one race, religion, philosophy, creed or doctrine.

Within each of us, there is also a naturally evolving powerful force of self-love, honour and intuition. It is an inner wise consulting soul compass that when followed, naturally flows divine love, inspiration, passion and creativity. An individual's spiritual journey is as unique as a fingerprint and holds no ties to one faith, path, culture, modality or era. Yet, like the mysterious powerful forces and will power that is threaded throughout Annish's journey, it is our individual connection to our own soul and spirit that ultimately, when we open our minds and allow, makes us 'One' with God, and the all that is.

In spiritual growth, this relationship feels much like a grand homecoming. We come to know this loving force and energy flow as a life force and interconnectedness. It is the space where we find our own unique authentic wild nature of inner adventure and contentment. It is a great adventurous journey for many who consciously choose to forgo a traditional lifestyle, for that uncharted authentic life journey.

Each soul's existence and unique expression adds to the beautiful tapestry of the cosmos. The nature and spirit guide communication also symbolizes that divine nurturing, sense of belonging, and timeless wisdom, that allows us to walk in harmony with the all that is, as we are, and in harmony with each other. Across the cosmos, soul mates and kindred spirits find each other.

And yes, life is a series of defining moments, cross roads and gateways, and as each door closes, in time, new ones open. Always and in all ways, follow the heartbeat of your own soul, which is the path of light and love.

Annish is the spiritual soul seeker within each of us.

I wish you only global community minded love and wish you all good blessings on your journey.

And so, it is.

Jan Porter

Bio – Jan Porter - Author

Jan Porter was born in rural Ontario. Growing up in the great outdoors, Jan recalls being held captivated by the other-worldly magic of indigenous cultures, mystics and tales of the northern wilderness. As a teen, she found battered old copies of Voltaire's 'Candide', Margaret Caven's 'I Heard the Owl Call My Name', Shakespeare, Robert Service and anything Canadian literature that her adolescent soul hungered for. Inspired, she first scribbled then dabbled with typewritten short stories, articles, poetry and founding a funky alternative secondary school newspaper 'Cool School News'.

After many years of work in Human Services and completing a Spiritualist/Metaphysical Minister's degree, Jan cocooned in a northern Ontario lakeside sanctuary and began to polish numerous books and course materials that had long been in various stages of completion.

With the wisdom of everyday unsung heroes and the human condition, Jan carves a new path. There is still so much more to do, share, explore and discover with more novels in the works.

Formerly published with Moose Hide Books Jan is a two-time winner of the Bookworks book of the Week Award and Readers Favorite Award for 'Soul Skin, woman have you had enough' and 'Angel Guides, love communication'.

As a philosophical muse of human nature, quantum physics, spirit world and nature, Jan Porter does not hold to any one tradition as one higher truth or one size fits all.

Viva la diversity!

Founder of Soul Works Gifting Foundation (ad hoc) and a proud member of; The Writer's Union of Canada, the Mohawk College Alumni Association and the Bancroft Spiritual Centre.

Formerly published with Moose Hide Books, Canada.

Articles published: Mosaic Magazine, Owen Sound Sun Times, Warton Echo News, Tobermory Press, Medium online, One Thousand Trees magazine, Link magazine and co-founder of Mystical Voices Magazine.

Web site: [www.janporter.ca](http://www.janporter.ca)

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/user/inspiredsoulworks>

## Other Published Works

\*Paperbacks, Large Print and E-Books available via Amazon.com, Barnes&Noble and wherever books are sold.

### ~ **Maddy's Wings** – literary fiction

“It was difficult to tell what was lightning, air fire or ground fire. It seemed we were trying to navigate a sky filled with fireworks within the middle of a storm. The plane shuddered, losing altitude in a dive that was too steep and too fast. Concerned that the stalling engine's fire and tail rip may ignite the load of ammunition within, I instinctively banked, aiming offshore to the water below.”

Maddy survived and now she wants to know why.

Racked with survivor's guilt and beginning to suffer from Alzheimer's in her old age, 92-year-old Maddy has a painful recollection stuck on repeat – the moment she crashed a loaded B26 bomber during her role as an Air Auxiliary Pilot in World War II.

Maddy's relives poignant memories; growing up during the Great Depression, war traumas, the death of her daughter and unborn grandchild, and yet it is the plane crash that she cannot get out of her head...

As Maddy's memories fade and life draws to a close, she seeks to live her last moments to the fullest. From intriguing new neighbours to a pet pig and giggle brownies, humour and heartbreak abounds as she struggles to shake off the survivor's guilt that has haunted her for so long. Maddy's free-spirited adventures are thwarted by a ruthless elder care worker, who is making her life a misery. Strange events unfold – the decades old cold case of a murdered local Pastor surfaces, and shocking truths come to light about little sister Rosie's life during and after the war.

What really caused that fateful plane crash? Why did Maddy survive while others lost their lives? What really happened to her little sister Rosie during the war?

As she faces the final challenges of life to set herself free from the shackles of culpability, Maddy may just redefine what it means to be a hero.

### ~ **Soul Skin, Woman have you had enough?** – literary fiction.

“*Soul Skin* can best be described as bliss in literary form—it is a mind-bending, sweeping story of impossible journeys made so believable by Jan's incredible literary talent.” Meaghan - New York Book Pundit

“An inspiring tale of hardship, wisdom and discovery, Soul Skin is a celebration of those of us who do not fit into ‘normal’. Deeply moving, Soul Skin is an odyssey of many lifetimes, that summons our own personal journeys. Life overflows with problems as Navi is caught in between two worlds, of loss, destiny and self-discovery. Striving to cope with; a child’s cancer, marital heartbreak, a stifling rural church community, a scandalous love affair, job loss, menopause and a haunting dark shadow nemesis, Navi is left heart broken and shamed. Lost and alone with her daughter, she is comforted by her dead Grandmother and a mysterious soul skin man. Slammed into impossible challenges, insights come through ancient sisterhood teachings and sacred dream journeying to historic events in; a Nazi death camp, a pre-civil war deep south, indigenous North America, as Joan of Arc, audience with Lord Byron, as a wolf mate and more. Throughout, Navi candidly explores life with wit, yet it is the love bond of her daughter, Gran and soul skin man that carries her through. Following the power of fate and finding the freeing truth of who you truly are, can be a magical journey of remembering your; innate heart wisdom, connection with the spirit world of possibilities and bring forth your life mission. "The power of your Ancestors and the magic of the cosmos is in your DNA!"

~ **Angel Guides, love communication** - self help. “Your Angel Guides are waiting to formally meet you! Communicate and allow your Angel Guides to flow comfort, love, insights and inspiration. A wonderful life path and to fulfill your soul’s purpose, is your birthright. The best of your ancestors and the magic of the cosmos is in your DNA!”

~ **Angel Guides, love communication Workbook** – self help. “Companion to 5 Star Reviews "Angel Guides, love communication"

Get your Angel groove on!

~ Your Angels and Spirit Guides are waiting to meet, talk and work with you!

~ Oodles of loving comfort, insights, support and inspiration.

~ Powerful and easy communication.

Your Angel Guides are waiting to formally meet you! Communicate and allow your Angel Guides to flow comfort, love, insights and inspiration. A wonderful life path and to fulfill your soul’s purpose, is your birthright. The best of your ancestors and the magic of the cosmos is in your DNA!"

"This book is the "medicine" that everyone needs right now. Everyone is “plugged in”, “online”, “dialed in”, and Over-Scheduled! This book is the remedy to all that."

~ **Sharing** – self help collaboration. Sharing, our stories, ourselves, our success. Twenty-four women writers share their personal healing journeys in commemoration of the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women. (All my proceeds go to charities. [www.OneThousandTrees.com](http://www.OneThousandTrees.com)

~ **Sacred Space, Body Mind Soul after Sexual Abuse** - self help. “The Sexual Abuse Survivor's Sacred Space" offers insights and resources from those who have been there and bounced back better than before. The power of your ancestors and the magic of the cosmos is in your DNA!"

~ **Life After Abuse, a practical healing guide for survivors.** – self help. “Your body, mind and feelings are your own sacred space. The pathway out of the pain and shame of sexual abuse to wholeness in a soul-healing journey. Life After Abuse offers oodles of insights, practical resources

and examples from those who have been there and bounced back better than before. Shift wounds into wisdom with insight, wisdom and inspiration. Gain comfort, peace of mind and empowerment. This is the art of wholeness and inspired transformation.”

~ **Soul Calling, your Angel guided life purpose** – self help. “Your Soul and Angel Guides are calling you to live your inspired life purpose! Communicate and commune with your own Soul’s wisdom, Guardian Angels and Spirit Guides. Access the wisdom of your Ancestors, harness the magic of the cosmos and hone your intuition with oodles of practical tools, tips and an Angel Guided Soul soothingly insightful Soul Calling meditation journey. The best of your Ancestors and the magic of the cosmos is in your DNA! Your soul path is a divine and unique fingerprint that adds to the beautiful cosmic tapestry. It is an amazing journey of self-discovery and living of life to its highest potential.”

~ **"Spiritual Biz, passion, purpose and fulfillment in a changing global community"**– self help. “Your soul is calling you to your passion, life purpose and fulfillment in a rapidly changing global community. What was once old time community mindedness and sharing cooperation is the emerging future of sustainable business and right livelihood. Harness the best of your Ancestors, ancient prophecies, the magic of the cosmos and practical wisdom bridging traditional and alternative resource tools. Hone your intuition and navigate your soul path with confidence. Doing what you came here to do is a journey of discovery and fulfillment. Your unique soul path adds an amazing spark to the global tapestry, a positive drop that ripples forward for generations to come.”\*Co-Author: Daniel Davison is a Global Investment Banker, Philanthropist and Visionary; Double Helix Management, Moral Explosion; global integrated micro-community concept. Double Helix Management Services Ltd.

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## **Thank you for sharing in the journey!**

Your positive feedback support inspires us forward to us creative types!

I personally, read all reviews, reader's feedback and personal journeys with care, consideration and upon request: confidentiality.

Blessings on your journey!

Jan Porter

[www.janporter.ca](http://www.janporter.ca), GoodReads, YouTube, Twitter.

Jane Porter. This collection of literature attempts to compile many of the classic works that have stood the test of time and offer them at a reduced, affordable price, in an attractive volume so that everyone can enjoy them. Read online.Â Jane Porter. Since the loss of her family in a plane crash, Harley Diekerhoff has led a quiet life and keeps to herself. Taking the temporary job at the Copper Mountain Ranch as widower Brock Sheenanâ€™s housekeeper seems perfect for her.