



Golden Nuggets

TRACEY KACHOR... A BRIGHT NEW BEGINNING



DESPITE BEING BORN IN WINNIPEG, CLOSE TO WHERE HER ANCESTORS CAME FROM NEAR THE RED RIVER, TRACEY KACHOR LIVED MOST OF HER LIFE TOTALLY UNAWARE OF HER CREE MÉTIS HERITAGE. THAT ALL CHANGED WHEN SHE DISCOVERED HER TRUE CULTURAL ROOTS AND IT CHANGED HER LIFE TRAJECTORY – AND THAT OF HER ENTIRE FAMILY!

“I found out I’m Indigenous because of a business transaction more than anything,” said Tracey. “My birth family was looking for a way to help my brother, so they suddenly decided to claim their ancestry out of convenience. It wasn’t to gain knowledge of our culture, it was because it benefited someone in the family.”

It was, in part, the reason Tracey pulled away from her birth family. But the realization of her Indigenous roots was also an epiphany that has since created a thousand little miracles!

“I walked slowly into an exploration of my ancestry, and about 10 years ago I had a close friend help connect the dots and found my connection to Red River,” said Tracey, who has lived in Alberta since she was eight years old. “I started learning more about who I really am. I call my generation the Lost Generation, because the generation before us suffered the 60s Scoop, so they were afraid of being taken. The one before that experienced residential schools. History was not good to Indigenous people, and everyone everywhere was hiding their identity if they could. My birth family is white-passing, so apparently it was easier to hide under that cloak.

“I’m sure my parents thought it was a safety measure to hide our heritage, because they could. A lot of people in minority positions hide if they can. So my generation is tucked away – our parents were afraid and we were unknowing or indifferent. But we missed so very much.”

Now in her mid-40s, Tracey wanted to know more, particularly so that her two daughters can know and celebrate their heritage. By the time her youngest daughter, Phoenix, graduated from high school last spring, she was wearing a Métis sash and presented with an eagle feather.

“It was my kids who started coming home from school talking about Indigenous culture. They were being educated about it at school and they started teaching me! I visited the Red Deer Native Friendship Centre to get some guidance about how to proceed in my personal journey, and that changed everything.”

Phoenix joined Tracey to take part in the blanket talk at the Friendship Centre, which is an interactive workshop where participants explore the history and relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada. Tracey began to work alongside some of the staff, who answered all her questions and lent their support. Eventually, she met Elder Linda Ophas, who really launched her learning journey.

“I walked into something knowing absolutely nothing, and the whole community embraced me wholeheartedly. I began taking Cree culture and language courses and learned more about who we are as people. That helped me learn more about myself and my heart is so full. It was Elder Linda who opened the floodgates completely, and me and my family owe her so much. My children will not lose the language and the culture, and we all have this great big loving family who embrace us. It means the world to us.”

Tracey’s daughters Zoie and Phoenix, and her husband Jeff, have been to jamborees and countless dinners and gatherings at the Centre. Tracey has talked about Indigenous culture with community groups and assists with Cree classes, and says she is forever at the Red Deer Native Friendship Centre. She has taken beading and drum-making classes, and her professional art has changed to embrace the colour and brightness of Indigenous culture.

“Everything changed, actually, and it has all been so positive,” said Tracey, whose art studio is called Red River Cree-ations. “Alberta Health Services purchased my artwork that depicts the Seven Sacred Teachings, and that represents my biggest art purchase after all these years of creating art. Every time I produce beading or sew a ribbon skirt, it is healing to me.

“I feel like I missed out on the strong community, the legends and teachings, the important stories, hearing someone speaking Cree properly,” said Tracey. “I wasn’t able to live my truth, but The Creator has a way of making things happen. It has been less than two years since we opened up to this, and it has changed everything. We are in a good place now. We are so proud of who we are.”



Tracey, with daughter Phoenix and husband Jeff at grad last spring. She and Jeff, who is a firefighter in Calgary, live just south of Red Deer in Springbrook and have been married for 22 years. “He jokes that he is the colonizer in the family, but he’s keen to learn all these things alongside us.” Their oldest daughter Zoie is studying at Lethbridge University.



Tracey created the beadwork on Phoenix’s graduation cap, as well as a hawk design that was present on the entire family’s clothing at graduation. The hawk is Phoenix’s spirit animal, and the whole community celebrated Phoenix. “I was presented with a second eagle feather at grad, and I shared it with my mom because she didn’t have anything like that when she went to school,” said Phoenix, who plans to become a firefighter like her dad. “Knowing my Indigenous culture makes everything clear to me and it adds a spark to everything I do. I took part in the first Indigenous Training Camp for future firefighters in Calgary which was amazing. So much has turned since all of this opened to us.”

Do you know someone who has discovered something new that is adding joy and purpose to their days in retirement? Or discovered the time to pursue an old favourite hobby? Let’s celebrate them! Contact me at sandybexon@gmail.com

