

Indigenous Stories - May Sam

Welcome to Indigenous Stories. We are so honoured to have Elder May Sam tell us a bit about her family and her knitting.

I grew up where it's called the flats, by the Cowichan River. And it's called Clemclemluts (*Lhumlhumuluts'*).

But I was born in Mill Bay, my father's mother was from Mill Bay. And I'm really lucky to share her traditional name. I'm very proud to have her name. And I really believed that I had to really walk in a good way in my life, to have this name. To acknowledge my grandmother and to work hard like she did.

My father moved back to Cowichan, where my grandfather was from, and his name was Skookum Tommy. And I always thought that name was cool, that was a really neat name, Skookum. That was my grandfather. My grandmother was Madeline Harry *Swutstisiye'*. So I get to carry her name *Swutstisiye'*.

When I acknowledge everyone, I always remember to acknowledge the land, the territory that we walk on, to acknowledge the ancestors. Because we have to remember that they were here before us, and in spirit they're still here, taking care of their land and their home.

My father was Everest Tommy, and I loved that name too, because when I look at Mount Everest... and my father was tall, slim, and he was a very hard worker. He was a logger and he was a single parent.

As a child, me and my sister had to get up early, go to Cowichan Bay and get on the boat, and go ahead across Cowichan Bay to Saltspring, and my father was falling trees.

And when he said, 'May, Julia, *ni unsa nowa (where are you?)*', we'd stand up and we'd wave at him so he knew we were still where he put us. And then he cut the top of the tree, and then he'd just, I don't know, not even a minute, he'd drop right down on that leather belt, went right to the bottom. That was really something to see.

So with all his hard work, at work, he'd come home... my father would rest for an hour or so, he'd go lay down after dinner. Then he'd get up, and then he'd pull the box under his bed. He was very shy, he didn't want anybody to see him knit. It was so perfect, so even, his knitting, and he could knit without a pattern. And I admired that, and my cousin, my Auntie's daughter would be there, and she'd be spinning wool. I watched my cousin, her little feet was going so fast, and I thought, I want to do that, I kept telling myself, I want to spin like her. Today I spin really, really fast like what I wished for. I can do that now.

I still look at the stars and I say, '*Huychqa (thank you) Dad, huychqa taking care of me*'. To stay and be myself, and not change, and not think I'm bigger than anybody else. I'm not. I want to just stay kind and humble like my father. He's my inspiration, my greatest inspiration. *Huychqa*.

Much thanks to May Sam, Al Sam, Rachel Perkins and Sarah Pocklington at First Peoples' Cultural Council for their help with translating and spelling May's words in Hul'qumi'num.