

15, 2022



Dear Q'shintul Community,

First of all, I would like to thank you with my whole heart for holding space for me and my family to begin the process of grieving the death of my husband - and Will, Jake, Charis, and Isaiah's father - Doug. Although Doug was ill for quite some time, his last breath, taken in the early hours of August 9, caught us all off-guard; we were gutted. We deeply felt the sudden loss of his presence - a presence that was supportive, appreciative, funny, kind, and loving - even when his brain was severely atrophied. Only two weeks before, while spending time together as a family in Ucluelet, Doug hiked four kilometres and jumped for a family photo on Long Beach. He wanted as much time as he could, and he didn't ever, ever, ever give up. His legacy of strength, courage, and love is a beautiful gift to us.

I didn't grow up learning how to grieve. My family of origin deeply values stoic responses to death - the ability to push past emotions and get stuff done - to move on. And, it's not surprising, given that all my ancestors immigrated here - away from their villages, their connections, their cultural norms - and were unknowingly thrust into survival energies for the rest of their lives - unable to say goodbye to loved ones back home. So, this has been a new and confusing experience for me. I have felt lost. I have felt deeply sad, and untethered. I must say that being accompanied by my radically generous friends, Tousilum and Sulsá'meethl, since arriving in the Cowichan Valley in 2018, has given me understandings, practices, and processes of unimaginable support during this time; ways of thinking and being that have kept the path lit. They have embodied David Wagoner's poem *Lost* - encouraging me to stand still, to listen, to trust, to see this time as a powerful stranger. I am so grateful for these gifts.

DAVID WAGONER

LOST

Stand still. The trees ahead and bushes beside you
Are not lost. Wherever you are is called Here,
And you must treat it as a powerful stranger,
Must ask permission to know it and be known.
The forest breathes. Listen. It answers.
I have made this place around you.
If you leave it, you may come back again, saying Here.
No two trees are the same to Raven.
No two branches are the same to Wren.
If what a tree or a bush does is lost or you,
You are surely lost. Stand still. The forest knows
Where you are. You must let it find you.

You, too, as a community have been radically kind to me. So many of you have fed my family, walked our dog, gave me a virtual hug, said goodbye to Doug, witnessed his funeral, attended to my boys, and many other acts - both known and unknown, seen and unseen. During the ten days of Doug's palliative care at home, I did not once have to buy groceries, make a meal, or leave Doug's side. I was held in a way that I have not experienced before. The only way I can describe it is LOVE - embodied, lived, expressed. During the hardest and strangest season of my life, this powerful, unexpected, surprising grace frames my memories.

I have spent my time away from the community finding my way through the sad and sometimes scary forest of *big emotion*, paperwork, *big emotion*, finances, *big emotion*, wondering and sorting, *big emotion*, supporting my sons, *big emotion*, fractured foot, *big emotion*, remembering and finding gratitude, *big emotion*, etc. As the many writers whose memoirs of illness, love and loss I have metabolized while making sense of my own, I know I will walk with a limp from now on (and not from my fractured foot!) and maybe that's okay. I like what Amy Bloom says - "*You are imperfect, permanently and inevitably flawed and you are beautiful.*" I also know that I want to move forward - carrying in me Doug's love for children and education - with a new humility and gentleness of spirit - even as I continue to hold to the vision of reconciliation, transformation and hope that Q'shintul/MBNS is learning to live as we walk together - Q'shintul. So, I look forward to returning to the community after Christmas Break in my role as Matriarch/Head Learner/Principal.

I would not have the experience of this contemplative, peaceful, albeit difficult leave without the willingness of the staff to 'take **more** things up'; we are all connected - so any one of us missing impacts the whole. The radical generosity of the Q'shintul/MBNS staff is a witness to Tousilum's initial call of "*building community before anything else*" in the Spring of 2018 (before the school opened). I offer a huge HUY CH Q'U to Lisa's respectful, thoughtful leadership which she offered graciously with a heart which intimately knows grief, as well as the Ecole Cobble Hill community which continued without her. I'll always be deeply grateful.

Please share with your children how much I miss them, and how I look forward to learning, problem solving, playing together, laughing, and getting messy come January. *And let them know that I might cry some days ... and that's okay.*

With love and appreciation,
Kim



This image was designed
as a memorial to Doug -
the beekeeper -
by Stuart Pagaduan,
Hulq'umi'num' artist.