

Heshook-ish Tsawalk

{As her winning entry for a staff essay contest, **Estella Charleson** wrote this essay about **sustainable tourism** when she was working for Clayoquot Wilderness Resort in the summer of 2008.}

I have chosen to look back at the priorities that have been set out and followed by my ancestors; as they have been successfully practiced for thousands of years. The all-encompassing ideology has been the understanding that, “Heshook-ish Tsawalk,” meaning that, everything is one. A story about ELK, as recalled by my relative, Umeek, elaborates in further detail on the priorities in life. As Elk rationalizes upon reflection of loss, he comes to realize that; “The primary purpose in life is to create, maintain, and uphold relationships.” The significance of Elk’s reflection is a key in ensuring a sustainable future.

Creating relationships emphasizing an interconnectedness of all living things as well as the elemental and spiritual realms should emanate from staff like spores of the ubiquitous sword fern. We must re-awaken the spiritual power that once guided people here in discovering medicinal and nutritional properties of plants, seaweeds, berries, and animals. Food, shelter, transportation, and clothing were all once harvested here. To learn history not only opens up fascinating knowledge for both engaged staff and guest, it also enables a fuller understanding and a greater appreciation for our connection within our world.

It is an honor to work amongst the tremendous splendor of Bedwell Sound. I have a strong sense to fulfill my priority: to share with others the relationships I work to create, maintain and uphold with my surroundings. The more we continue to work on these relationships, the stronger our message to the guests become. Working day to day with guests from around the world, sharing experiences with them and passing on knowledge serves as a decomposing cedar tree does in passing on its nutrients for the birth of new seedlings, ferns, and mosses.

As guides, we must act as the altruistic bees; by taking on a greater cause to advocate, through numerous examples surrounding us, a healthier relationship with the earth. A Nuu-chah-Nulth word for conservancy translates as, “Keep some and not take all.” This is a clear indication that our relationship should not last for 4 days of 1 week; it should transcend and grow deeper so that our great grandchildren will share in the bounty we have here.

It is through these humble methods, that I believe I can make difference. To understand that we are all one, will carry through progressively as we all grow to live by this attitude which is based on respect for all living and non-living things. The priority lies in the individual and our ability to greatly affect our relationships.