

Stories

In the summer of 1995, I sat with my paternal grandmother on the beach along the river that's covered with barged-in gravel, from a road that has caved in due to erosion. We were sitting there, resting after working on a hundred salmon or two, mostly summer chum, some king salmon too. I believe she was finishing up with a King head to dry.

I really enjoyed helping her, my mom, and aunts too along with a bunch of my cousins, while the men did the heavy lifting after resting from the fishing trip and loading the processing area. Quality family time, everyone in my paternal extended family coming together and taking care of the fish we'd eat for lunch and dinner that day and the next and for salmon food to put away for the winter. Irreplaceable memories of awesome family teamwork.

We sat there, watching the seagulls sitting on the river bobbing around. And then I asked my grandma, "Can you send out them to go catch some more? We're done cutting these ones."

She smiled at me and replied, "No, we cut enough."

I responded, "But we have time to work on some more, I see it."

She finishes what she was doing and she starts a little lecture, "Paniicuar, we have a whole river to think about that needs this fish too, they want to gather too, just as we have for the winter."

I interrupted, "How much is there?", thinking I can sneak in a way to take care of salmon just to have more quality extended family time.

She answers me, "I do not know, more than I can count, more than I can imagine, but the further up the river, the longer they take to gather and save enough for the winter."

I sat there trying to figure that out but my little mind only knew so much of the river and so far. I got so confused and she must have recognized that and she just explained, "You'll understand when you get older, maybe you'll have a better idea than me." After that, I knew there was no way to convince her into telling her sons to get more fish.

Another time, I helped my maternal grandmother with salmon, I was tired but happy to spend time with the other side of the family. But it was different, it was a mostly women crew with a guy or two. There was less kids around meaning more time to concentrate. We got those fish done fast. But with the same utmost love and care. Each family is different and works differently. There was less complete family interaction but there was this intimacy with deeper learning. I asked my grandma, mom and her sisters, "Are the guys going out again for us to take care of more fish for the winter?" They all had the same answer, "We don't need more, we have enough, we have to think of others." With my paternal grandmas words already imbedded, I had no energy to fight those words to take more than we need.

It's cultural and traditional to keep in mind that there's more to the world than what we're exposed to. It's taught when we come to awareness of our little world and surroundings.

We're taught at a very young age that the world is bigger than we can see and have experienced. We're taught not to think of ourselves. We're taught to think of the future. Almost like spending money, we can't spend it all at once, otherwise, we'll have nothing for the future unless we learn how to save.