

Gwich'in Magic

Cynthia Pavlovich

A version of creation story says that at one time the Gwich'in and the Caribou were one. Not two separate beings, they became relatives and made an agreement. The land would sustain the caribou and the caribou would sustain the people. They would each keep a piece of the other's heart within themselves. In that way their lives and well being would be connected forever.

Once upon a time there was a little Gwich'in boy who was ready to start school. Like many children he was worried and anxious to leave his mother and home that was his safe place all his life up until now. When he went to school he would miss his mother, and feel very alone, so much so he just didn't want to go to school. So his mother, the clever woman that she was, thought up a way to keep them connected. She had a heart tattoo on her heart, and so she told her son the next, I have a plan, today I will draw a heart on your chest, the same as mine, on the left side of your chest, closest to your heart. Today I will draw a heart on your heart, the same as mine, on your left side of your chest closest to your heart. So she took out a pen and drew a small red heart on his chest in the same place as her tattoo was located. Then she explained to him: "We are connected always, I created you from the love I have within me and our hearts are tied to one another. When I place my hand on my tattoo, I can speak into your heart and I tell you many times a day, I love you, I believe in you, I miss you and will see you soon when I come to get you at school". The young boy answered back, "Yes, Momma, I can hear and feel your love right now."

"So," she continued, "You now have the special tattoo on your chest, so when you miss me you can put your hand over it, close your eyes and speak directly into my heart and to me, and I will always send that love right back to you. This is Gwich'in love magic, and it's the most special of all. It is powerful, it is ancient, and it can heal and protect you." So the little boy went to school and made it through the day, using his love magic to build his confidence and brave his first days of junior kindergarten in the catholic school.

Gwich'in magic is something I have told my children I possess. It's how I know when they are out of their beds. It's how I know who took the cookies or threw the toy out the window even without seeing. My youngest Gwich'in son used to try to say he was too scared to go to bed, or sleep alone in his bedroom, he was afraid of shadows. Of what could be under the bed. So I tell them no ghosts, or boogie men, or bad guys of any kind are allowed to come to our home. Nothing bad can happen here, because I use this Gwich'in Love Magic, and I use it to cast a spell over our entire home, yard and driveway so nothing bad can ever happen or no monsters can come here. There are never spirits in our home, nor monsters under the bed as they cannot even enter our protected area. But for little boys who don't want to go to sleep, there's a cousin, he's a big wolf, and he walks around at night, and if children do not go to sleep, then they must go to work. The big wolf will walk by, and collect those children who don't want to sleep, take them out on the land and make them pick garbage, or recycling and help to look after the earth which is our duty always. Or go help do chores for elders. And wouldn't you know it, that sweet little boy magically feel asleep unafraid of anything, and protected by the ancestors and the love that had for generations created the resilient Gwich'ins we see today.



Cynthia Pavlovich is deeply rooted in Gwich'in values. As an intergenerational residential school survivor, Cynthia has found a unique way to connect her identity to her culture and strives to learn more and share more each and every day. A lifelong goal of her's is to learn Gwich'in and help to preserve it for future generations to come and she has been blessed with a spot in the Mentor - Apprentice Program to learn Gwich'in and now passionately writes children's books in Gwich'in translated into English & French.