



Dr. Jeanne Paul, ND, Medicine Woman

Dr. Isis van Loon, ND

Dr. Jeanne Paul is a naturopathic physician and a traditional healer. She is a member of the Sliammon band whose traditional lands are near Powel River BC, and she is a graduate of NCM, class of 1991. She has a particular focus in traditional plant medicines, and this year won the University of BC's prestigious Aboriginal Capacity and Development Research Environment (ACADRE) award for her work on "Traditional Healing Knowledge and Practices with a concentration on native wild crafting and how to make medicines." She has recently realized her long time dream of founding a college of traditional medicine. This interview took place at her home in rural Chilliwack, at the foot of the coastal range mountains.

Isis van Loon: What was your early life like?

Jeanne Paul: I went to two Residential Schools in my first 12 years of education. As I was the sixth generation since acculturation of native people there was not that much left of our culture. We were separate, couldn't go into town to go to hospital, or school. They (the dominant white culture) did accept our money to buy groceries... It is a long story of having been a people that were not accepted.

It was compulsory for all Native children to attend residential school. Fortunately I came from a very powerful mother who believed in education. She told me: "Although it's not good with the white people, you still need education." Residential school was very difficult for me at the beginning because I only spoke my language.

I am Coast Salish Tribe from the Sliammon Band and we speak the Sliammon language. There are many languages spoken within the Coast Salish Tribes.

IvL: What brought you to naturopathic medicine?

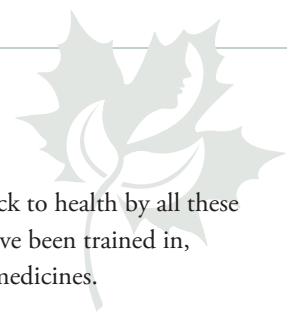
JP: By the time I came along there was no understanding of medicine really in terms of what was in our "Back 40", because (the knowledge) all was gone. Only after many, many years of my own study, and going to naturopathic school where I specialized in botanical medicine did I really understand what our people had. How our people used it as their first medicine.

This is how I started out wondering: wouldn't it be nice to go to



a place and learn all these facts about health? And what do you know, there was such a place. Dr. Joseph Boucher introduced me to that, a place that you could learn alternative healthcare to match the basic philosophy that I had in me and what I was trying to find, the cultural background of my people. I found in studying there were people who were already doing traditional medicine in Canada and the United States. Traditional medicine for native people was making teas, always teas. To learn that there are other forms of making medicine other than water/tea was a big eye opener for me.

I graduated from NCM in 1991, at the age of 51, which was quite an accomplishment. My health was shot to hell from the stress of school. I always think it is ironic to go to medical school to get the sickest in your life. I think now is the best I ever felt in



my life, 25 years later. It keeps getting better and better as you find yourself.

I am very fortunate with the education I have had as a naturopathic doctor, I specialized for five years in botanical medicine (at NCNM). We never went out to see what the plants looked like, this was missing with my training. It was only after I left school that I ran around in the woods to see what the plants looked like. This is why when I teach we go out to see what is out there.

lvL: So you took the route of naturopathic medicine to go full circle?

JP: Yes, that is exactly the word. Going full circle, finding about medicines in a very traditional way. Do traditional medicines fit into the western mode of healing? They do. You don't throw out the baby with the wash because you are so anal about drugs and about your idea of medicine. If you need your drugs to survive then you should do that. I have that much respect for life. There are other things you can do, of course that is what naturopathic

Considerations for NDs Working With First Nations

For NDs interested in working with first nations, one can apply as a doctor to service their community. The band will hire you and then people of that village make appointments to see you.

If you are not affiliated with a band and a first nations person comes to see you, advise the patient to ask their individual band to see if they would cover your services and tell them the amount. The patient would consult with her band to see if they would cover your services. Otherwise they would have to pay out of pocket. Many can't afford our services because ND coverage may not be on the plan. So, I did a lot of trades, with fruit, veggies and fish. I always had a lot of fish in my freezer. Of course many of the natives have good jobs so they would be able to pay your costs.

doctors do: help encourage the body back to health by all these different therapies that we know and have been trained in, especially for me the use of traditional medicines.

I have chosen some very, very important medicines that are out there that are number one for me: elderberry is my big sister, and devil's club is my big brother.

Elderberry we call *Thewaquo*. My mother would say "Jeanne, it's out, you go pick me a jar." She didn't know what it was for but she knew we always had to have a jar. One jar. She would can them, on the stove, with lots of sugar, which is called a rub. Elder opens all your tubes. I really stress that to my students when we are picking it in March. If we take care of ourselves by drinking elderberry tea, this is the naturopathic philosophy of prevention.

Devils club: All the bands I have spoken with know about devil's club. All these various bands seemed to understand devil's club was used for "Ahhahum" in my language which is soreness in the joints. Everybody drank it for their arthritic conditions. I am very fond of devil's club. It has a lot of uses and its actions are mainly anti-inflammatory.

lvL: How do you define healing, and what is healing to you?

JP: I have looked a lot into 'what is healing?' I went to different churches, talked to different groups of people, traditional healers – medicine men they called them at that time. No one could really give me an answer. I have come to find out that healing was within myself. It had to come from myself and I used my training as an ND to encourage what I felt within myself. I learned two main answers to my question. How did our people know what plants to use if they were in the woods and they walked around and saw something? People aren't stupid enough to eat it to see if they are going to die... there is something innate about it, they watched the birds, and the animals. Basically, what I discovered was the doctrine law of signatures. Whatever the plant looks like is what it is going to heal. That knowledge is innate in all of us, as a people.

The second answer is more spiritual. I only learned this when I had decided I didn't want to pursue anyone anymore – medicine people, books – I gave them up. I had a spiritual experience and I found my answer. I was wide awake, I experienced something that is very difficult to describe. When it was over, I knew what I was supposed to be doing – I was told by this experience, "this is your job." At first, I really didn't want it, then I found that my practice changed. I knew what to do. How do you know? It's in your soul. It's not me at all, I watch the healing... I am a conduit between the spiritual powers, like an electric cord, I am in between. It is such an honour for me to watch people heal.

I realized that the basis of all healing is to capture what has been lost. I have found this through lots of people I have worked on. When trauma has happened to you, you leave a part of your soul there. Either you leave it there or somebody selfishly, evilly took it from you. That is what healing is for me now, capturing parts of a person's soul that have been lost and giving it back. But how is a healer really able to give it back to another person? That person has to do their journey too.

For example, giving back their childhood to a person changes everything. It follows Hering's Law of Cure, like playing your LP record from the backwards to the core... It eats away at that LP record of tunes that have happened to you. It works at all the levels – mental, emotional, physical – at once.

Not everybody believes this kind of thing, but finding lost parts of peoples' souls is very important. You are not defined by what it is that has dragged you down.

JP: And what are you planning now?

JP: Now in my semi-retirement I have decided to dedicate my life to traditional medicine making, looking for these brothers and sisters out in the woods to use as medicines. There is so much interest now in traditional medicine in all forms because we are finding our voice as a nation and as a people, and realizing that we do have something to contribute to the world and to ourselves. There is big interest in learning how to make medicine, and it fit in with my interests to open a college of traditional medicine for as many of the native people that want to learn how to continue this important work.

I work for Seabird Island. They are very progressive. They really want to encourage the culture of the bands under their umbrella. I was originally hired to help teach herbal medicine as part of breast cancer research last year. I travelled around to the 11 bands, and I spread my time working with whoever would come. There were people that would follow me as I visited each of these bands.

I graduated 10 students in June. That is how it started. Then Seabird Island approached me and asked if I would be willing to start a college of traditional medicine in the village. Of course I said yes - this has been my dream for 40 years. The first lecture was held on September 22.

What is unique as an ND and having a medical background is that I am able to incorporate the body systems with the medicines. In the first lecture we study the musculoskeletal (MSK) system, then two days later we go out and study the plants that affect the MSK system. In a basic way we study biochem and anatomy so

that they have some background as to what is going on before they are able to make a formula. Before people learned by "this medicine, Gramma says it was pretty good for cleaning you out." Now they know why it works because of the chemical composition. I want the students to understand this. In that sense my teaching is unique, and not just a cookbook thing. People appreciate that indeed there is some thought behind the teaching and not just "pick this, it's good for you."

I will do this as long as I can, while I still have grey cells working and I still have the energy – which I have a lot of – and I still can think. The interest in traditional medicine, especially in herbal medicine is catching on with all the bands. Just this week I received two phone calls which relate to this. There are two forthcoming conferences on traditional medicines where they want to hear something about mental, emotional, physical and spiritual medicines. It's really good to hear that you want to incorporate the spiritual aspect to the whole healing process. Isn't that what we are all about as naturopathic doctors, we look at the whole person and not just the sick part of you?

I am very happy with the direction of my life which has given me happiness, peace and joy. I am still fulfilling my every dream. What more can anyone want? And thank you for allowing me to share this with you. 🍂

