First Nations Health Authority
Health through wellness

Grizzly Bear Calls a Meeting

Written by Dr. Garry Gottfriedson

It was nearing winter and the world would soon fall into deep sleep. Chief Grizzly Bear, sensed imbalance. He saw that the world was rapidly changing, and he was worried. He wondered if the other clans noticed the change as well.

The leaves would soon turn yellow and would drop. He knew he had to do something before the snow settled in, so he decided to bring the clans together before winter hit fiercely.

He called on Chief Eagle to send word through the winged ones, requesting a meeting. Eagle called on Chick-a-Dee, Magpie, Crow and Owl, and so they flew out to all of the villages informing the clans of the important meeting.

By the time the clans gathered, the windy month had loomed and the leaves fluttered to the earth. Black Bear, Brown Bear and Red Bear were fat and ready to enter the long months of dream time, but they arrived at the meeting ready to listen. All the clan mothers arrived too. Even Old Man White Bear made his trek a long way from the north to attend.

Chief Grizzly Bear noticed him and approached with great respect asking, “Would you pray for us and give good words to open our meeting, since you are the oldest and the wisest of us all?”

Old Man White Bear nodded in agreement and began.

“Dear Creator of all things, I pray on this day with humbleness and sincerity. I ask that our people never forget our ways, which are as old as the land itself. The Old Ones said that many new challenges and sickness will fall upon our clans. And that our world will be different from our ancestors. But we know we must try our best to take care of ourselves in the changing world that will come. Creator, help us face the many challenges and dangers that we will face in the days ahead. Help us to always remember who we are.”

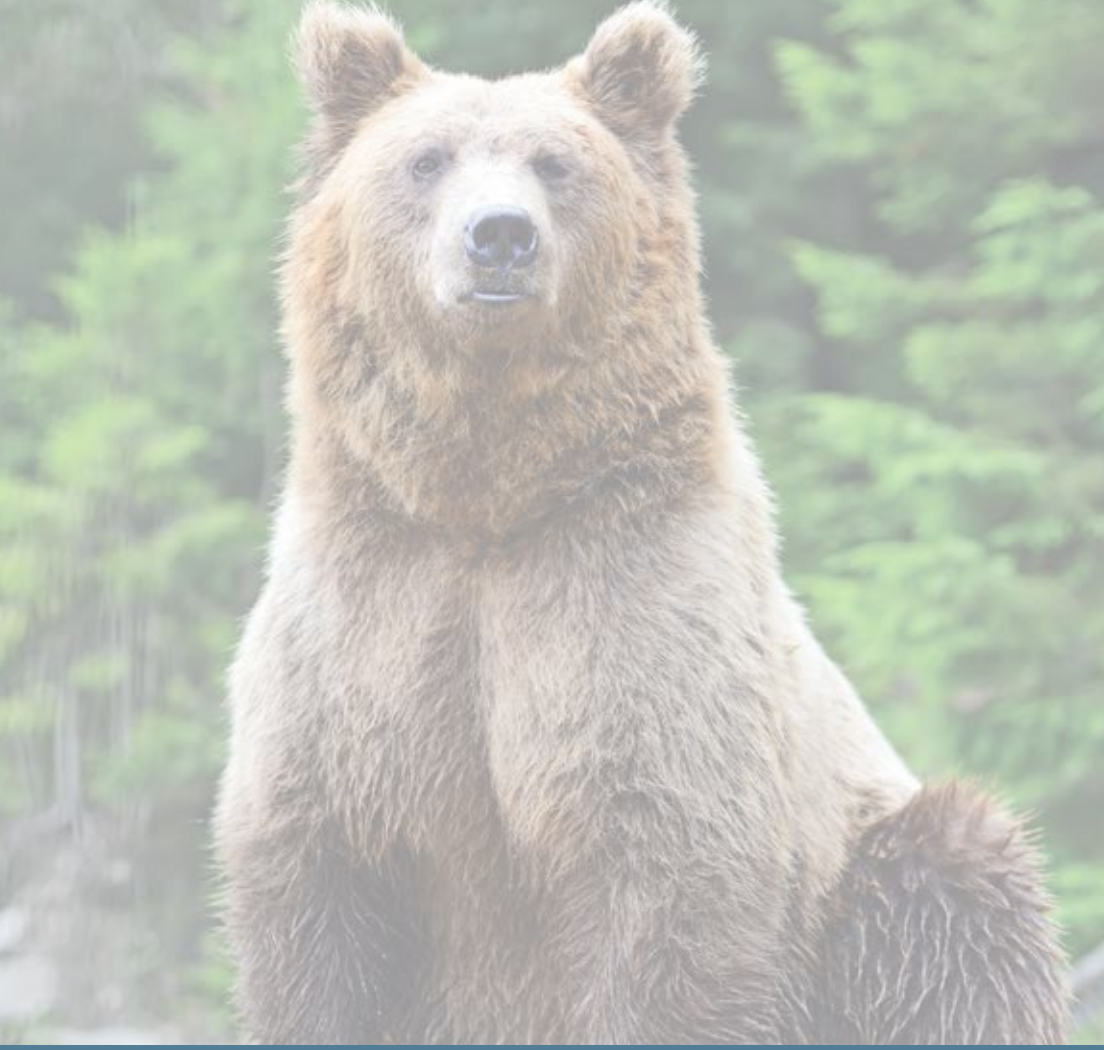
And when Old Man White Bear finished, Chief Grizzly Bear turned to Clan Mother Red Bear and asked her to speak. “Dear Clan Mother, you are the ones who brings new life into the world. And we hold high respect for the life-givers, with great respect, I ask you to say a few words.”

She nodded in agreement and began to speak, “My dear people, Old Man White Bear is right. We must never forget who we are! But more importantly, we must do our duties as mothers and grandmothers and guide our communities to always do what is right.” She sat quietly for a couple of minutes thinking, and then went on, “We must show love, respect, honour and grace as we teach our families and communities. We must show kindness towards each other. We must work together in cooperation with all clans for the sake of our well-being and health.” Clan Mother Red Bear cleared her throat before her final words. “We must clear a new path for ourselves. And we must remember that we are here today to create a good road to follow, not only for ourselves, but more importantly, for those yet to be born. Thank you!”

“Those are powerful words,” Chief Grizzly Bear said. “Thank you!” Then he went on speaking directly to his brothers, “We are about to enter into the long months of winter when dream time is powerful. My brothers and fellow clansmen, you have heard wise words today. And it is a time for each of you to dream what is possible. When you awaken in the new year, we will gather in the spring to carry our good dreams forward. Remember the clear messages of Old Man White Bear and clan mother, Red Bear, had spoken about.”

And so all of the clans returned home.

Winter rolled into spring, and the sound of thunder woke the sleeping bears. They emerged from their dens eager to tell Chief Grizzly Bear of their dreams. They found him walking high up in the mountain range deeply thinking. The land was once again green, clear water filled the creeks, and land was full of new, fresh scents.



Brown Bear spoke on behalf of his brothers. “Chief Grizzly Bear. We dreamed a new people are coming. They will bring with them new laws, new ideas and it will be a struggle for us to understand each other.”

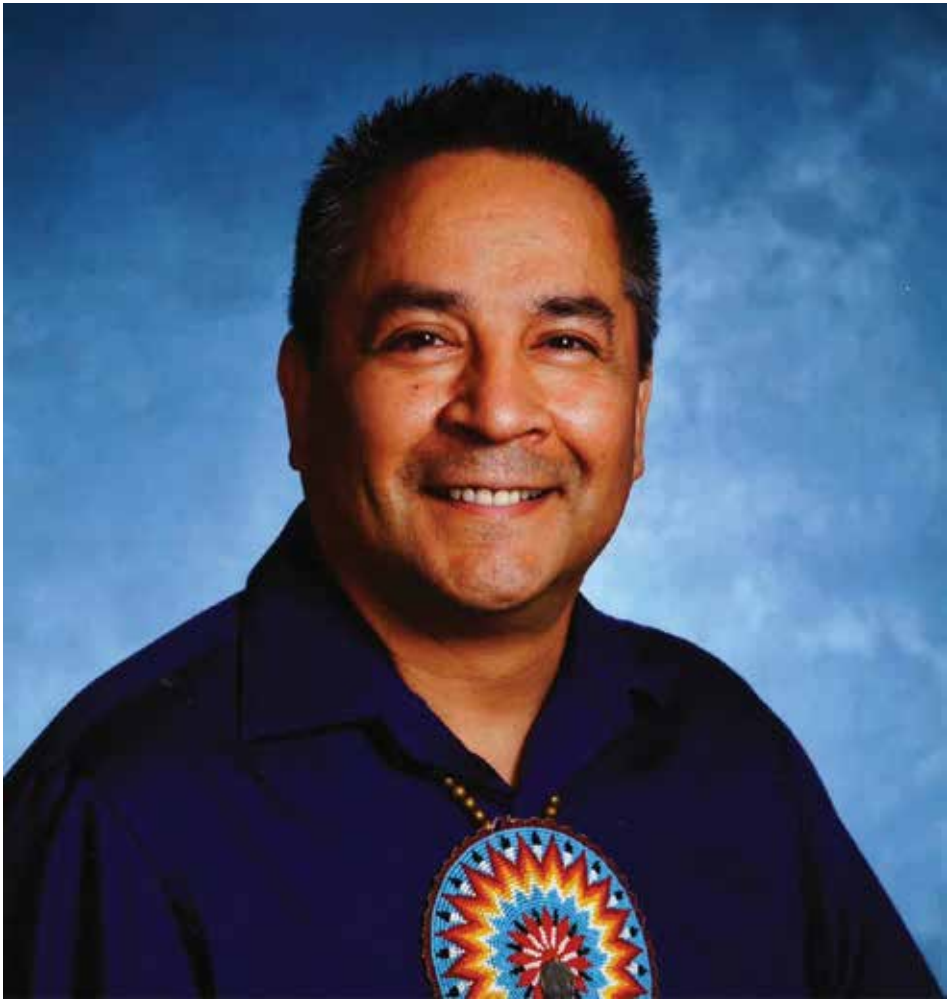
Chief Grizzly Bear sat in silence for a long time before he spoke. “Thank you brother for this news. I think it is important to work in collaboration with these newcomers. I know we can work together because we have already cooperated with many other clans throughout our history.”

Again, Chief Grizzly Bear sat thinking. “Regardless of what may come in the future, we must remain strong and never forget who we are. We have already seen many changes in our lifetimes. Our voice is critical in these changing times. Let’s all call the clans together once again. We must prepare for what lay ahead.”

And as the days moved onward, their dream became a reality. The newcomers arrived and had many lessons to learn about the people they would live side-by-side with. The changing times were filled with many challenges, but the clans remained focused on a clear path for those yet to be born. Good decisions were to come for a new world living in harmony.

Biography of
Garry Gottfriedson, B.Ed., M.A.Ed., LL.D.h.c., D.Litt.h.c.

Gottfriedson is rooted in his Secwepemc teachings. He holds a Masters of Education Degree from Simon Fraser University, achieved an Honorary Doctor of Laws from the University of Northern British Columbia (2023) and Honorary Doctor of Letters from Thompson Rivers University (2024). In 1987, he attended the Naropa Institute in Boulder, Colorado with an MFA Creative Writing Scholarship. There, he studied under Allen Ginsberg, Marianne Faithful and others. Gottfriedson has 13 published books. He has co-authored four books. These include: poetry, children's books, history and academic. He has presented his work across Canada, United States, Central and South America, New Zealand, Europe, and Asia. Gottfriedson's work unapologetically unveils the truth of Canada's treatment of First Nations. His work has been anthologized and published nationally and internationally.



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