

Salige'^{*}

Linnea Dick

Denial

Is the single piece of Hope I have left that you are still here and I am not alone. And then I remember something you taught me: everything happens for a reason.

Anger

Comes softly creeping and I want to scream, "Creator, how can you do this to me?" Until I find the courage to let go of blame and face the pain that's hiding within.

Bargaining

Instead of praying, asking why a light like you was taken instead of anyone else. And then I realize that someone as supernatural as you belongs with the ancestors.

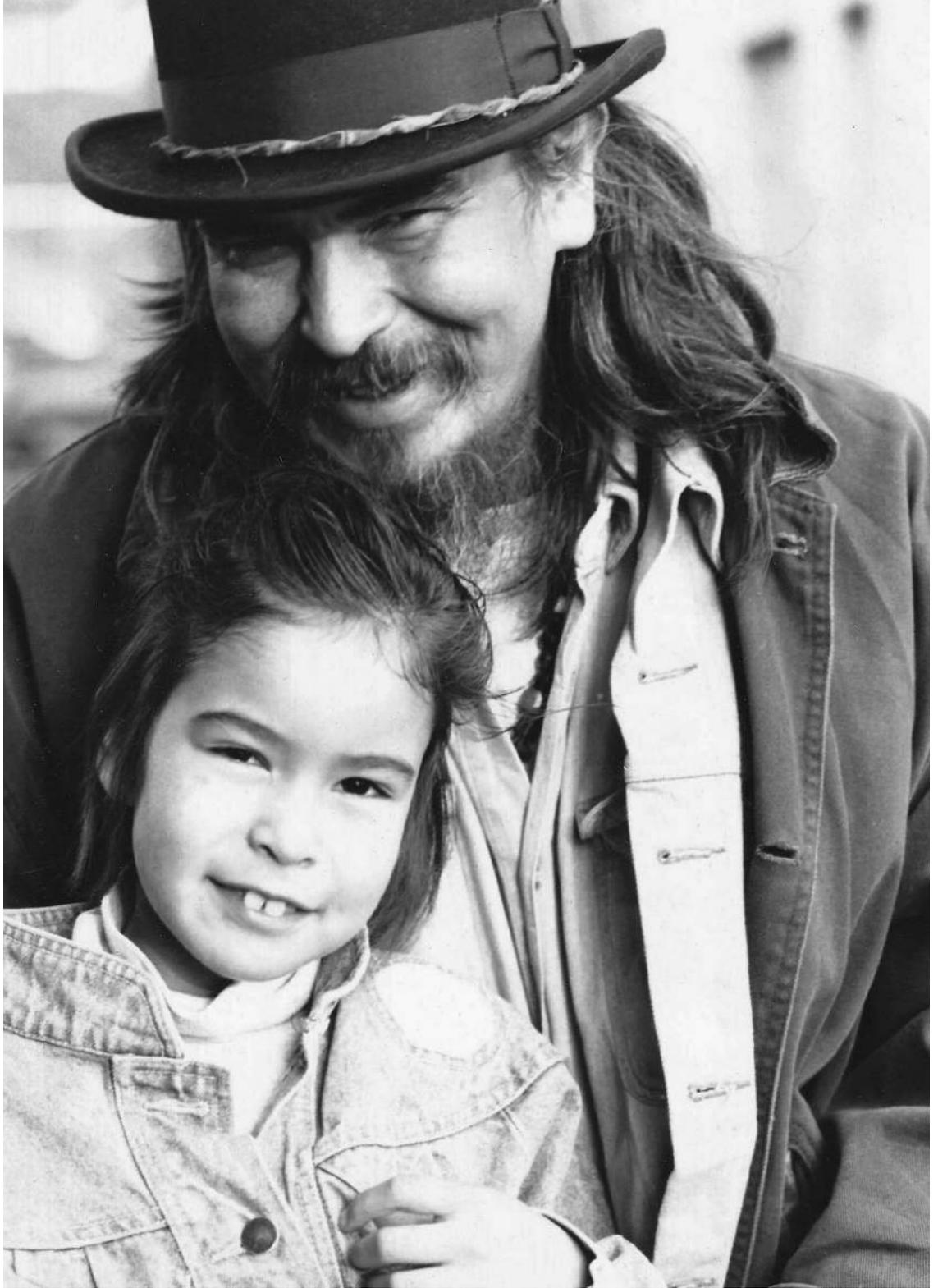
Depression

Comes quickly like the darkness in Winter and life doesn't feel worth living without you. But then I find the strength to shine even when the hurt is closing in around me.

Acceptance

Reminds me how heartbreakingly beautiful it is to have anyone to grieve at all. Because you filled the world with so much of you and that magic will last forever.

* Salige' is the Kwak'wala word for mourning.



Linnea Dick with Beau Dick.

“Everything happens for a reason” is a cliché that we may hear many times throughout our lives, but my dad had a special way of revealing this very truth to those around him. He had his own particular brand of charm that, like magic, would make you believe you could outshine any darkness. It was hard not to shine in his light, and I remember many dull moods that turned into vibrant moments filled with laughter in my childhood.

Depression is a darkness that I’ve struggled with for most of my life. It started as a child when I would experience night terrors. In my dreams I wasn’t myself, but someone else, running down dark corridors, trying to escape an unknown monster. Terror crept in every night when it was time to go to bed. I remember kicking and screaming and clawing at the walls and doors as my parents tried to carry me off to bed. Sometimes, when my mom went out for the evening, my dad would come and take me from my room, and we would stay up late watching movies until I was too tired to keep my eyes open. The mattress on the living room floor became a safe place where I could sleep soundly.

My dad was there throughout all of my life’s woes. His light helped guide me through depression, addictions, sexual abuse, heartbreak, and other moments when it felt like the world was caving in around me. When he was around, I always felt a profound sense of hope within me, despite it all. He shed what light he could to help heal the suffering of others, and the world truly felt so much brighter when he was around. This was his gift, and he used to say, “Gifts are meant to be shared.”

When he left us, the world he carried on his shoulders suddenly fell down on me, and I felt suffocated beneath the weight of it all. I couldn’t make sense of the pain, so I couldn’t embrace the love around me either. I resisted healing and let the depression creep in. *Who was going to help me out of this dark hole now?*

My dad used to share a Kwakwaka'wakw legend about a young man, Kwakwabalís, who has experienced so much pain in his life. He is a good, deserving man who is led to a supernatural world where he encounters death. "And then he realized how precious life is," my dad would say.

I was retelling the Kwakwabalís legend to a group of Indigenous youth when its message struck me: embrace all that life has to offer. I remember the feeling of grief fall from my body until all that was left was acceptance. I stood up a little straighter and tears welled up in my eyes. I was ready to embrace this gift my dad still had to teach me and to continue this journey with him.

I visited communities throughout Turtle Island, carrying the voice of my dad with me wherever I went. As I shared his teachings with those around me, I started to feel his presence again. I heard his voice encouraging me through each stage of grief, sharing the teachings he'd always shared with me as I was growing up. Eventually, I started to believe in his words again, and I realized that his loss, too, was a gift. *Everything happens for a reason.*

Loss is one of the most painful experiences we will face in life, and there were moments when I thought I would never overcome the grief of losing my dad. But today I think of all the ways he still lives on...even without the magic mattress on the living room floor. I'd like to leave you with something in the words of my dad: Regardless of how short it is—how tormented you are throughout it—your life is still a gift and yes, everything does happen for a reason.



Linnea Dick holding the family copper. Photograph by Sharon Eva Grainger.