

# This month's čičyε circle teaching



“November is usually the month that my mother-in-law does smoked fish; that’s her love. She loves to do smoked fish and barbeque fish by the fire. She smokes it in brine; it’s got that special touch to it.

We all help right from the start – washing it and brining it, hanging it the next day. Taking the bones out of the fish with tweezers - my mother-in-law used to use her teeth. My daughters help with washing and dumping the water. There’s always something to do around that time. Before you hang the fish, you soak your cedar sticks in water for a day or two so it’s not dry. And you gather green or brown ferns and use that wipe the fish down because they’re very slimy. The young ones just love to handle the fish; they think it’s out of this world. Gathering and piling the wood for the fire, usually alder. My mother-in-law keeps the cedar sticks you hang the fish with from year to year and just replaces them as needed. And the fire can’t be too hot, it has to be a certain temperature.

The hard work, it’s well worth it to have the young ones experience the kind of work you have to do. It gets the family together and passes the teachings down to them. It’s always nice to sit by the fire and watch the fish cook – and have a great lunch after. We have it with boiled potatoes, and bacon grease of course! You can’t have smoked fish without bacon grease. The fish itself is cut very thin for the smokehouse. The extra meat that’s there, they call it neckties. It’s the best snack! The female fish have eggs; we save that and use it when we make fish soup. That was always a staple for the older people.

She always says when you’re finished doing the fish, the guts and everything has to go down to the beach, right at the water line. We were always told you have to bring it back where it came from. There’s not too many smokehouses around now, but they have a big community one up at the hatchery.

I went fishing with my dad when I was younger. My oldest daughter was just starting to walk, and I had her up there too. That was quite the experience, something I’ll never forget. It’s nice to reminisce about those old days, and pass it on. Keep it alive.

I try to instill sharing in my grandkids whenever we do something, like picking berries. We always share with the Elders that can’t get out and do it for themselves. When we distribute, my grandkids bring it to the door and hand it over. It’s nice to see them carry that on. It’s always been that way, long ago. Fish, deer meat, clams – you always share what you have. It’s a good feeling.”



- Pauline Paul, čičyε Circle member