



Ernestine Marie Gensaw

November 9, 1930 - June 4, 2024

“There is no death. Only a change of worlds”

Chief Seattle

In loving memory of chu hu che/se' chay' s' ol' wet aka Ernestine Marie Lane Ballew-Gensaw. She is also known affectionately as:

Gravenstein/Smiley/Ernie and Teacher by many who had the opportunity to know and love her.

She was born on November 9, 1930, to Alfred Lane and Sadie Celestine Lane. She left this world on June 4, 2024, surrounded by her loving family. She was a proud member of the Lummi Nation. She is preceded in death by her husbands, Richard Ballew Sr. and William Gensaw, her daughters Claudia Spencer and Anna Ballew, her parents and siblings: Fran James, Bertha Lane, Ruth Boome, Glen Lane, Rena Ballew.

She is survived by Beverly Cagey, Wilma Olsen, Allie Scott, Charles Sanchez and her children: Richard Jr (Janet), Cathy, Timothy Sr. (Laural), Marie, Theresa, John (Cesarita) Paul Sr, Kathy Gensaw and Laurie Lucero and numerous grandchildren, great grandchildren and great great grandchildren.

She was born in Marietta until her family moved to Portage Island where she

grew up influenced by her grandmother, Elizabeth Adams also known as Grandma Lizzy. Her grandmother only spoke Lummi language and they went to catholic church once a year.

Ernestine always remembered and shared many stories of her life on Portage Island with her Grandma Lizzy. In early spring they would herd sheep into corrals and the workers would herd and shear the sheep. The wool was saved and used for making socks and sweaters, which were sold. Ernestine remembers how Grandma Lizzy would feed all the workers and paid them .25 cents – \$1.00, depending on how good of a job they did.

As children, they went to school every day by way of a small boat. She remembered that it didn't matter if it was sunny, rainy, windy or cold. They attended Lummi Day School that was located on the Lummi Campus of Northwest Indian College.

Ernestine was 12 years old when she left for Chemawa Indian School in Salem Oregon with many of her cousins from Lummi.

She married Richard J. Ballew on November 9, 1949, and they raised nine children. They lived at the fishing village on the Nooksack River. They eventually moved their family to Gooseberry Point. To help support her family she learned how to weave cedar and wool from her aunts, Bertha Smith and Edith Jones. Edith operated an arts and crafts shop in Lummi, and she made items to sell. This was her beginning of becoming an entrepreneur and sharing of her knowledge for the art of cedar basket weaving.

She was teachers aid at Mountain View Elementary School and then worked as a preschool teacher for Lummi Headstart. She worked over 20 years as a preschool teacher and retired in 1992. She married her second husband, Willie Gensaw, who was her high school friend. Together they would harvest

cedar for basket and hat weaving. They would travel throughout Washington and Oregon to sell their beautiful cedar baskets, hats, and dolls. Ernestine loved to travel and meet new people. Many vendors who worked alongside her would share stories of Ernestine's special "something." She had a knack for finding anything from a rock, stick or shells she would find on the beaches and turn around to sell these with a "special story" to go along with the items. Her family would laugh with her to hear what she sold and what story she gave to the person who bought her special "somethings." We believe the people who bought her special prized "somethings" just enjoyed hearing her stories that went along with their purchase.

Ernestine was a devout catholic member of Saint Joachim church in Lummi. She participated in the annual Tekawitha conference as often as she was able to attend. She also made sure her all her children were baptized and received their holy sacraments. It was her faith in God that kept her strong and solid throughout her long lifetime.

Her work with cedar was more than a craft, it was an art of knowledge and tradition shared amongst the Pacific Northwest tribes. She believed the spirit she weaved into her work was significant and that a person must have a good mind because your thoughts go into your work and people can feel them, these were her beliefs. She would meditate and pray over her work. As a vendor, she traveled on many tribal journeys, pow wows, elder and community events throughout Washington and Oregon to sell her crafts. She was well known for her craft of weaving and was featured in Indian Country Today.

At 93 years of age one can only imagine the many different times and changes over the decades of her lifetime. She lived during a time of no electricity and running water, when tribes were still trying to develop themselves to where we find ourselves today. So many life changes and

throughout this Ernestine has kept a strong faith and never waived with her love for her family. She is remembered with her beautiful smile and cheerful sense of humor. She loved hard and strong.

Memories from Cathy aka Scalawag:

Celebrating our mother Gravenstein's life. She was a women/teacher/artist/wife/friend/mother, with a busy streak, always moving fast and doing almost anything and everything. Our mother was born at home in Marietta, her most loved memories were growing up on Portage. She often talked about the plants on the island, it was rich with fruit orchards and shellfish. She planted a lilac bush outside the front door of their shack on portage, that is still there today.

She worked for LITE, as the project mainstream office. She moved on to the Ferndale school district as teachers aid, however when Lummi opened the HeadStart she immediately applied for a teacher's position, working with Madelyn Jefferson, Shirley Bob, sister Rena Ballew and Grandma Sadie Jones. She retired as teacher and became a full-time artist and vendor, selling sometimes the most bizarre items, like rusty medal pieces she found on the beach, a stick, she called magic, that Henry ended up purchasing, she said, I am going to tell stories about each item on my table and will make it interesting enough for people that they will have to buy. She would go out fishing with our dad Richard Ballew Sr. and get in the way.

She stayed busy, harvesting cedar, wild onions, hucmain and preserving our foods, fruit, jams, smoked salmon, sockeye. She loved to play bingo and slot machines at the casino.

At times I never understood her humor, some of her stories never made sense or did I just not understand the punch line?

Mom married Dad at the age of 19 years old. She wrote wedding invitations on brown paper bags, they invited everyone on the reservation. No wedding plans, just show up, people came with musical instruments, food and wedding cake, they celebrated at the Balch family estate in the orchard. They had nine children, we all had nicknames, life was fun living in Marietta, the River and Gooseberry Point, very simple, the waters, beaches, riverbank or mud puddle was pretty much our playground.

Memories from Theresa:

Momma was always silly, telling jokes. She taught us— good memories. The sniffing in my neck to make be happy! I love you, Momma! The love you had for my Tesia, Elora and son son we will remember always and forever.

Tribute Wall

DM

“ *Heartfelt condolences for the family's loss of their loved one.*

Debbi Mele Mai - June 10, 2024 at 12:00 AM

DE

“ *Wow, what a loss of a beautiful lady with so much history! My condolences to the family and the Lummi Tribe. Rest in Peace Ernestine.*

Deena - June 10, 2024 at 12:00 AM