



Krista White is a Community Support Worker and Media Relations spokesperson for the Aboriginal Friendship Centre of Calgary. She is a fluent Blackfoot speaker, Siksika member and is responsible for implementing programming for Calgary's Indigenous community.



Originally from Ontario, Tara Klager and her family now raise fibre sheep and alpacas on a small corner of Rocky View County, Alberta, hard against the eastern edge of the Rocky Mountains. Surrounded by beauty and connected to nature, Klager's goal is to build a farm where value is measured in friendships.



Alanna Manybears was born in Calgary and is from the Siksika Nation. As a Community Outreach/Cultural Reconnection lead with the Aboriginal Friendship Centre of Calgary for the past three years, Manybears has been instrumental in supporting the most vulnerable members of the Indigenous population in the city.





friendship has no boundaries

**TARA KLAGER WITH ALANNA MANYBEARS AND KRISTA WHITE
PROVIDENCE LANE HOMESTEAD
WATER VALLEY, ALBERTA, CANADA
WRITTEN BY TARA KLAGER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MORGAN STORCH**

WOMEN CAN COME TOGETHER TO SHARE A SENSE OF COMMUNITY AND OPENNESS UNDER THE MOST UNIQUE CIRCUMSTANCES. DISCOVER HOW A PRAIRIE PLANT, KNOWN BY THE BLACKFOOT NATION AS “KAKSAMEEA”, BROUGHT THREE WOMEN TOGETHER TO FIND THEIR COMMON GROUND.

I look over at Alanna Manybears. “Now,” I say with a cheeky grin, “be honest. What did you REALLY think when I called you? Eh? Did you think, ‘O great, another white woman? Did you? I bet you did!’”

I’m laughing at her now, poking her gently as she flaps her hands in front of her, “NO!” she giggles. “No, not at all!” Her sister, Krista White, is standing under the trees, surrounded by browsing and drowsing sheep. “Of course not! We wouldn’t say that,” Krista says. Her ribbon skirt is long and trails on the grass just above her rubber boots. “Talking to the community, that’s our job!”

Both Krista and Alanna are from Siksika, part of the Blackfoot Confederacy, one of the nations who signed Treaty 7 on September 22, 1877, along with the Stoney Nakoda, Kainai, Piikani and Tsuu T’ina. They both work for the Calgary Aboriginal Friendship Centre, reaching out to Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike, building community with encouragement and hope.

Three years ago, I picked up my phone and called the centre about some mystery plants that were slowly taking over my front flower bed. Tall, a little spindly and silver-grey, my wildflower and native plant group on Facebook had identified it as Prairie Sage, a common variety, ubiquitous in my part of Alberta.

Not rare. Not unique. As common as mosquitoes on a summer night.

But very special. Let me tell you why...

Prairie Sage – *Artemisia ludoviciana*. Also known as pasture sage. Krista and Alanna know it by its Blackfoot name, “kaksameea.” It’s an important plant in Blackfoot culture and ceremony. I am not Indigenous and have very little knowledge of the ceremonial practices of any Indigenous group. For most of my life, Indigenous people were a mystery, a gap in my understanding. Like so many Canadians, I wanted to find a way past the barriers, to build connections, to do better. To be part of something I knew was important, but also understood, wasn’t mine.

Prairie Sage was my way through. Kaksameea became my passport.

Providence Lane Homestead, an hour north-west of Calgary on Siksika traditional territory, was always meant to be a place of gathering, of community, of respite and retreat. A place of connection – of reconnection – with each other and with nature. For settlers like us, finding ways to engage with people outside of our own community has been a priority, but that initial reaching out doesn’t always come easily. It has to develop, to find its own cranny of richness to flourish and grow in.

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@providencelanehomestead



My call to the Friendship Centre connected me with Alanna, and that first visit (Alanna came with Krista to harvest Kaksameea and offer tobacco) has turned into texts and emails, zoom meetings, planned outings with other CAFC guests, elder teaching talks and, in 2019, a chance to share Blackfoot culture as part of the homestead's participation in the province's Open Farm Days. People young and old, Indigenous and not (mostly not), stood in the heat of an August day as Krista danced in her regalia. They listened attentively as elder, Bryan Little Chief, told of the five rivers of Turtle Island, the ribbons on his shirt twisting in the breeze.

Krista's face is as smooth as an acorn. Looking at her, you wouldn't guess that her 54th birthday is approaching at the end of the year. Her hair seems virtually untouched by grey, where mine is more grey than anything else. In her hands, her perfectly-painted nails a bright orange, she holds an eagle feather, the shaft wrapped in beads. "This was our late father's," she says gently. "We believe it is a great honour to be presented with a feather. We hold the eagle in high respect." I can tell by the way she cradles the feather between her hands that this is a touchstone to people and places long

gone. "We know that when we pray with sage, our prayers go up with the smoke. The eagle takes them on his back and carries them to the Creator."

Sitting by the firepit or walking on the land, we talk about so many things. We talk about the usual stuff – COVID, moving house, trying to make sure children get enough sleep and how we should be eating better. I talk about menopause – the newest hitch on my horizon – and Alanna tells me about plants that can help to alleviate some of my discomforts. We talk and laugh about my absolutely foul – if sincere – pronunciation of Blackfoot words. I am reasonably comfortable telling someone my name, but it all goes south after that. "Not to worry," Krista encourages me. "You just have to practice. Um, maybe a lot," her eyes are twinkling with mischief. No matter how serious a conversation may be – and we've had a number of serious conversations – there's a particular kind of humour that Alanna and Krista lob in my direction. It's subtle-but-pointed, sneaks up on you and then dances away laughing. I am frequently caught out by it, disarmed and rueful for having fallen for it again. We talk and we laugh and we eat and wave our hands in the air as we go.

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A woman with long dark hair, wearing a traditional Indigenous garment with a dark blue and white patterned collar and a black shawl, is shown in profile from the chest up. She is playing a wooden flute. The background is a dense forest of thin trees with green foliage. In the lower-left corner, a portion of another person wearing a blue denim jacket and a black bag is visible. The overall lighting is soft and natural, suggesting a daytime setting in a wooded area.

“RECONCILIATION IS.... IT’S A CHANCE TO SHARE MY CULTURE. IT’S BEING INVITED, FEELING WELCOMED. IT CAN BE ANYTHING - IT ISN’T COMPLICATED... I CAN COME HERE AND I FEEL LIKE I’M BEING LISTENED TO. MY CULTURE IS BEING APPRECIATED, IT’S EQUAL.”

- Alanna



I ask Alanna, “What is reconciliation? What does it look like?” Alanna draws herself in, concentrating. “Reconciliation is... it’s a chance to share my culture,” she says. “It’s being invited, feeling welcomed. It can be anything - it isn’t complicated... I can come here and I feel like I’m being listened to. My culture is being appreciated, it’s equal.”

“I’m respected, really. That’s what it is. That’s reconciliation.”

Overhead, an eagle screams in the clouds. Krista’s head snaps up and she waves her father’s feather toward the sky. “Someone is here!” she says, a radiant smile lighting up her face. “Someone likes what we’re doing.” She thinks for a moment, “It’s probably the grandparents.”

I think so too. And I smile back at her. 

PHOTOGRAPHER MORGAN STORCH OF RANAHA PHOTO

Morgan Storch is known to have an old gypsy soul and is always up for spur of the moment trips and road trips. Growing up ranching is where her passion for photography stemmed from. Storch loves capturing walks of life that are misunderstood and under-romanticized for the beauty they hold. Follow along on IG @ranahanphoto.

