

PRIDE: AN INDIGENOUS STORY ABOUT HAIR

Dorothy Stirling

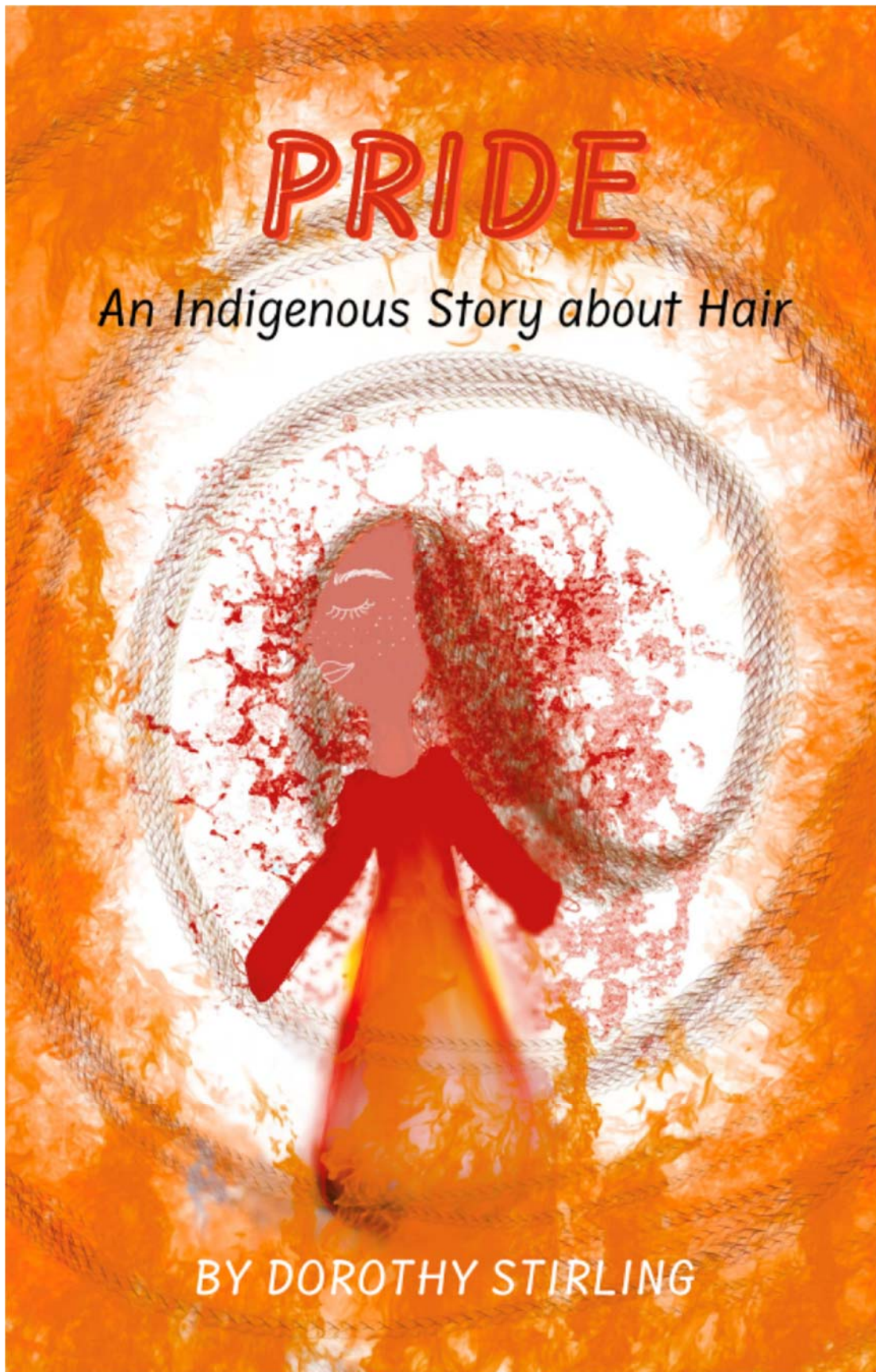


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Acknowledgement: We raise our hands in deepest respect and gratitude to the ancestors and families of the *ləkʷəŋən* and *WSÁNEĆ* nations and to our own ancestors and Nations. We raise our hands to all Indigenous children and youth who have grown up in colonial systems, to those we have lost, and to those who survive, resist, and imagine justice and resurgence. INVINCIBLE is grateful for funding provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (Insight grant 435-2020-1191) and the Canet Foundation.

Dorothy Stirling is an Indigenous youth in care and an INVINCIBLE youth storyteller/researcher who has been working with the Kinship Rising research project at the University of Victoria since 2021.

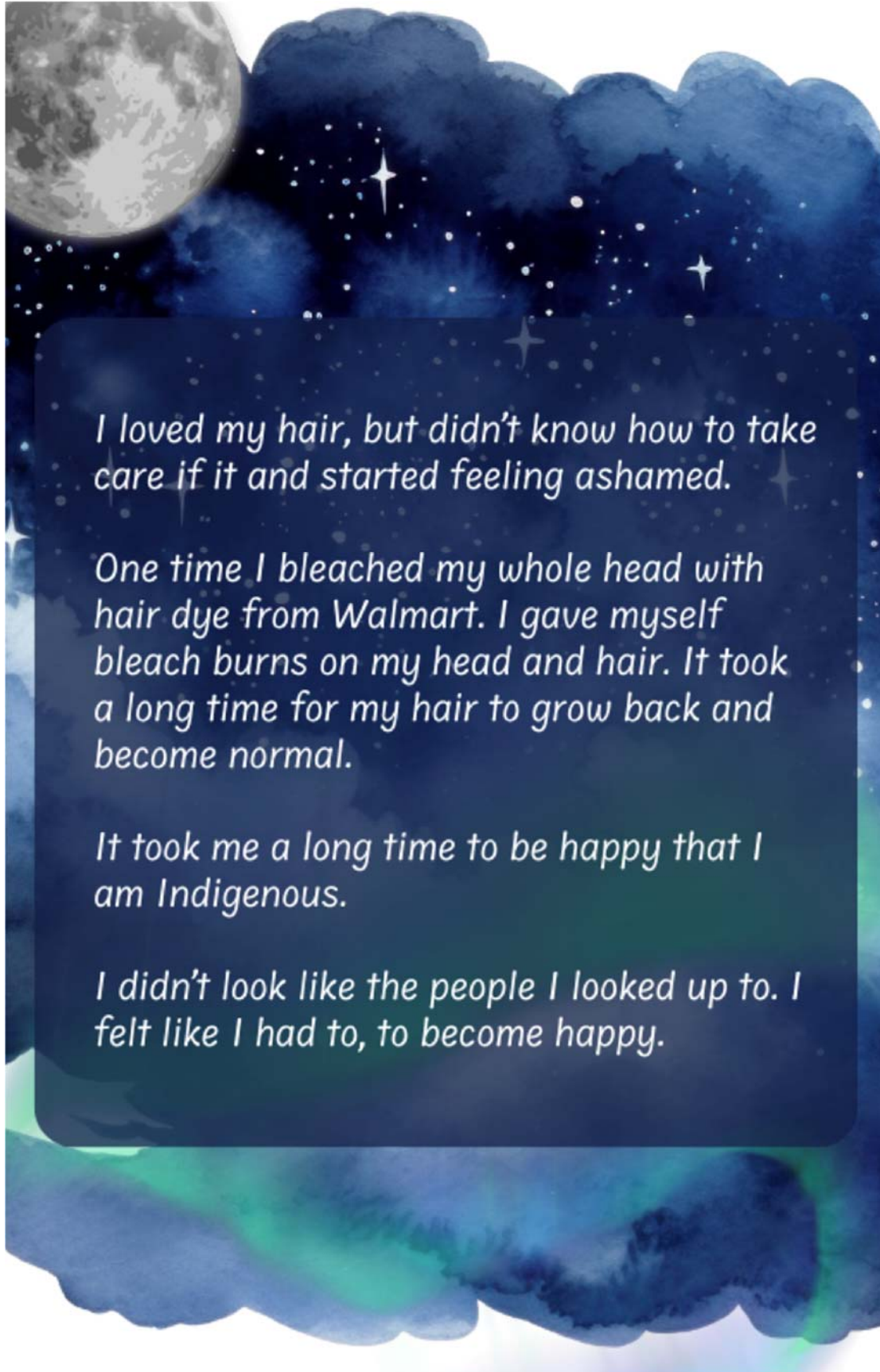
Please contact the Kinship Rising project: kinshiprising@uvic.ca



What My Hair Meant to Me Growing Up

When I was young, I grew my hair long. It was very thick, got all knotted, and would need to get cut short. It would look super puffy like a dandelion! I grew my hair to my waist many times because I knew many could not have long hair, and it was one of the only things I knew about my culture.





I loved my hair, but didn't know how to take care of it and started feeling ashamed.

One time I bleached my whole head with hair dye from Walmart. I gave myself bleach burns on my head and hair. It took a long time for my hair to grow back and become normal.

It took me a long time to be happy that I am Indigenous.

I didn't look like the people I looked up to. I felt like I had to, to become happy.

Finding Out I'm Indigenous

I'm registered with the Upper Nicola band, where my father is from. I found out I was Indigenous in middle school.

Someone from my school contacted VNFC (Victoria Native Friendship Center) and told them I was Indigenous. I got an Indigenous support worker. They explained I was Indigenous and I didn't even know what that meant. I thought my dad was Mexican growing up, and thought my nation was from a part of Mexico. It took me a while to understand what being Indigenous meant. I was 14.

Then I did my own research when I was 18 and aging out of care. I found out that I had a whole family in Merritt. I met my dad, and he came to my grad. It was good and I got to talk to him about my culture.



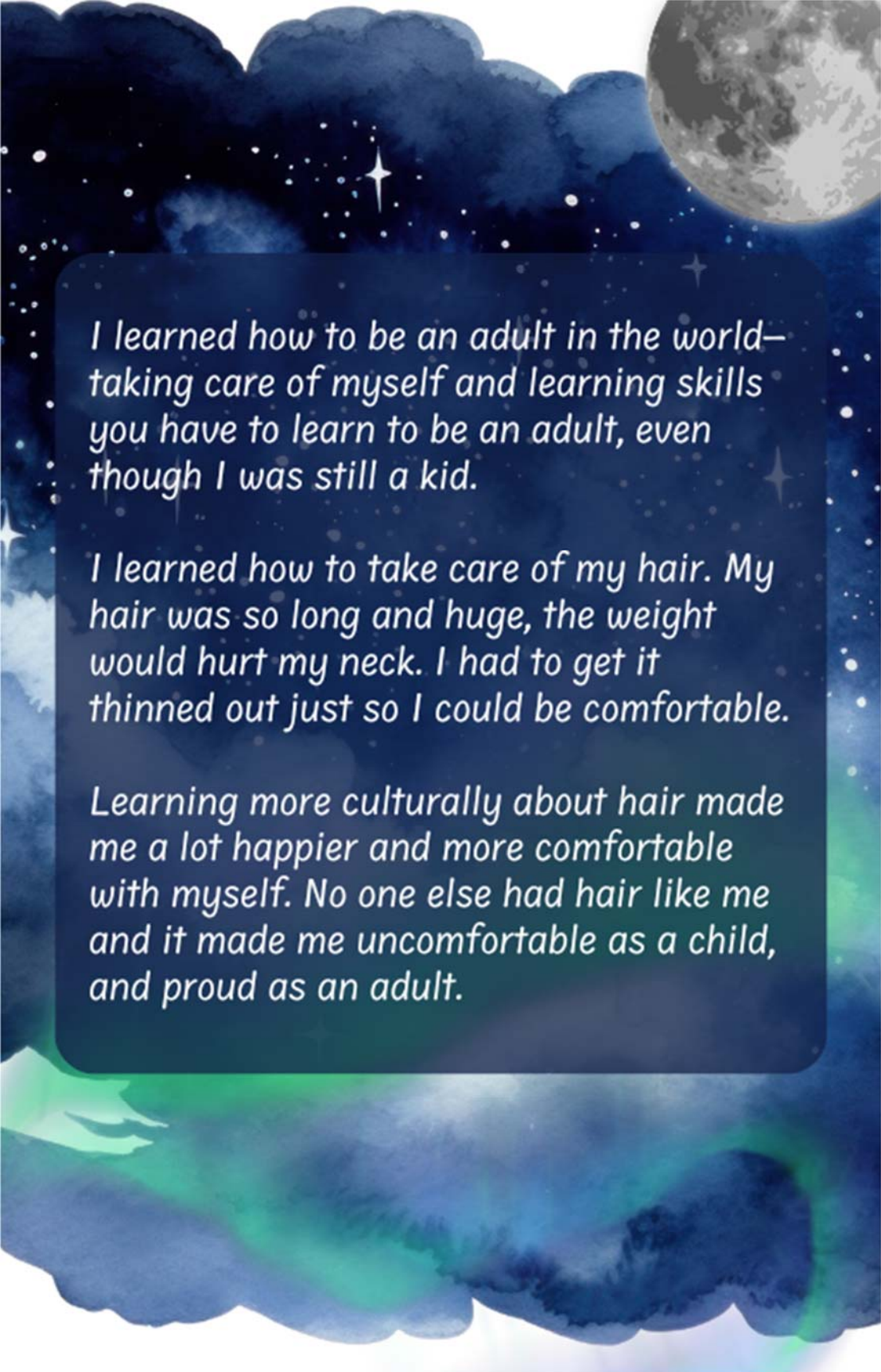


Going into Care

I went into care on a youth agreement at age 16 and lived with my friend's family at 18.

Growing up with VNFC, they taught me about drumming, Indigenous identities, walking through life and being able to be proud to be Indigenous.

Once I got into the care system, I was scared, to say the least. I was 16 and had never even been downtown before, or even taken a bus.



I learned how to be an adult in the world—taking care of myself and learning skills you have to learn to be an adult, even though I was still a kid.

I learned how to take care of my hair. My hair was so long and huge, the weight would hurt my neck. I had to get it thinned out just so I could be comfortable.

Learning more culturally about hair made me a lot happier and more comfortable with myself. No one else had hair like me and it made me uncomfortable as a child, and proud as an adult.

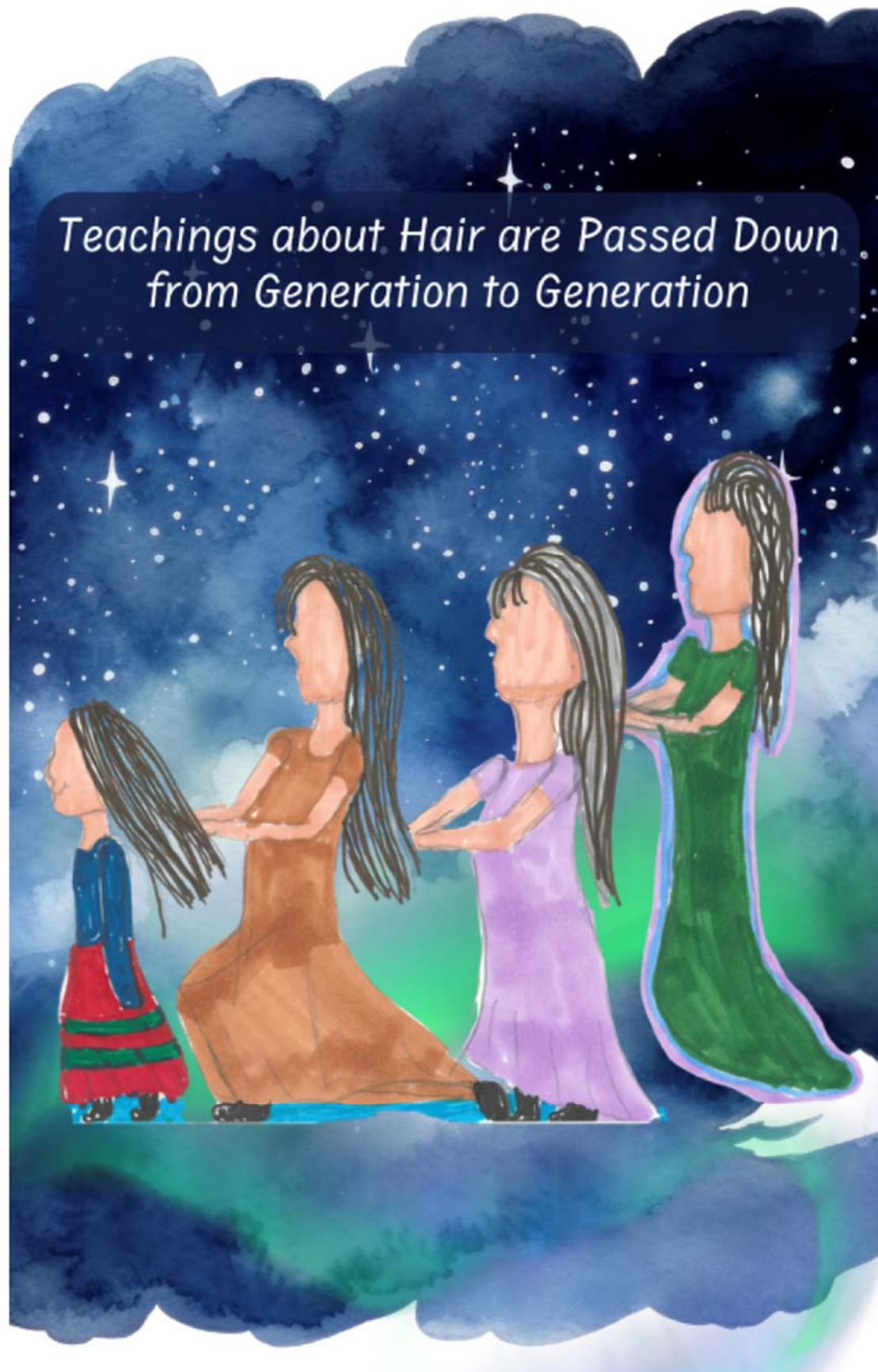
Celebrating Hair, My Cultural Identity, and Pride

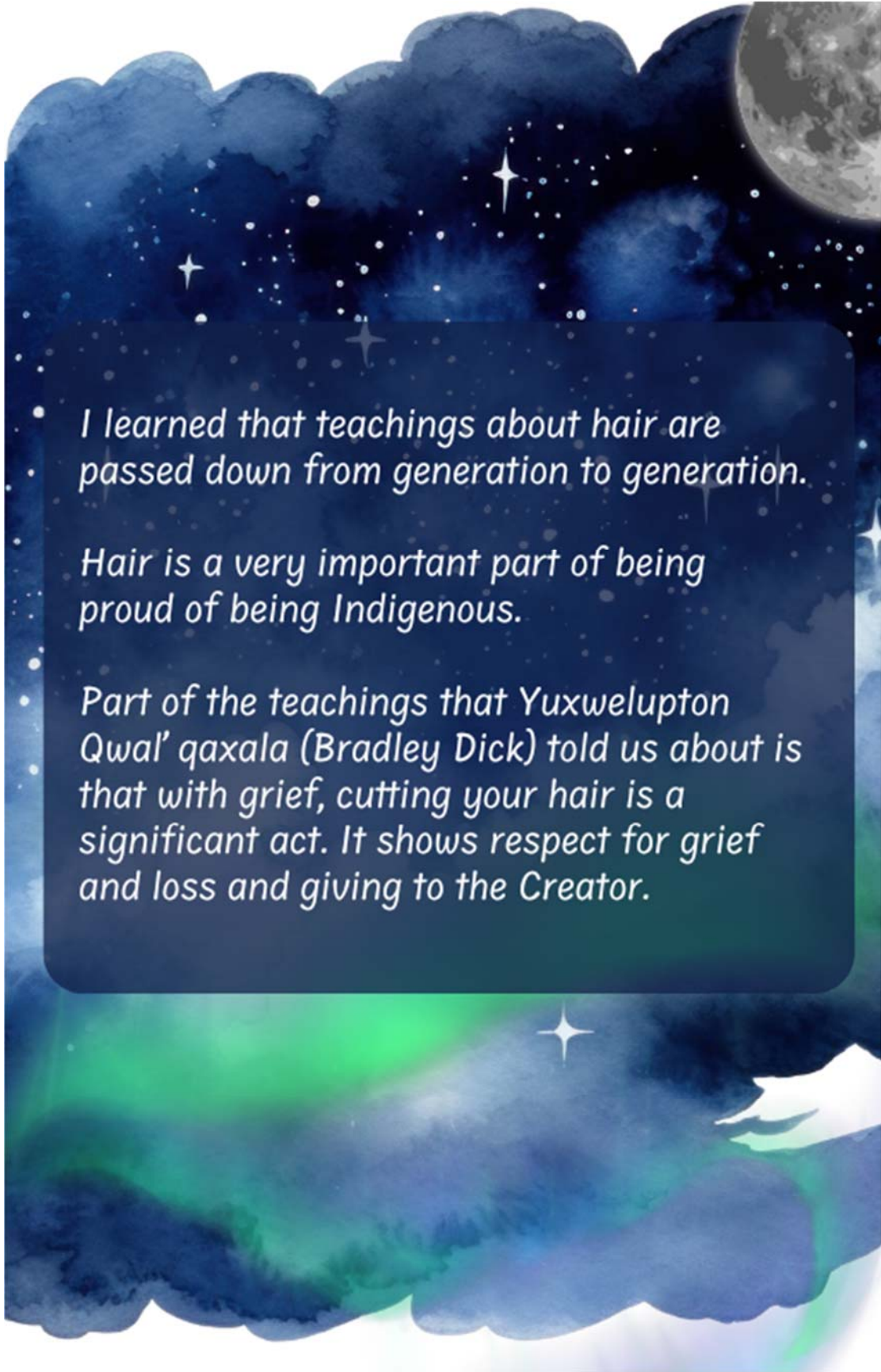


Now I love my hair! It's long and thick and curly and I can be very proud of it. I get compliments about it.

When I think about my Indigenous identity, I think of my hair. It is something I hated for so long and I related it to being Indigenous.

Reclaiming my identity means having an understanding culturally of what hair means, and how it's a part of who I am as an Indigenous person.

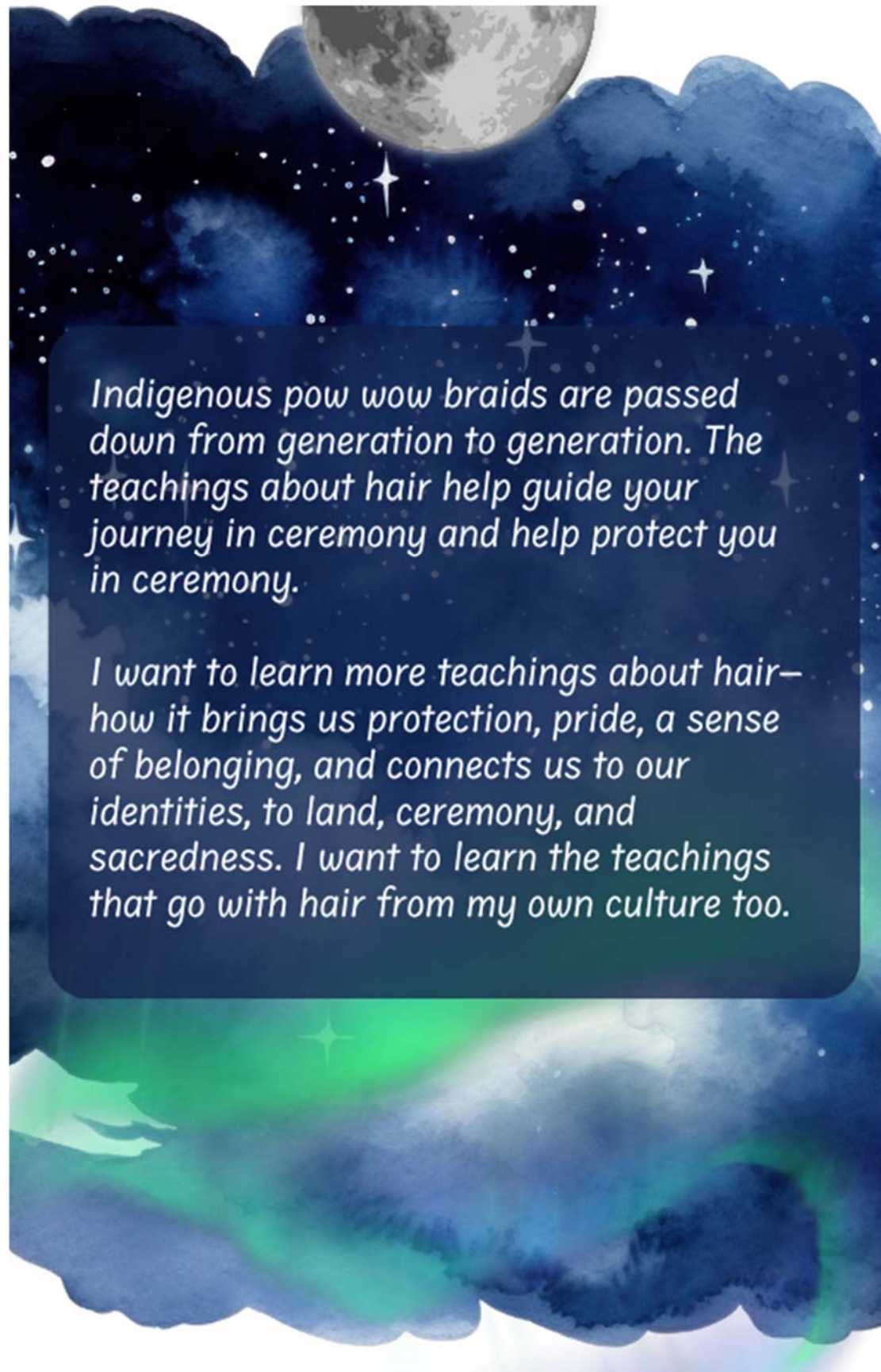




I learned that teachings about hair are passed down from generation to generation.

Hair is a very important part of being proud of being Indigenous.

Part of the teachings that Yuxwelupton Qwal' qaxala (Bradley Dick) told us about is that with grief, cutting your hair is a significant act. It shows respect for grief and loss and giving to the Creator.



Indigenous pow wow braids are passed down from generation to generation. The teachings about hair help guide your journey in ceremony and help protect you in ceremony.

I want to learn more teachings about hair—how it brings us protection, pride, a sense of belonging, and connects us to our identities, to land, ceremony, and sacredness. I want to learn the teachings that go with hair from my own culture too.



To Other Children in Care:

I would like to share that hair is a part of you. It's not something you have to hate or cut. It's ok to love it and be proud!

You don't have to follow other people's standards that they want to impose on you. Having braids and long hair is something that a lot of people are proud of. Children in care may not have the teachings about it, but I want to say:

Wear your hair proudly!

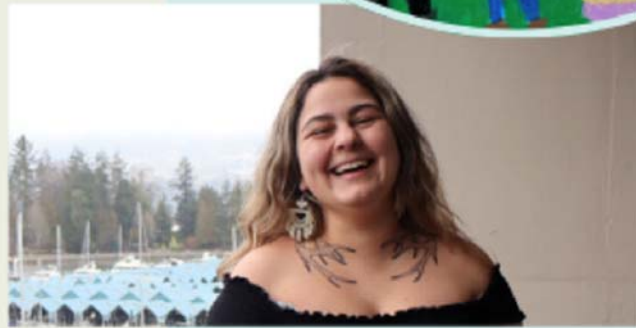
You're allowed to be proud to be Indigenous. It doesn't matter if you don't know your own Indigenous culture, it is still your right to be Indigenous!



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Life plan:
Working to be an Indigenous
artist and tattoo artist

Likes:
I like to write and illustrate



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