

## **The Emergence of Thunderbirds From a Nootka Basket World**

By Selene Hofstetter

For the beginning nine years of my life, our lidded Nootka basket - passed from grandfather to granddaughter, mother to son - has lived in the sky, beneath our roof, on a shelf.

“Inside resides the miracles of the world.” My mother would whisper in my ear each night, hugging me from behind, my back against her legs. “It holds the stories and myths our people have now forgotten. Songs, culture, language, tradition all reside within this small basket.” Her voice never lifted above a whisper, to not disturb the the basket’s frozen peace. “Never remove the lid. It will disturb the rest of the world. Man is not ready for our nativeness. Neither is our people.”

For the beginning nine years of my life, I have watched two chestnut-colored figures reside in canoes in this mini-basket world. Floating along an everflowing berry-stained river - the wings of a red bird flew around in a perpetual circle, joining the figures in this continual journey.

They went nowhere except forward, always beginning backward beneath a sealed, tight sun sitting above this plain basket world. My eyes gazed at the stained designs of this world - waiting for a ripple to run across the surface and disturb the motionless red river encircling the maroon sun. Waiting for river droplets to spill from the edges, onto the wood of the shelf, leaving a watermark behind as evidence of brimming life. Waiting for the red bird to break free from the constraining weaves of grass and willow bark - to suddenly emerge from their world and into ours, its great wings beating against the stale air of our living room, begging to be released from another lid and into the great sky. Waiting for the faceless figures to rest their canoe against the side of our couch and take their first step onto land - to share stories of their infinite journey where the sun stood still in the sky, and the ocean was too wide for land to coexist - I waited for the day when they would be released from this dormant world.

From the floor, to a chair, to the shelf’s edge, I grabbed the world with two hands and lifted it from its resting place. I lifted the sun from the sky, and from the abyss came forth the coyotes and thunderbirds - the skinwalkers and wendigos - the bears and deers - the spirits and Creator. I released wonders of the world man had forgotten. With a shrilling cry and heavy beat of its wings, the thunderbird rose beyond the roof, into the great sky, thunder rumbling in its presence as the skinwalkers shaped shifted into creatures and men, the bears and deers and coyotes left

for forest edges, and the Creator looked towards the shifting sun - returning the spiritual back into nature.