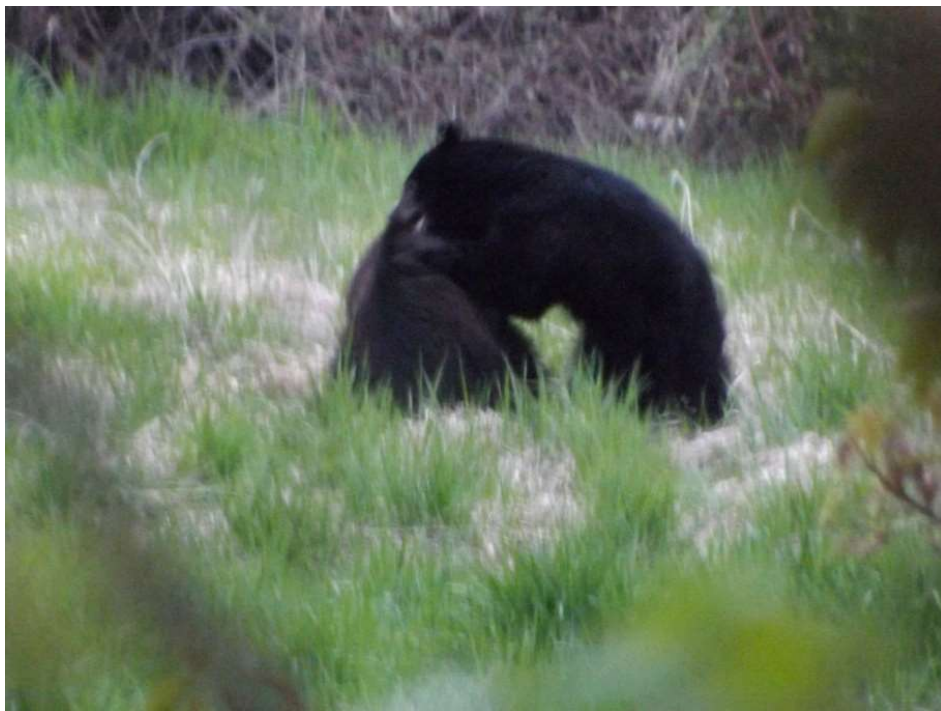


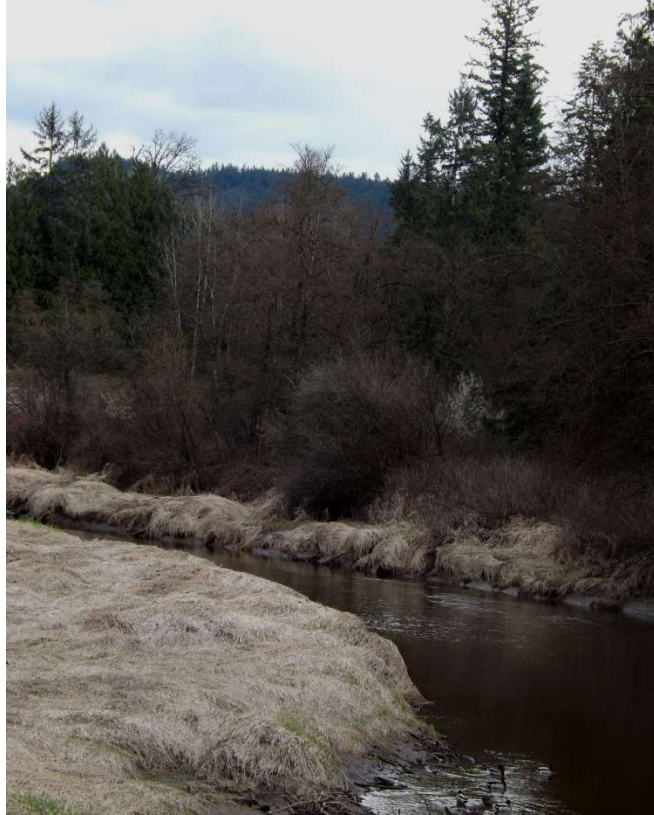
# *Honey Bear*

The bright and sunny mid winter afternoon was in stark contrast to the almost total darkness of the den, where on this day three lives would come into the world; tiny, almost blind and totally helpless. The mother bear licked the newborn cubs as they wriggled about in the den, located in the hollow of an old wind thrown cedar tree that faced fortunately to the south, to capture the feeble warmth that came on occasion. In the relative warmth of the den, one of the cubs eventually located one of the mother bear's teats, and began to suckle contently, and his siblings soon followed suit.

The seeds for this unforgettable winter day had been planted some time ago, during the previous summer, when a large, experienced male known as Dufus had successfully pursued the mother bear and initiated a week long courtship along the banks of Kanaka Creek.



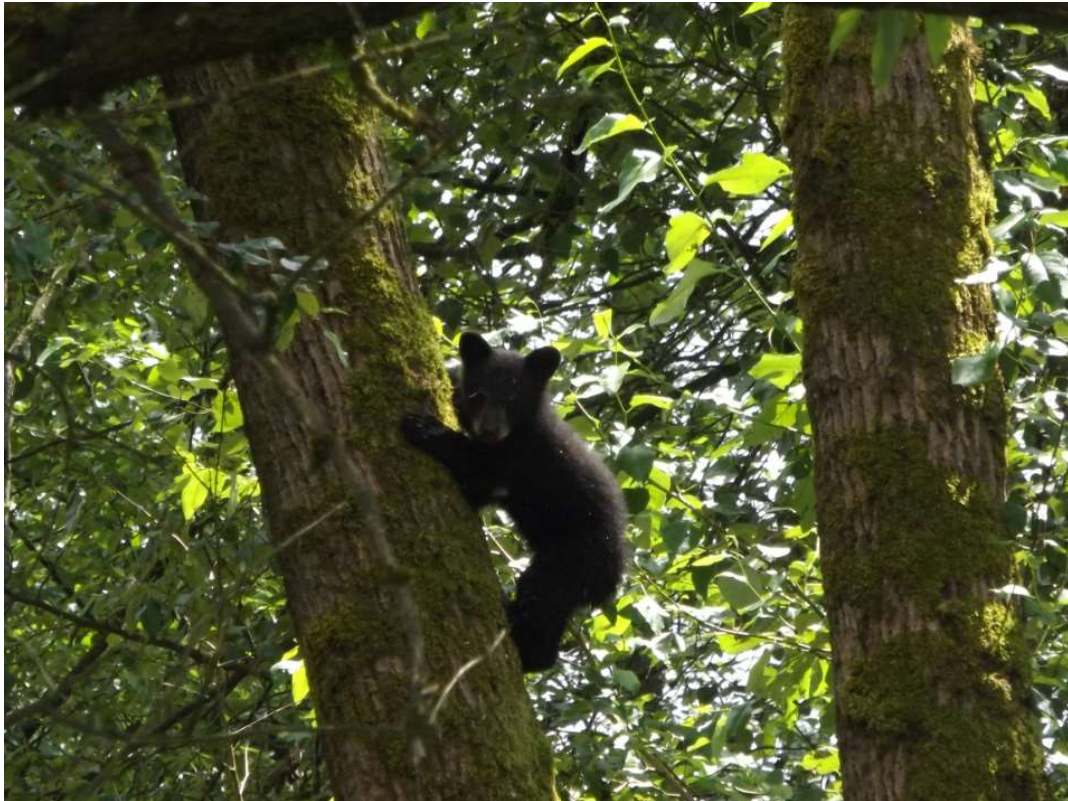
The cubs continued to suckle and snuggle together in the den, and the mother bear cared for them and even ate their feces as the long winter dragged on. Eventually though, spring arrived and the increasing daylight hours roused the bears from their den, and the cubs stared in wonder at their new world.



The mother bear was very experienced; in fact, she had previously raised several litters of cubs. Consequently, the cub's inquisitive nature came as no surprise to her. She allowed this, albeit within reason, as she weighed her knowledge of the potential dangers with her realization that her cubs would gain valuable life skills via their playful investigations of their surroundings.



One of the cubs, named Filbert, was always the first to venture out and explore new areas, or to climb the tallest tree.



For the cubs, life was as enjoyable as any life could be. Food was plentiful, as the bears gorged themselves on the grasses and emerging berries that the mother bear's considerable experience led the family to. The days were becoming longer and warmer as summer approached. Even the mosquitoes could easily be quelled by a pleasing swim in Kanaka Creek.





The mother bear was always vigilant, and this served the family well one hot afternoon as the summer solstice arrived. The little family had been playing in the shade when the mother bear suddenly froze, and trained her keen vision towards a scent she had detected.



She gazed up the hill, towards where the scent was originating from – and looked directly at Dufus, who was returning her stare.

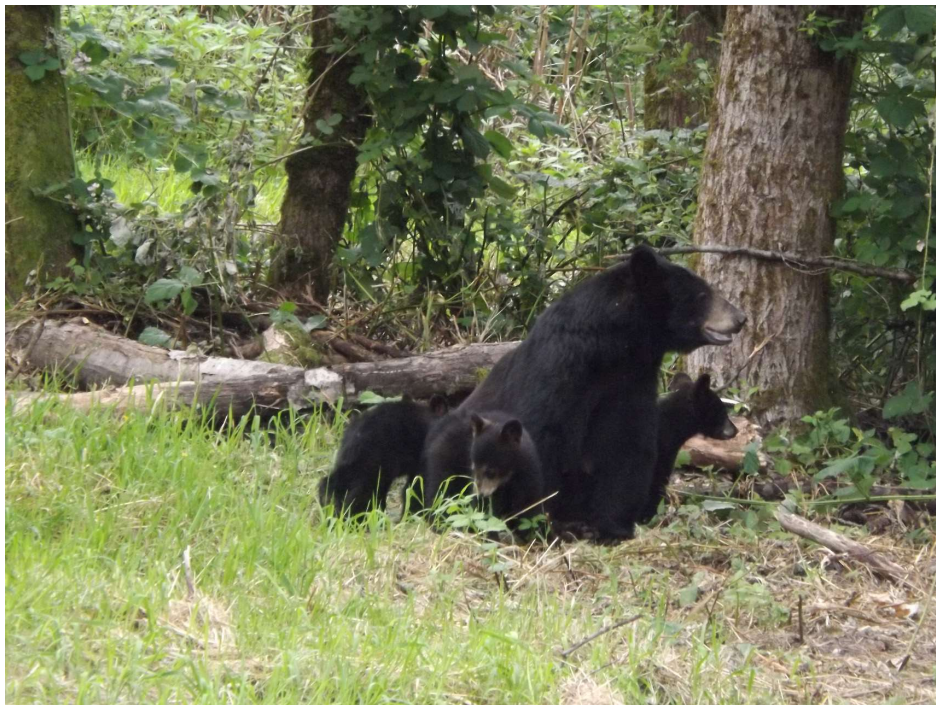


The days of courtship that had led to her three cubs were long forgotten. Dufus, as a dominant male, was to her a danger to those very cubs. The two of them remained for several moments with their eyes locked on one another. In the end though, it was Dufus that turned away. He had no reason to fight. The mother bear had plenty of reason. And so Dufus, he who had so recently driven away a rival dominant male along with many others in the past, deferred to the mother bear, and retreated to the relative coolness of Kanaka Creek as he panted in the early summer heat.





The days that followed brought that familiar pattern of summer days, where the family would feed, play, and then nap in the shade, and then commence the whole routine over again.



The cubs enjoyed a carefree and relaxing lifestyle, since they had little to fear. The mother bear was dominant as females go, and the several other bears in the area always deferred to her. Although she was a loving, devoted parent, she demanded instant obedience from her cubs. Like all bears, she communicated primarily through body language and facial expressions, and the cubs were quick to obey.





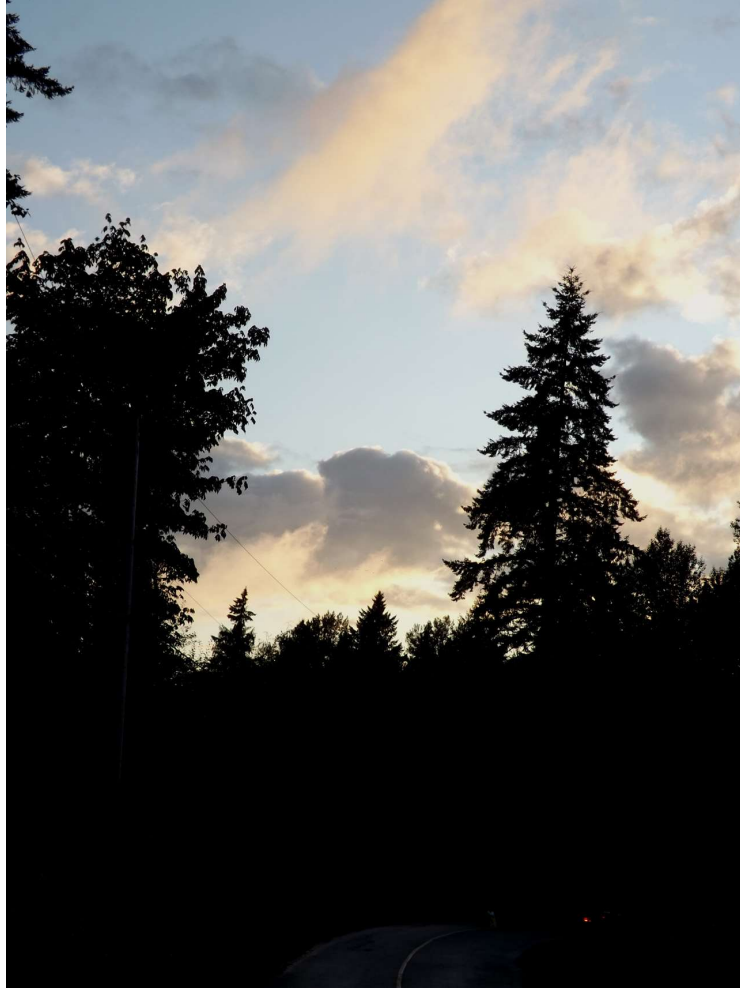
And then there came the evening when disaster struck. The bears were crossing a country road when a loud noise came from behind. The mother bear instinctively instructed her cubs off the road, but as she turned to leave she was struck with stunning force. She was sent tumbling into the tall grasses at the roadside. Her adrenalin masked the pain as she looked frantically for her cubs, but they had fortunately hidden in the foliage. She collected herself and limped to gather them.

Morning brought an uncomfortable stiffness and pain, and the little family remained in the hollow of a large fir tree through much of that day. The cubs could readily sense their mother's discomfort, and the usual wrestling and chasing games were decidedly subdued. The four of them snuggled together and slept through much of that day. However, the pangs of hunger eventually woke them. It was high summer, and the time that bears needed to forage almost continuously. The mother bear forced herself to stand, and the quartet began to move up towards the canary grass meadows.



Although the grass was welcome and tasty, the mother and her cubs were nervous and uncomfortable, and very frightened and wary after the terrifying experience of the previous day. They abandoned their feeding and retired to the comforting safety of a large Douglas-fir. Black bears have amazing recuperative powers, and the mother bear climbed the tree with ease until she reached a secure spot. The family would spend the night here.





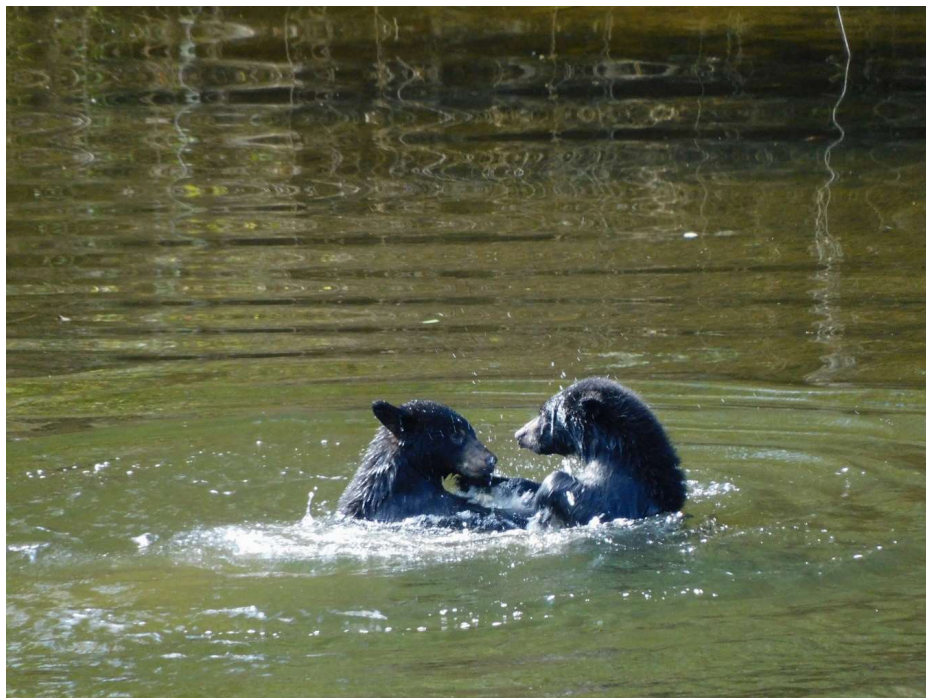
Dusk was falling, and the only sounds were those of the distant treefrogs, the light breeze of the soft summer night, and the far off water sounds of the creek. The mother bear, secure on her perch in the old Douglas-fir, dozed as did her cubs on the adjacent branches. And then there was a new sound.

Something was moving, out in the canary grass meadow.

The mother bear trained her keen vision towards the movement, and she saw two humans in the distance. She had learned from birth to fear and avoid humans. However, as she watched, she recognized one of the humans, the one that came often. She had learned to trust this human, and in fact, she had approached him on occasions when she felt threatened. For example, she had come to realize that Dufus would not threaten her cubs if this human were present. So she continued to calmly watch the human as he spoke in the low, calm voice that she knew so well.



Eventually, the human would leave, but she would see him again many times as July turned to the sultry days of August. The mother bear soon fully recovered from her injury, and the little family once again enjoyed the warm days and mild nights of the summer. But the summer was inevitably deferring to fall, and the days were becoming ever shorter. The mother bear sought out food sources for her family more than ever before. Of course, there was still time for play sessions along Kanaka Creek under the golden autumn sunshine.





It seemed as if those magical days would never end. But the season was late. Colors were changing along the creek, as chum salmon completed their return from their incredible ocean journey. The mornings were dark and cool, and frost began to appear on the remaining canary grass. The leaves that had provided comforting cover were falling, and this meant that the family's foraging outings often occurred under the cover of darkness.



Finally, the mother bear led her family to a denning spot in early November. The three cubs would likely be on their own the following spring, but for now it was comforting to retire to the hollow of the fallen cedar tree, as they snuggled warmly together and dreamed of spring even as winter descended.

*Ross Davies*