



Tlingit National Anthem

A Tribute to the Beginning of the Tlingit Nation

as retold by Robert Willard Jr. (Raven/Beaver Clan Elder)

"On June 1, 2001 Robert Willard Jr. quietly passed away. It was such a sad service. He truly was a great man. He was a quiet man but he was great in his knowledge and of trying to help his people. He stepped in wherever he could to help our people. He was one of the last few people to try to help the landless. He will be a great loss to the natives of southeast.

By Val Cooday.

This is the story of the Tlingit National Anthem, a song that entwines our people with their past and keeps our ancient heritage alive. At potlatch ceremonies, Tlingit Elders sing the anthem and tell how the Tlingit Nation came to be (this ritual was long forbidden by the government and for many years was told in secret,) passing the story on to new generations.

Long ago, the Tlingit Indians lived in the area now called British Columbia and the Yukon Territory. They decided to move from this region of lakes to the great ocean, now called the Pacific, where they heard the fish were abundant. When all the clans assembled they began a great trek through the mountain canyons leading to the sea.

Many, many miles later the way was blocked by a glacier that filled the canyon. Going back in search of a different route would be a long and wasting journey; so the leaders, both women and men, climbed the mountain to look for a safe way around the ice. There was none. They saw a stream flowing from the narrow mouth of the glacier which emptied into a great bay on the distant side. This passage under the glacier seemed too dangerous, though, the ice caverns too narrow to pass through. Determined to continue the migration to the ocean the leaders met to plot a new course.

Then, four women stepped forward and volunteered to journey beneath the glacier. Two were barren, one was a widow and the fourth was well along in years. The women had no children to nurture and protect so, the men built a raft of logs and the women set forth early next morning. The hopes of the leaders were renewed and they once again climbed the mountain keeping watch all morning and into the afternoon.

Toward evening they heard distant voices calling from the bay. It was the four women waving their arms and shouting, "We made it, we made it through under the ice". Then, the youngest and strongest of the Tlingits set out for the other side. When they arrived they began building large boats for the next part of the journey and explored the region beyond the glacier for a safe place abundant in resources. Then, all of the Tlingit people followed behind them on the path. Three days and three nights later they came through the ice caverns. So, they set up camps and rested.

The next day, the people asked the Great Spirit to be with them on their journey. They decided to row in all directions and settle as much unoccupied territory as possible. It was a sad, sad day as the people sang good-bye to their uncles, aunts, cousins and friends. They wept as they rowed, but it was the beginning of the Tlingit Nation which today occupies more than twenty-three million acres of land and water in Southeast Alaska.

In grand camp 1989 Austin Hammond gave the Tlingit National Anthem (put to song) to the Tlingit people so that they could perform the song during the 1990 Celebration. It is often performed today by dance groups and at traditional gatherings.

Anthem in Tlingit:

Verse One:

YAAW, EIYAAW, EIYAWW, EI—YAAW
HOO.EIYAAW, EIYAAW EI—YAAW
HOO.EIYAAW, EIYAAW EI-YAAW
HOO.EIYAAW, EIYAAW EIYAAW
EIYAAW, EIYAAW, EIYAAW
AAYA AW, YAAW HANEE, AAYA AW
CH'A AADEI YEI OONA TEE
GA-ZAWE HAAA TLEELKW HAS

AA NEE---YAAW, EIYAAW
AAKAADEI HAA SAGAX
DDO.AXCH-A
HOO.EI--YAAW, EIYAAW, EIYAAW
EIYAAW, EIYAAW, EIYAAW
AAYA AW, YAAW HANEE, AAYA AW
CH'UYEI! CH'UYEI!

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