

Reginald & Louise Dangeli
February 26, 1987
by Vera Wells

Reginald's talk began with a story about Behm Canal: Today, there are many stories about this area, 40 miles south of Ketchikan. His ancestors used to mix their words with the Tlingits when they established their villages. Half of the place names were in Tsetsaut and the other half in Tlingit. The Tsetsauts utilized this whole area, especially the two big rivers--Unuk and Chikimok rivers. They lived alongside the Tlingits in that area, and coexisted and intermarried to some degree. A Tlingit chief lived at a place nearby called Kasaks Cove at the mouth of Boca De Quadra. The Tsetsauts were close friends with the chief. They often visited him and highly respected him. This adawak or legend is about a big lake in an area known as Rudyerd Bay in Behm Canal. There is a cove there called Punchbowl Cove, named on account of Punchbowl Lake right above the cove. There is a strong story in this area about Addada. In this legend, two men and one woman went in their canoe in East Behm Canal to dry salmon. One day the woman crossed Punchbowl Lake to gather berries. When she didn't return in the evening, the men thought she had been captured by another tribe. But in the evening when passing a steep rock, they saw Addada coming out of the water; they knew at once that he'd killed and eaten the woman as she was crossing the lake. He looked huge. They planned to kill the monster and called the other men of the village to help. They cut a number of young hemlock trees and sharpened both ends. Then they made three canoe loads of the poles, and carried the canoes up to the top of the rock under which the monster lived. With cedar bark ropes, they lowered it down towards the water. After awhile, the water began to swell. The Addada was drinking. Then they dropped the sharp poles into the whirlpool that formed as the monster drank. A little later the water became calmer. The whirlpool disappeared. The Addada came up and drifted on the lake water. The poles had pierced his stomach and intestines. He died and floated up, his hair blue and his skin like a man. The men let the canoe down to the lake and paddled up to the body. They chopped the body up; it was as large as a house. In its stomach they found the canoe with the dead woman still sitting inside. (end)

This second legend goes up into prehistoric times when the Tsetsauts first came out to the saltwater coves, known as Portland Canal. This happened during the flood of the world. The Tsetsauts settled on their new habitat after reaching the coves, where they enjoyed themselves for many, many generations. But a great catastrophe was about to happen. They noticed the great change in the weather. It rained for many, many days. The tide waters and the rivers rose each day. Their villages were starting to wash away and the animals were heading for the mountains. The chiefs were alarmed and advised the people to make large rafts, which they did with provisions. The waters kept rising for many days until they were near the peaks of the high mountains. After many days, the water ocean stopped rising. The people secured their canoes to the strong rocks on top of these mountains. Later, the water started receding; many had died. But some Tsetsauts survived and returned to their villages. The Flood of the World is also described in the present-day Bible. (end)

A third story, called the Great Snowfall, occurred in the same area, many years after the great flood. The families of the wolf and eagle clans from the village of Bear River had a hunting settlement in the upper regions of the valley. Their settlement was suddenly attacked by men wearing bear skins, and everyone was killed except for two boys and two girls from each clan. They were crying all of the time when they saw their relatives being killed. The grizzly bear men went to their house and told them to stop crying or he'd kill them too. But the boys were able to kill the attackers. They stayed long enough to bury their families. They left their hunting village and returned down to the village of Bear River. After some time, they reached a house where they found an old man who had been left behind by his clan to die alone. He said to them, "Stay here until I die, my grandchildren. Bury me when I die." But after awhile he asked them to return to their hunting village from where they came, as salmon was scarce at the rivers near their present village. The old man was a great prophet, as he could foresee the future. He told them that there would be a great snowfall. He advised them to stalk up on meat and erect a strong house. A few days later the shaman died and they buried him as he wished. They obeyed his warnings and headed back to their hunting village. They followed a river. On the upper reaches of the river, they saw a large herd of mountain goats coming towards them. They killed a lot of them so they could store the meat. They made camp and remembered the old man and threw meat into the fire; it was the custom for the people for the departed ones. Later, they moved their camp to a hill located among three lakes where they built a strong dwelling. The girls dried the meat while the boys strengthened the poles of the house with strong bounds of leather. They were well prepared for the great snowfall as predicted by the shaman. A few days later it started to snow. It snowed steadily for three months. They used their wood sparingly. The smoke kept the hole open in the roof of their house. As the days passed, all they could see through the small smoke hole was snow and specks of light. After many, many days, they saw the smoke hole brighten. The sun was shining again. They dug a hole towards the surface of the snow and came out. All they could see was snow; the mountains were covered, except for a few tall ones sticking out. When the snow began to melt, tree tops began reappearing. One day they saw a bear at the top of a tree. It crawled down to the foot of the tree as they approached; they killed it for food. After a long and difficult journey home, they reached the coast to harvest the olechan, a smelt-like fish. They caught a plentiful supply--their provisions were well stalked. That summer, the salmon were plentiful in the rivers. They dried and smoked a great supply. They married and had many children. They were the only people who were saved from the heavy snow and from them descended the present-day generation of the Tsetsauts. Only a small part of the snow had melted the first year. A few rocks began reappearing gradually in the mountains. The trees were freed from the snow a few years later, but the snow that was on top of the mountains they say had turned into glaciers. The couples who were saved from the snow grew to be very old. One day, some young men climbed the mountains to hunt the mountain goat. One of the old men went with them, but he was left behind because he couldn't keep up with the younger fellows. When he reached the meadow high up the side of the mountain, he heard a voice on the rocks saying, "Here is the man who killed all of our friends." When he looked up he saw

a herd of goats above him. He didn't know how to reach them, as he was very weak on his legs. He tied a stick to each leg in order to strengthen them. It helped him climb. He reached the mountain goats and slayed many. Among the goats was a young one, or a 'kid.' He took out the tallow and put it on his head. Then he cut off the head and carried it home. He stayed away so long his friends thought him lost and dead. He told them of his adventure and instructed them to go and get the many goats he slayed. He roasted the kid's head and ate it. The next day they saw that the old man had died. (end)

This next story is an account of the first Tsetsaut to discover the mountain goats--in the very olden days. In the beginning, there were no mountain goats. The first man to discover them was Alama. One day he went up the mountains and found a cave full of goats. He set a snare and as it grew dark outside, the goats came out and got caught. He caught two. He tied one around his waste and the other on his back. He returned home and after that he was known as Alama Amongst the Mountain Goat. This mountain is in Portland Canal right below Tombstone Bay. (end)

Behm Canal: Reggie's great grandfather Levi, a chief, related this oral history to each generation. But some was recorded by a German anthropologist named Franz Boas, who made contact with Levi in 1894. Boas documented the period when Reggie's ancestors occupied the Misty Fjord National Monument. His recordings were significant because Levi was one of the last chiefs of the Tsetsauts. There were only 10 chiefs left when they joined the Mission Village in Kincolith at the mouth of Nass River. He helped his people go through the mission days and did many wonderful things. There were many land disputes and his people were in the center of it all. They battled with the Tlingits and later on, a Tlingit chief died, The people were held responsible for it. The Tlingits wanted to chase them out of the area. A lot of battles developed from that incident. Many were killed on both sides. They fought for the land and hunting areas in Behm Canal. The number of Tsetsauts was decreased at the time. But they always retaliated--they killed their enemies, man for man. They had such strong feelings against them, they would invade their territory. Later on, these same people pretended to make friends with the Tsetsauts and while the Tsetsauts let their guard down, they killed the men and took the women and children as slaves. They were taken to an area around Ketchikan, on Revillagigelo Island, where the Tlingits have many villages. A lot of the Tsetsauts were enslaved by the Tlingits, so the number was diminished. Also, traders brought smallpox into the area. Some 600 people used to live in that area, but only a few who were spared (hunters) remained. People living along the coast, from Sitka to Haida country, and other tribes, were also affected. Three villages were completely wiped out from the epidemic. (end)

The story, which took place in Behm Canal, is called Waterways of Many Islands. Levi related this adawak to Franz Boas. At one time, Levi came down Chickamin River with his parents and a group of people.

They settled down to live there but didn't know of the conflict that was going on among the Tlingit clans. Some Tlingit hunters approached the camp and wanted to trade furs; they were using muskets. They said they would come back the next day. So the next day, several canoes with several men in each one approached Levi and his family. They were wearing blankets and ready to trade. The Tsetsaut people invited them into their houses where they talked. But Levi didn't know that the Tlingits were hiding rifles underneath their blankets. After everybody relaxed, gunfire all of a sudden came out from these different places. The Tlingits were killing all the Tsetsaut men. Levi's father was among them. After they killed the men, the Tlingits rounded up the women and children; Levi was a child then, with a little sister. They took them to another island near Ketchikan. Later on, Levi's mother stated (this is her own story), that she was traded into another clan in the area. One day when she was relaxing in the bushes, she decided to escape. She found a nice, yellow cedar tree. Like other men and women, she was good at making canoes, so she secretly made one and waited until the time was just right to escape. During the night, she took her children and put them into the canoe and started rowing across Behm Canal on the mainland. She traveled only at night, for fear that someone might see her. The strong woman made it through the open ocean, and she managed to get back to her home in Tombstone Bay; it took her two months, rowing only at night and hiding in the woods during the day. The Tlingits wouldn't follow her once she entered Portland Canal. (She was Reggie's great, great grandmother. She was baptized at the mission in the late 1800's and adopted the name Eve Dangeli.) end

An account of the first whitemen who came into Portland Canal: One day, the Tsetsauts were hunting seals right below Hyder, Alaska. They saw two strange boats with big, large oars on each side. They hid in the bushes and the two strange canoes went by, close to where they were hiding. Later they saw the strange people and didn't know who they were. It was the first time they saw people who looked like that. Their faces were very white; they thought they were from the spirit world. They saw one big strange canoe. All the oars went up in the air at once. After they landed on the beach, the whites spotted some mountain goats not far upland. The Tsetsauts saw one man pick up a long stick and point it at the mountain goat. All of a sudden they heard a big noise. Boom!! The mountain goat came rolling down the hill. It was dead. The strange people cleaned the mountain goat, then went back to their canoe and brought back a round, strange-looking thing, like a big box. It made strange noise when it hit the rocks as they took it up the hillside. They built a big fire and set it on top. The Tsetsauts thought the whites were going to put hot stones into the pot at first, to cook, but they didn't. The people cut up the mountain goat, put it into the strange pot, and added a few things. The strangers were very happy as they ate the big meal. Later, they took the pot, washed it and put it back into their canoes. "Who are these people?" the Tsetsauts thought. Later, they noticed the strangers used long canoe paddles. The strangers continued down the canal and were never seen again. Later, the new generation heard this story and discovered that the strange people were Captain George Vancouver on his first visit to Alaska. Reggie learned from journals that

Vancouver was looking for a shortcut to China to transport furs there. He was disappointed when he did not find a passage to the far east, so he went back down the Canal, and that's when he headed up to Tlingit country, where he ended up at East Behm Canal. He came upon Eddystone Rocks around Revillagigelo Island. Other whitemen--Spaniards, Englishmen and even Boston people from New England--came up but didn't venture into these Inlets like Vancouver did. Everybody owned Alaska that time. The Russians were up North so everybody was after the fine pelts. The Tsetsauts were afraid of Vancouver; he anchored his two ships at Prince Rupert. He used life boats to ride up Portland Canal, and when he layed out his charts and memos or journals, he named it Portland Channel. It was not known why it was changed to Portland Canal. And all the islands and coves and various places around Ketchikan and Juneau were named by the explorer. But the names were changed during the remaking of maps. Vancouver even went up to the Chilkat country. The Russians came in further north around Sitka, where they established New Archangel, present-day Sitka. They traded with the Natives and almost wiped out the Sea otters along the Coast. Vancouver said he saw the sea otters even up Portland Canal; he said he could almost walk on the salmon, they were so thick. He was amazed at the number of animals, trees and vegetation of this place. But his main mission was to find a shortcut to China. So he didn't explore the area as much, although he traded with the Nisqas at the mouth of the Nass River, where he stayed for quite a while. The Nisqas had many stories about his visit. end.

Traditional Tsimpshian traders communicated with other traders--both Natives and whitemen--through the "Chinook" language, which is a common made-up language of English and other. It was used all over Alaska, among traders, including Europeans, Spaniards and Englishmen.

The missionaries tried to abolish the Tsimpshian culture so Louise (Dangeli) was not able to see much of her culture as she was growing up. But she does a lot of research to educate herself on traditional ways. And she did speak her Nisqa language as she was growing up. She knew she was of the Eagle clan but she didn't know she was from the Beaver house until she did research.

The Tsimpshian Nation was devastated by missionary influence; some of the coast villages lost their heritage, their traditional ways for many years afterwards. But in some way or another, some villages retained their traditional, ancient ways. The westerners tried to assimilate the Tsimpshians and Tlingits and make them into different people, but they failed.

In traditional times, the maternal uncles taught boys, and aunts taught the girls about traditional ways and practices. When it came to adawaks and morals, it was the grandfather who told the stories. The children learned from certain people at certain times. Those who showed talent in one area were put with the experts or artists in the group.