

KNOWLEDGE of NATIVE ELDERS - REGGIE and LOUISE DANGELI - MARCH 3, 1987

Reggie first expressed his and Louise's thanks to everyone involved in making the Festival of Native Arts the great success that it was, and then thanked the class for our gift of Nick's drawing.

In introducing his Tsetsaut adawaks Reggie expressed his concern that the Tsetsauts were always set upon even though they were such an easy-going people (warfares with Haidas, Tlingits, and interior tribes over land; "white" sicknesses). After each outbreak of war and sickness there were fewer and fewer Tsetsauts left.

Reggie told the adawak he had learned from Chief Mountain of "Place of Scalps" or "Rock of Skulls" (Kincolith today). Haidas entered Nisqa territory at the mouth of the Nass River looking for slaves. They came by canoe and attacked in two places. The battle lasted several days, but Chief Mountain's people repelled them. The Haidas saw that they couldn't take the land from them and retreated. The Nisqa's took the heads of the slain Haida warriors and mounted them on poles as a warning against any future attacks by the Haidas. They never did come back. And that is why it is called "Place of Skulls."

Chief Mountain also told Reggie of a time a while later when the Chief suspected the Haidas of another attack farther up in Portland Canal. He invited the Tsetsauts to join his people in preparation for battle, and they found a suitable vantage point in a cliff (not too far from modern Haider, AK). The Haidas did attack and there was a big battle with arrows and spears. The Chief Mountain Nisqas and the Tsetsauts fought side by side to repel the raiding Haidas. Today if you go to the cliff where they established their fort and look in the cracks in the cliff you can see the spears and arrows from their battle that penetrated the cracks and have since fossilized (turned to stone). This place is called "Where the Arrows Are Stuck in the Rock" by the Nisqas and Tsetsauts.

Reggie related that at one time interior people came down to the head of Portland Canal (around Haider and Stewart) and attempted to drive the Tsetsauts out, since it was such a good subsistence area. There was a big battle, but somehow the Tsetsauts managed to hold on to their territory, though there were many casualties on both sides. The Tsetsauts were pretty much left alone after this, especially since they had become allies with the Nisqas. The Nisqas themselves had a major battle with the same interior people at Bear Glacier. In the end they held on to their land.

Later on when things calmed down in Portland Canal the Tsetsaut people returned to Behm Canal (just south of Ketchikan). Much warfare in this area reduced the Tsetsaut population to only about one hundred (this is where Levi's father was killed and where his mother secretly made a canoe to escape with her children from their captors). While living in this area they heard of a big warfare up in Sitka (1801 or 1802), which was the battle between the Tlingits and the Russians.

After this battle firearms were introduced along the coast to the native people by traders (Yankee/Boston traders, Spaniards, English). In order to get a musket the native people had to pile expensive skins (beaver, marten) as high as the gun was, for the trader. ("Imagine how they were shortchanged in these deals.") They were also introduced to cloth and alcohol at this time, which (along with the firearms) led to changes in the native cultures. During this time the Tsetsauts had to deal with the Tlingits as the "middle men" in trading, so the Tsetsauts got very little for their furs, while the Tlingit "middle men" made very great profits. This went on for quite a few years.

Next Reggie talked about a great sickness that the people heard about (from the N.) all of a sudden. They heard that the sickness was called smallpox and that hundreds and hundreds of people were dying from it along the coast. Many thousands of people eventually died from this and other epidemics that were brought in by European traders.

Later on about thirty Tsetsauts (those who had survived the epidemics) returned to Tombstone Bay in Portland Canal. They decided to stay there and not return to East Behm Canal. They heard of a mission at the mouth of the Nass River and went to it. When they arrived the missionary there said that the mission could help them with their sickness, and asked them to join them and live there. Chief Levi Dangeli's Tsetsaut people were slowly becoming fewer and fewer so he decided that they would accept the offer of the missionary and they settled there at the Christian village of Kinkolith. They had no trouble doing this because they already knew the Tsimshian Nisqa language. They adopted the ways of the people of Kinkolith and pretty much became Nisqas after that, though they still spoke their own language when they were together. When they settled there were 12 Tsetsaut people left. They really liked the people and the place and all agreed to be baptised into the Anglican church. Reggie found the records of the baptisms which listed "heathen" and Christian names (he got a good chuckle out of that). The oldest person listed was Eve Dangeli, Levi's mother who escaped from the Haidas, and the youngest was Jane Dangeli, who related adawaks to Reggie

Question Period: On common laws - Reggie stressed that the most common "law" among his people was that if there were any hardship among them nobody was to be in want. They would pool their resources and help one another out. This is still practiced extensively among the Nass River Nisqas. At a time of a death or a marriage people give and see to it that everyone is provided for - to continue the life cycle of their people.

- On methods used on teaching: Maternal aunts and uncles spend a lot of time with the kids teaching them skills, as do the parents; grandparents and elders teach the kids their way of life through stories, tales, legends.
- On copper seals: These seals were large and very specially made with intricate designs that told stories. They were used extensively as a means to gain wealth from other tribes, also used for trade - was an investment, like a bank note. On special occasions they were displayed to demonstrate the owner wealth - someone with two copper seals was very rich. During raids warriors were obligated to protect them. When one was obtained a potlatch was given. They used to be found from the Chilkat area down to Vancouver Island but now collectors or museums have most of them.
- On the Nisqa God: The Nisqas had "Omliggihahlhal" (sp?) - the higher power - the creator - the Nisqas always worshipped this higher power - believed in no other gods. There also existed a mythological figure called "Khaimsom" (sp?) who was sent into the world by Omliggihahlhal to teach the Nisqas a lot of their ways (ex. the proper way to prepare ooligan oil, etc.). They said Khaimsom provided the fruit, the fish, the meat. There was always only one higher power though, and this goes hand in hand with Christianity today.
- On deadfalls: For a bear use a big log, good to set it up on a trail, use fish for bait. When an animal comes it hits a certain stick set up and it springs the trap and lands on the animal killing it instantly. Used for small and big animals - for larger ones weights used on ends too. Deadfalls are better than steel traps because you're sure nothing can get away (animal can't chew its paw off and escape). It does take a while to set up though.

After break Reggie related a humorous story of a ship captain who wanted to

impress the chief of a village. He sent ashore a pair of navy pants, with an invitation for the chief to come aboard. He didn't know that there were two chiefs of that village, though. The chiefs weren't quite sure how they were both going to fit into the pants so they split them and each wore one leg of the pants to visit the captain on his ship. Reggie said he couldn't stop laughing when he first heard this story, and that there are a lot of funny stories about the first contacts with European traders.

Reggie related the story of an end of an era - of the Tsetsaut culture and language - when his grandfather Chief Levi Dangeli passed on. Levi always went back to Portland Canal to hunt mountain goat and take care of subsistence needs. He tried to remember the happy experiences and not the battles or sicknesses. One time when he went back there with a hunting party to get mountain goats he had stomach cramps and returned to their base camp. That night the other hunters heard him moaning and praying. In the morning he was dead. They took his body back to the mission and he was buried in the cemetery there both in the Christian way and in a manner befitting a chief. Reggie was sad that a very significant part of his ancestral history was lost when Levi died, but he was happy that he ended his life in peace, doing what he liked to do. And that was the last chief of the Tsetsauts.

The Tsetsauts started to become Nisqas when Reggie's grandfather Mathias married a Nisqa woman named Rachel. Mathias was of the Eagle clan and since there were no more Wolf clan people left, and he couldn't marry someone of his own clan, he married a Nisqa. Together Mathias and Rachel had three kids - Eliza, Elsie, and Henry, who was Reggie's father.

One time Mathias went back to Tombstone Bay to hunt. He went into a valley with very steep slopes. Once he was into the valley he saw six grizzly bears fighting over a black bear. This was in the spring when they had just come out of hibernation and were very hungry. He tried to sneak out of the valley but the wind shifted and they smelled him. There was no place for him to run and no trees for him to climb since the slopes were so steep. One started in towards him, so he took careful aim and fired. The bear dropped not too far from where he stood. Then another came at him, and another, but he was able to kill each one with one shot. The last one was big and old and he let it rear up and come really close to him before he shot it in the heart. He had just six bullets and would not have been able to tell that story if he had missed a shot. Mathias said that every time he thought of that experience his heart beat a little faster.

Reggie talked about Timothy next. He used to go on walks and hunting trips with him and Timothy would teach Reggie ways of survival. Reggie loved Timothy for his kindness and being everything a grandfather should be. One time Reggie and Timothy were out in the bush about ten miles from where they were living. They just had blankets to keep them warm. When Reggie heard dogs barking that night he didn't think anything of it but in the morning Timothy was a bit upset and told Reggie that those had been wolves, and would have brought in lots of money for their pelts. Timothy told Reggie to wake him up if he ever saw anything unusual so that nothing would happen to them. Timothy really enjoyed being out in the bush hunting and trapping and instead of going to work for one of the canneries that were established in the area where he may have earned \$2000 but would have had to have paid \$1500 for using the company net - he built himself a boat and a cabin and continued to do his own thing. One time Timothy went on a trip and came back with a strange looking rock. He took it to Prince Rupert to be analysed and was paid \$3000 for it. Everyone wanted to know where Timothy had gotten his rock

and he was going to take his family to the place the following summer after fishing, but he became ill and died, and the source of his gold discovery died with him. Reggie said he adored and loved Timothy for the man he was.

Timothy and Jane were the last Tsetsaut speakers. Jane married an Irishman who was a miner in Tombstone Bay. One time Jane went upriver to gather cedar and spruce bark for her baskets. She only had a hatchet with her when she saw a black bear with two cubs. She tried to avoid them and give them room, but the mother saw her and charged. Jane clubbed it in the head and it fell, but it got back up and charged again. This time Jane struck it in the vital spot several times and it fell dead, after it almost tore her clothes to pieces. The cubs then charged too, but she was able to kill them as well. She had three bears lying at her feet - food and skins. Jane skinned the bears and took them back to Kincolith. The missionary there at first did not believe what she had done, but she brought the bear skin to prove it and it was hung on the missionary's wall as a reminder of her momentous achievement of killing three bears with a hatchet. Even when Jane was getting along in years she carried her own gear when out trapping; "I have two legs to walk on." Sometimes she out-trapped the men, and she was a good shot too. They were taught from the beginning how to survive in the bush in whatever situation they were in. Jane and Timothy were the last true speakers of the Tsetsaut language - after they passed on no one knew much of the language. The younger generation joined the Nisqas at the cost of their own culture. Now wherever Reggie goes when people ask him if he knows any more of the Tsetsaut language he is sad to say that he does not - in part because of the missionary influence on his folks and on his own upbringing. Speaking or learning about your language or culture or relating to your heritage in any way was strictly banned because the missionaries wanted to Christianize the people and get rid of their "heathen" ways. They later found out what a terrible mistake this was. Reggie was very honored to be able to relate some of the adventures of his grandmothers and grandfathers.

Reggie talked about traditional ways and contemporary western culture and said that you always keep one foot in each world - you can't totally abandon one for the other. During Festival Reggie heard some elders from this area say that they believed that we will all have to go back to subsistence lifestyle eventually. Reggie said he saw this happen during the great depression & was very impressed by what these elders said. Reggie said that some Nisqas today have boats that cost in the hundreds of thousands\$, but they still go back each year to put up fish with their families so that the traditional ways are not lost.