

Kudatan Kahídí (The Salmon Box)

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The Alaska Native Knowledge Network

Tlingit legend of the Raven pulling shoreward the salmon from the middle of the ocean.



drawing © by Harold Jacobs

--- Story provided by the late Henry Davis, Former Director of the Native Studies Program, Sheldon Jackson College ---

At the earth's creation there was no light; but Raven, by means of trickery, brought light into the world. Then he stole water from his best friend on the Hazy Islands. As he flew away with a mouthful of water, his friend gave him chase. Wherever Raven dropped a big drop of water, it became a big river or a large lake. The smaller drops became smaller lakes, creeks and streams.

But alas, there were no salmon in the inlets, rivers or creeks. The salmon, herrings, ooligans, and other fishes were kept in a house in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. These salmon and other fishes were able to spawn right in the ocean, so they never came into the bays or inlets. Only the rich chiefs were able to go out to the ocean in their big canoes to get some of the salmon for food. The poorer people were not able to go out so they just watched the rich eating the fine salmon.

The Raven, in his adventurous travels, soon heard of the salmon in the middle of the ocean. He gave a lot of thought to just how he could get the salmon and other fish to the bays and inlets. Soon the Raven heard of another mythical being, Xanaax.atwaayaa, who possessed an octopus-tentacle staff with supernatural powers.

The Raven thought, with such powers in a staff, he could latch it to the salmon's house and pull it shoreward. The Raven decided to show his friend the supernatural power of his bow and arrow, which he wished to trade for his friend's staff. He asked Xanaax.atwaayaa to watch a mountain goat far off on the high mountain. When he fired the arrow, it kept on travelling towards the mountain goat, for the arrow was in reality a magpie. The magpie flew behind the mountain goat on the face of a cliff and scared it, and it fell off. "Did you see how my arrow hit its mark?" cried Raven. His friend was so impressed that he agreed to the trade.

With the staff, the Raven and his nephew, the Crow, made their way towards the Alsek River near Yakutat. At the entrance of the Alsek River, he latched his octopus-tentacle staff to the salmon house. Here the Raven struggled with all his might, pulling and tugging, so he could get the salmon into the bays and inlets.

His nephew, the Crow, urged the Raven to sing a song about his friend Xanaax.atwaayaa. When the Raven started singing about the mythical being, Xanaax.atwaayaa, he easily pulled all the salmon into the bays and inlets so they could go up the rivers, creeks and streams to spawn.

To this day, the tracks of the Raven are at the entrance of the Alsek River where he struggled to pull in all the salmon.