

Koohaanti Orphan

By: Elizabeth Nyman, Yanyeidí
Translated to English by: David, Katzeek / Kingeisti

Introduction

This is a Yanyeidí story about an orphan boy, Koohaanti, as told by Elizabeth Nyman: Yanyeidí, Wolf/Eagle family from the Yukon. It is a story about discipline, obedience and following directions, which every student must absorb in order to learn how to learn.

It is a simple, yet powerful story that outlines how grandparents taught their grandchildren; this is a story of love and kindness.

Story (Shkalneek)

There was a child whose mother and father passed away. The grandmother took her grandson and he did not have very much clothes. The grandmother took the bladder of a moose and made a hat by drying the skin out and cleaning it. She created a hat for her grandson when it was dried out. *(Elizabeth goes on to describe how it was made.)*

She put the hat on the child when it was done and when she would walk through the village with the child. The people would laugh at the child for wearing the hat. He got the name Shdaax'íxk'. *(Rough translation would be "that which is tightly wrapped around the head".)* The young girls and boys would laugh at him saying "... there is the one with the stinky hat!" They did not care that he heard them laughing at him. He would walk with his grandmother (leelk'w) through the community.

The orphan's grandmother would make a new hat for him as he outgrew the hat. The young people continued to laugh at him. They would laugh at him about the hat he was wearing and even comment about how he smelled.

The grandmother told him not to respond to the ridicule, teasing and laughter that the young people would do when they saw him walking with his



grandmother wearing the hat. His grandmother told him "you don't have a mother, father, brother or sister that could protect you, so don't pay any attention to them."

His grandmother made him another hat and she put it on him and when she took off the old hat his hair was curly. She washed his hair with urine and placed the second hat on him telling him not to take it off. He obeyed his grandmother.

The young orphan's grandmother was a good hunter with a small bow and arrow and took ptarmigan (x' eis' awaa), flying squirrels (tsalk), ducks (gaaxw) and other small animals. Also, a very powerful bow (sákhs) was made for the young man. This bow was used to kill moose (dzískw), caribou (watsíx), mountain goat (jánwu) mountain sheep (tawéi) and other wild game.

One day, they went hunting and they came upon a great creature on the mountain. They call monsters khoostin át. All the men and young men became fearful of the creature except the young man. They had given him another name Dzískw Káloox' cháne; 'moose urine smell'. They thought it was funny.

The grandmother told him how to take the animal. She gave specific instructions where to hit the animal with the arrow (chooneit). She then told her grandson to take off the hat that she had made for him and when he did, his long and black curly hair fell to his shoulders.

All of the girls and guys wondered, "Where did this handsome [man] person come from?" He was a good looking person and the young ladies took notice. He gave little attention to the sudden recognition. The young men and women said "is this the one we call Dzískw Káloox' cháne?" The young man did not answer.

When they went to take the monster on the mountain, the young man took aim and shot the monster in one of his eyes. The second one followed quickly and almost hit the same spot; this is how accurate he was. The third shot hit the heart of the monster and he killed it.



The back sinew (a deix' tásee) was very long it is said. He took two of them for his grandmother so that she could use it with her bow strings (sákhs tásee). These became good fortune for his grandmother. Nothing was difficult for her to take. She even took moose with her bow (sákhs).

Note from David

Elizabeth Nyman discusses: this is how my mother would tell me the story. I was told by my mother not to treat an orphan in a mean way. The name for an orphan in Tlingit is koohaantí. My mother said that this is the way she was disciplined by her mother because people sometimes have their mother die when they are young and that is why they are called koohaantí. Don't ever be like those who mistreated the orphan in this story.

Elizabeth goes on to talk about the word or phrase "hás akawlidées" is what the young people did to this orphan. She explains this as teasing, making fun of and laughing at.

She then questions why people treat orphans this way. Why do they treat them mean? Why do they make up names that are not kind? She then answers herself by saying maybe this is why good fortune follows these people.

She then tells a portion that she left out. She said that the young man's hair was very attractive and what the grandmother did was make an ermine skin (dáa doogu) tie and she tied his hair in a bun behind his head (a kawleech'in).

Then she tells how this person became everyone's grandmother because of what she did for her grandson. She became well known and everyone wanted to be her grandchild and said that she was their grandmother.

