

# Aas Khwáan

## Tree People

By: Taa Gooch, Clarence Jackson

Retold (by permission): Kingeistí, David Katzeek

### Introduction

This story was told by the late Clarence Jackson of the Tsaagweidí, Eagle/Killerwhale clan from Kake, Alaska. He told this story at the celebration held in Kake, Alaska in 2012. The celebration was Kake 100 Years Later. This marked the day when it was decided to set aside traditions, customs and practice of old, to pursue the new ways that were flooding the land with the coming of the Western European ways of living.

Kingeistí interpreted the story as the story was being told to a packed A.N.B (Alaska Native Brotherhood) Hall. The story was received with great joy and emotion that would be hard to describe. The spirit and response of this story could only be experienced to comprehend its power and its acceptance.

This is one of the most powerful stories about working together → Woch.een.

### Story (Shkalneek)

Long, long ago before the great flood, this story took place.

It is said that the Tree People were plenty on the side of this one mountain not too far from here. One winter it snowed and snowed and snowed.

In the spring there was rain, wind and just miserable weather that the Tree People had to endure. Then, one day there was a great avalanche that started tearing down all the trees that were in its path. The powerful wind going before it was loud as it thundered down the mountainside.

It is said that all the trees were ripped down and that all the Tree People perished except for one tree at the top.

One day, the tree started to call out to see if there were any other trees that survived the great snow slide. He yelled out "Can you hear me out there? Can



anybody hear me?" He did this every day for a long time until one day he heard a still, small voice say "I can hear you!"

The tree at the top called out "Do you know what happened to us?" The little tree yelled back "No! What happened?" The tree at the top said "a great snow slide wiped almost all of us out!" The tree at the top then asked the little tree "do you know why this happened?"

"No" said the little tree.

"It is because we thought we could stand by ourselves. We thought we did not need each other's help and that we could stand tall and alone all by ourselves. So when this snow slide came, it killed almost all of us off on this mountain. We need to stand together, support each other **with our roots** and hold each other up. This is the way we will survive, by helping one another."

### Note from David

This is why, to this very day if you were to check the rooting system, you will notice that they are bound together in a tight weave and this is the way that we learned from the Tree People.

Notice that I emphasized the brief phrase "...with our roots." In Tlingit culture and values, it relates to the families that we are rooted to through thousands of years of relationships. We are not here on our own; it took all of the people in our roots to be alive today. This is why our people called each other "precious children of the land."

The storyteller said "let's learn from our mistakes and stand together by helping each other with kindness, patience and love. We will hold each other up!"

Yéi áwé

