

Legend of the Thunderbird and the Whale

The following story is adapted from a longer story recorded in 1987 by Katie Ferry Adams (Ubumpa), a respected Nakwaxda'xw elder from the village of Ba'as at Blunden Harbour.

There was a big tribe at a place called Dals at Seymour Inlet, way near the head. And people from that village would go out in their canoes and get lost and wouldn't come back. Sometimes whole families went out in a canoe and just disappeared without a trace.

There were less and less people and so the people got together to find out what was killing their people and to decide what to do. One man said "Well, let's make two big canoes and we'll put them together and make a whale out of it." And that's what they did. They made a whale out of the canoes and when it was all finished they tried it out in front of the village. You know how the whale comes up and down? Well do you know what they did to make it go up and down like that? They'd all run from the tail to the head and then they'd run back to the tail. And when the head was sunk down in the water, the tail would come up. Smart people. And they pounded up clamshells to use for the blowhole. And it looked like steam coming through the blowhole but it was really clam shells all pounded up until it was just powder.

So they travelled down the channel, up and down like this. They hired all the people and they had a whole bunch of poles ready in case there was a big monster getting them. And just when they got around the point - all of a sudden the lightning came and there was big thunder roaring across the sky. And a great big thunderbird came and grabbed that canoe that was made like a whale. The thunderbird thought it was a whale and grabbed it by the tail. The people in the canoe started pounding and pounding its wing and when they broke its wing, the thunderbird dropped the canoe from way up out of the water. The whale canoe went shooting down to the bottom of the sea and it was such a heavy thing that it went down fast and was buried in the sand under the water. So they had to get all the different tribes to help: the crab tribes, the starfish tribes, the devilfish tribes and all the different animals. And the crabs were the fastest ones to dig it out - and the starfish.

Three times this happened. And the third time they managed to kill the thunderbird family - the father, the mother and the son and they thought that their people would never die off again when they went away on those trips.

But when they went up a great big mountain to look around for where the lightning and thunder started from they found a baby in a cradle in the thunderbird home. It was still just a little infant and they left it there. They left the baby so that it would continue with the lightning and with the big roaring noise that it makes. And that's why we own the thunderbird. And if they hadn't left that baby in that cradle, there would be no thunder today.