"Become a World"

A Tribute to Angela Sidney

Yukon International Storytelling Festival

and The Northern Research Institute, Yukon College

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"Become a World"

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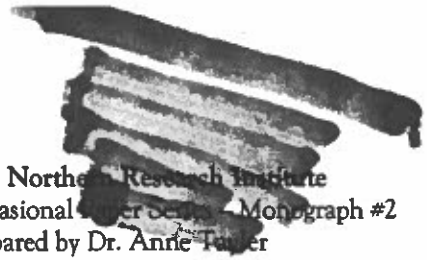
When he encounters a greedy sea–lion –lord who's keeping all the land to himself, Crow kidnaps one of his pups; he trades it back for some grains of sand. "You know how sand'll sometimes float on the water," Angela would ask her listeners at this point in the story, "That's what Crow does — throws it on the water and some of it floated." As he casts this sand forth upon the waters he cries out: "Become a world!"

From Another Long Tale About Crow,
By Dan Yashinsky



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Storytelling Chapbooks

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Introduction

This begins what we hope will be a long series of chapbooks celebrating the fine and ancient art of storytelling, through the stories and great storytellers from around the circumpolar world.

The series begins with a tribute to Mrs. Angela Sidney, the incomparable grand storyteller of the Yukon. Mrs. Sidney was truly an inspiration for our organization. The first Yukon International Storytelling Festival was inspired when our co–founders contemplated the deep irony of a journey Mrs. Sidney had made to the Toronto Storytelling Festival – the irony of this grand storyteller flying across the continent to tell stories, while essentially unheard at home. Out of that moment came a single question: why couldn't we hold such a festival right here in the midst of our own storytellers? And when mention of holding such a festival in Whitehorse reached Mrs. Sidney's ears, she declared immediately that it should be done.

A handful of dedicated volunteers struggled to mount a one–time–only storytelling festival in 1988. Before the tents were down that year, it had become an annual event. And an office with a co-ordinator. An archives of rare audio and video tapes. A newsletter and story–circle meetings. An international exchange, summer art school courses and Elderhostel. So the circles keep on growing, ever–linking and ever–connected to the vibrant image of Mrs. Sidney.

I used to think it unfortunate that we do not adhere to the Japanese tradition of living monuments, for Mrs. Sidney would surely have been one. Yet all who came into contact with her knew at once that she was indeed such a living monument — so perhaps it is not so unfortunate at all.

With this chapbook, we hope to make several introductions. First, we wish to introduce you to Mrs. Sidney, one of the greatest traditional storytellers of Canada's north. This introduction comes through the voices of several people who knew Mrs. Sidney as a storyteller and as someone dedicated to enlivening, not just preserving, the history and

tradition of her people and the land. We hope that these reflections on her stories and her life will give you some sense of the living voice of Mrs. Sidney. But we cannot end there, of course — we also include one of her stories. It is but a small one out of the many hundreds she told; may it lead you on to seek out her voice in other books.

We also hope to introduce the world of storytelling in general, especially the Yukon's storytelling world. We hope to give you a glimpse of the magical power of storytelling. This can be, however, only an introduction. There is, mercifully, no way to capture and imprison the essential qualities of storytelling and lay them out on flat sheets or video screens for the eye to scan. Once the introduction is done, there is nothing but to go out and find yourself a storyteller — not someone reading a book or a radio script — a true storyteller, whose words come from the heart, far deeper in memory than the printed word can ever go.

I would like to sincerely thank all those who have worked on this project, especially the staff of the Northern Research Institute. My appreciation also goes to Lotteries Yukon for their funding assistance.

Anne Tayler,
Whitehorse, Y.T.

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Works by Angela Sidney:

Life Lived Like a Story
My Stories are My Wealth
Tagish Tlaagu: Tagish Stories
Reading Voices
Southern Yukon Lakes Place Names

Contents

Another Long Tale about Crow

by Dan Yashinsky

With myths, one should not be in a hurry. (Ivan Calvino)

Can we change the old stories? A student asked me this question recently. She was in the middle of reading and memorizing stories from the brothers Grimm. How can we tell these stories for our own time, she wondered; how can we make them new?

Her questions continue to haunt me, and I venture here to continue the conversation. My first response starts from a long way back, back in the beginning time, back when — *Crow made the world.*

So said my friend Angela Sidney, a Tagish woman living in the Yukon. She was 89 years old the last time I visited her. We spent a weekend side by side ("Don't tell your wife!" she teased), on the occasion of the fourth Yukon International Storytelling Festival. We sipped tea in a friend's house, or sat by the river in Whitehorse — and I listened as she recreated the creation of the world.

Crow, in Angela's telling, didn't so much make the world as trick it into being: through a series of Crow connivances, misdemeanours and scandalous reversals, the scantlings of the world–to–be emerged. "Crow is always stealing things," Angela would say. She often told of his cosmic gestes in the present tense. He steals the sun, the light, the moon, the fire, the fish, the rivers, the earth itself — all the necessities of life — from those stingy creation–time chiefs who presumed to hoard these essential resources. And whatever Crow steals, he releases into common use. "Go to the skies," he says, tossing the sun and moon up into the heavens; "now no one man owns it — it will be for everybody." Crow steals the world, and gives it away to us, the creatures for whom it is to be a dwelling–place. When he encounters a greedy sea–lion–lord who's keeping all the land to himself, Crow kidnaps one of his pups; he trades it back for some grains of sand. "You know how sand'll sometimes float on the water?" Angela would ask her listeners at this point in the story, "That's what Crow does — throws it on the water and some of it

floated." As he casts this sand forth upon the waters he cries out: "Become a world!"

And there we'd be, me on the grass and Angela in her wheelchair spinning the tale; and as I listened sometimes I'd notice a real crow settle nearby on the lawn. Which made me wonder: did she, and her Tagish and Tlingit ancestors, look at that common, raucous, devious scavenger and see the bringer of light, the creator of man and woman, the word–maker? Does the spirit of the creator really live on in this embodiment? Is that crow, Crow? And I wonder further: what is it like to live in a world shoplifted and bodied forth into glorious existence by a force they named after an unpredictable blackbird? Surely in such a world one cannot take things for granted. Surely one would never go forth in the name of Crow to slaughter infidels who happened to believe the world came into being some other way. For it seems to me that in a Trickster–wrought creation all hoarding is absurd — of light, of earth and of that most valuable of commodities, truth. As far as I know no Yukoner ever went out to convert or terminate the unbelievers. Crow–logic is far too generous — ruthlessly so sometimes — and far too spontaneous to motivate such crusades.

So here is an old story made continually new. For if Crow stole the world and gave it unto our care, and if that squawking, persistent thief of a bird is still around to remind us of this, then we can learn daily the creator's great and paradoxical lesson: the world belongs to you: the world does not belong to you.

Well, "Crow was going" — so those old stories usually begin. I too have wandered in my Crow–caught and Crow–beguiled narrative, and strayed from my main point: the word of mouth is a haunted word.

By the time an oral story reaches our ears it has passed many memories, and been uttered by many tongues. Alice, another one of my elders, once told me that the difference between storytelling and acting was this: an actor puts himself between the story and the listener, and a storyteller lets the story through directly. Storytellers, in other words, are willing ghosts. The story passes through us as a knot slips along a much–spliced rope — hemp or nylon, the knot holds to its own patterns. The words of a spoken–aloud story, pushed through the air by

a teller's tongue, leave a wake of ancestral signals: as we held this tale in our remembrance, they murmur, may you shelter it in yours.

And so I lean closer to my friend and hear the world being created. Crow utters his words of power in myth–time — but I hear them in 1991, in the 89–year–old voice of Angela Sidney. It is her voice that, four weeks before her death, cries out in triumph: "Become a world!"

Haunted.

The old storytellers leave us; the tradition unravels in two or three generations; the word of mouth gets written down, locked into books, shelved alphabetically by author in the local library; computers are invented to save us the work of remembrance; and voice and memory seem ever more frail and disregarded in this strange, machine–full and story–poor age. Voice and memory: fragile shelters for the oldest stories in the world. Yet somehow strong, as witnessed the last June that Angela Sidney still could tell the tales she's received from a continuous, thousand–year–old tradition. Perhaps only voices, mortal and vulnerable as they are, can carry the true weight of Crow's world–making adventures. The strength of the word of mouth is a communal strength. A story carried orally must remain timely; that is, it will be told by real people in real places to real listeners for real reasons. It requires a gathering of listeners, an effort of remembrance, a weaving of connections between the story world and the present moment. Once this commitment is made, the stories can provide an ongoing way to commemorate and reflect on life.

Angela Sidney once remarked — "Well, I've tried to live my life right, just like a story," (from Julie Cruikshank's remarkable collaboration with three Yukon elders, *Life Lived Like a Story*, published in 1990; the earlier story quotes are based on personal recollection aided considerably by the printed versions in this book). I think of Odysseus in the banquet hall of King Alcinous. Odysseus has not yet revealed his true identity to his hosts. When the bard Demodocus enters with his lyre, Odysseus asks him to sing the tale of how the Greeks tricked the Trojans with the hollow horse — his own ruse already turned into epic song — and how they ravaged that city with the help of Athena. As he listens to his own story sung by the bard he begins to weep. The king asks the

reason for his tears, and only now does Odysseus make himself known. The circle is complete — from life into legend and back into life. Life is indeed lived like a story, and the story returns itself to history whence it arose. Once revealed through, and released by, his story, Odysseus is able to continue his fateful journey.

It seems to me we don't really have a word in modern English to name this intimate relationship between life and story. Stories, in oral tradition, are tools; they are known to be useful; they are taken as a frame for explaining events; they are used to create new understanding. One has to go back to medieval English to find a word that carries this kind of meaning. The term *geste* used to mean both deeds, and the legends that were made of those deeds. A noble geste meant not only action, but the story of that action. Such a usage could only exist in a culture that knew what we have largely forgotten; namely, that story-telling is itself a deed, that the remembering and recounting of stories is itself an act of commitment. A life completes itself in the realm of legend; a legend is memorable because it re–enters the lives of those who choose to live by its values.

Do we need a new word?

And, say we re–discover the impulse to tell and remember and gather for stories, how do we find stories for our time?

Angela Sidney knew what she had to remember in a way that I, grown up in a culture beset with technology and forgetfulness, can never know.

Speaking, Naming, Telling

by Anne Tayler

Stoów / Ch'óonehte' Má
Angela Sidney, 1902–1991

For at least the next few generations, there will be two Angela Sidneys in Yukon history. One, a respected Tagish elder, whose life and stories have been recorded in many books; the other, a radiant and indominatable spirit that will inhabit the stories of those who knew her. And that is, for Angela, just right, for her life and her work embraced both the modern written work and the oral tradition.

For those fortunate enough to have heard Angela tell stories, her voice and her words will linger in their memories for the rest of their lives. For the rest of the world, the written record will speak — not as beautiful perhaps, and not as riveting, but still powerful and moving, and reverberating with truth.

As the history books will say, Mrs. Sidney was born in 1902 near Carcross, Yukon. She was a nurse, a scholar, a teacher, a tri–lingual historian, a preserver of cultural heritage, an internationally recognized storyteller. If Canada followed the Japanese tradition, she would surely have been a National Treasure.

Angela was given the Tlingit name Stoów, and later a Tagish name Ch'óonehte' Má. She received her English name courtesy of a prospector who visited the family the night of her birth and remarked that the new baby looked just like an angel.

She was one of twelve children born to Ḵaajinéek' (Tagish John) and La.oos Tlá (Maria) of Tagish, Yukon. Most of the children died in infancy. Three of them were sent to mission school, a step which could well have resulted in an early death for Angela. Many of the students, including Angela's sister Ḵaneegweik (Dora), contracted tuberculosis there. But Angela and her brother Yéiłshan (Johnny Johns) were both lucky to have determined, resourceful parents — they insisted on taking Dora to the hospital and removing their other children from school. It

was too late for Dora, but the two surviving children returned to their home in the bush. Angela missed her sister so much that years later she began to call a new baby sister Dora; her name was actually Alice Dora (Yaajindahéin), but the family went along with Angela's choice.

Angela's mother was ill much of the time, so Angela stayed home to care for her. During that time, Angela questioned her mother about traditions, songs, stories, and the histories of clan and family. She learned a great deal about the customs of the potlatch, puberty, marriage and childbirth. She also learned about traditional methods of healing. And she was blessed with a phenomenal memory. Even late in her life, she could remember events that occurred when she was only three years old. So the lessons learned from her mother lasted long and well.

Angela had not learned to read by the time she left mission school, but later taught herself to do so, and urged others to learn. She appears on a Public Library poster with the slogan "Hutaats'edezi k'ēuts'in huts'inye" (Reading makes you wise). And as one of the last fluent speakers of Tagish, she worked hard to ensure that her first language was recorded. With the loss of a language, there is the regrettable loss of ways of knowing, beliefs, particular understandings. Mrs. Sidney spent countless hours with linguists, anthropologists and historians, trying to cut down on such loss — through the simple acts of speaking, telling and naming. A lack of formal education did not keep Angela from contributing to the European or immigrant mainstream culture and community. When still a young woman, she became an unofficial nurse in her community during time of sickness and during the construction of the Alaska Highway. She was also a midwife for several years.

During the last half of her life, Angela dedicated herself to the preservation and development of traditional ways and customs. Working with anthropologist Julie Cruikshank, Mrs. Sidney recorded her stories and her knowledge: *Life Lived Like a Story*, *My Stories Are My Wealth*, *Tagish Tlaagu: Tagish Stories*, and *Reading Voices*. This last book will be in Yukon schools for generations to come. She also contributed to Catherine McClellan's landmark work, *Part of the Land, Part of the Water, the* first text attempting to present a history of Yukon Indians from their own perspective.

Mrs. Sidney was ever generous with her knowledge, sharing it in schools, at cultural camps, at conferences and at festivals. Throughout her life, she travelled whenever asked, provided she was able, to any event where she could contribute her historical or spiritual knowledge. In 1986, she travelled to the Toronto Storytelling Festival, a journey that became the inspiration for the founding of Yukon's own International Storytelling Festival. She opened the inaugural Yukon festival, in 1987, and performed each year, including June 1991, only a month before her death. Mrs. Sidney was committed to the ongoing practice of traditional ways, performing as a storyteller, and working tirelessly for the Carcross Dancers. She appeared regularly at Native Folklore Night and other local events, and participated in language conferences.

In addition to promoting traditional ways of knowing, Mrs.Sidney also urged young people to pursue modern forms of education and training. In 1988, she named the Whitehorse campus of Yukon College, giving it the name *Ayamdigut*, believing that the College at last offered Yukon native youth an opportunity to gain an education in their own territory.

Official recognition for Mrs. Sidney's work came in 1986, when she received the Order of Canada.

That is what history books will say, in part or in whole. But here and there, over a cup of strong tea or coffee, this is what the people will say. How Angela nearly outlasted everyone at the storytelling festival, drumming past midnight with the Assumption Dreamers, as if sleep were no longer relevant. How she took you by the hand and looked out past your shoulder as she started to tell a story. Or how she made you say the same Indian word over and over, until you got it right, even if you were the Commissioner of the Yukon, trying to pronounce the name given to you at a potlatch.

How she could have Crow make the world again right in front of yours ears. How those hands had such strength, in old age, and such care, so much light. How she edited (or corrected, depending on your point of view) stories that she knew when she heard other people telling their versions. How she loved to sneak a bite of the foods her doctor had forbidden. How she nodded in approval when the young people performed their dances. How she scolded a clown performer who she

thought was not behaving properly, and how she made the audience laugh more than the clown had.

How she had that rare gift that the Spaniards call *duende*, feebly translated as soul in English. How the wavering voice could transfix you to the spot, for hours that passed in a moment. How the glittering eyes remind you always that there is a life in every story, many stories in every life.

When someone special is far away, or gone altogether, they visit our memories in fragments — a familiar smell, a gesture, an idiosyncratic phrase. Angela's memory visits with a radiance, a glow that could touch any audience, a spellbinding and magnetic radiance.

Guneł–chish and Edekanihł–ą, Stoǫ́w, Ch'ǫ́onehte' Mą́ for everything you have given us.

For the Love of Speed

by Louise Profeit-LeBlanc

She loved speed. Her first question about anyone's new car was always to do with how fast it could go.

"It's a good car?" she'd question. "Goes fast, hey?"

In the early thirties a road was just cut into the Tagish community from Carcross. She often spoke of feeling privileged to be married to George Sidney, one of the few Indians who owned a car at that time. He loved to drive and would often take her to visit her relatives in Tagish. It was spring when the following incident took place.

The story was told in direct response to my question as to why she would always make the comment, "Here's to you gentlemen," whenever we passed a car along the highway. Her comment was made with conviction and delight, with a twinkle of satisfaction in her eyes. Never did she like to stay behind other cars travelling in front of us; despite the speed we might have been travelling, she would always insist.

"Pass 'em." Her eyes would be beady and she would hunch over, looking at the car drawing closer with our increasing speed. I never had the heart to tell her that we were already breaking the speed limit by about 40 kilometres! She would have none of that! I loved to see the look on the driver's faces in the vehicles as we whizzed by. The look that would probably be followed by a statement of disgust and horror.

"Look at that Indian woman. Hasn't she got any respect for that old lady? She's probably scared spitless. So much for those people respecting their Elders!"

After passing she'd hunker down with that complete glassy-eyed stare of satisfaction — as if meditating and hoping for another motoring challenge to come quickly. And despite our hurry she'd always ensure a geography lesson of the countryside, complete with Native place-names and stories of who had hunted where, and the exact year of all the action. She had an incredible mind for detail.

"Once my husband, George Sidney, and I ... well we going up to

Tagish to visit. Gee, it sure was muddy that time. Springtime you know. That mud comes right up to the axle. We were swinging down that road! Sure slippery, that road. That time! Here we hit the ditch. We just slipped right off the road, in there. Hoh! For goodness sakes! Sure was a mess. And not only that, but it's starting to rain again. Can't get out and help my husband. He told me to stay inside the car, no use getting all muddy. After all, I did have on my high heeled shoes and silk stockings. We just came back from church that time. My husband got out his axe and chopped down a whole bunch of willows and little spruce trees to put under the tires. He's going to make a little bridge to try and get that car out, somehow. He'd cut brush, put it under, then get back into the car. He rock it back and forth. Me, I can't drive! Gosh he's just covered with mud and wet too. I feel sorry for him. No one there to help him push us out. Pretty soon another car comes along. Same kind of car, like my old man's old model T. Them too, they're slipping all over. Good to see them coming, but for goodness sakes! They didn't even stop to give my husband a hand. They just drive right by. Not only that, but they splashed him all up with mud! For goodness sakes! He sure was mad that time. But ... pretty soon we got out. This time we take it easy and just go slowly. Here, not too far. Just around the next bend, just a little ways, there's those two white men. Them, they're stuck in the ditch. My husband didn't even look at them, he just look straight ahead, went right by. Me, I said to them, 'Here's to you gentlemen!'" She'd raise her hand as if holding on to a drink at the window.

"Funny, I remember some old timer saying that before. It just came to my mind. Now when we gonna pass somebody it comes to my mind again. Funny hey?"

Mrs. Angela Sidney performing at the Yukon International Storytelling Festival.

Basket of Nations

by Jeff Leer

English interpretation of a speech delivered by Jeff Leer at Angela Sidney's potlatch for her children and grandchildren, July 20, 1991.

My aunts and uncles, thank you for inviting me here.
I would like to speak briefly about my grandmother, Angela,
whom I loved,
and I know she loved me as well.

It seems to me that when I first met Angela
we recognized each other as kindred souls.
She was a Tagish Indian
and so inherited a dual nationality:
she was both Athabaskan and Tlingit.

My case is similar:
even though I am white,
I have become Tlingit as well
through adoption,
so I too have a dual nationality.

And in fact this is true of many people today.
Because of our mobility,
there is much mixing of different nationalities and cultures:
the nations are becoming interspersed.
One person may be Athabaskan on her mother's side
and Tlingit on her father's.
Another may be white on his father's side
and Tlingit on his mother's.
This is indeed the way it has always been with people:
we must embrace the world outside our own families.

Axh àt hás, axh sani hás, gunałchîsh hàt xhat yìyxhùxhú.
Axh tuwâ sigû ch'a yê yguwâtl' du dàt yût xh'axhwdatànî
yá axh àt Stûw xhasixhani
kha hûch tsú xhat saxhánin.
Shux'ânáxh gúshé wùch wutustìnî
wutusikû wùsh xhùnîxh hà istìyî.
Ha hú khu.a Tàgish Khwânxh satîyin,
ách áwé dêxh tîyin du nàxh satìyî,
Gunanàxh wusitì, kha Łingìt tsú áxh wusitì.

Ha xhát tsú yê xhat yatì.
Ch'u ghunâ dlèt khâxh xhat satîyî,
Łingìtxh tsú xhat wusitì
axh yát xh'awdułyùwúch.
Ách áyá xhát tsú dêxh yatì axh nàxh satìyî.

Ha yá yìdadi khâwu tsú yê natìch,
wùch xhùxh yawtudagùwúch áyá wùch xhùnîxh yá hà nastîn,
whùch xhù kâwdihâ yá wùsh ghunayâde nàxh satî.

K'e yâť'à Ghunanàxh sitì du tlâ niyânáxh,
du îsh niyânáxh khu.a Łingìt.
Hêt'à khu.as du îsh niyânáxh dlèt khâ,
du tlâ niyânáxh khu.a Łingìt.
Ch'u shûgudáxh xhá yê natìch Łingìt.
shk'e ghuna.àn aghàxhsatìn, du k'idàkakhwân ch'as axhsakût
[tunatìch.

This is why the old people say
our roots have grown together.
They liken us to the roots of trees
that have grown into one another.
We cannot be pulled apart
because our lives are so closely linked.

So I will use this saying to make an image for you:
we are like a Basket of Nations.
It is as if someone has woven a basket.
She has gone to this tree and selected roots from underneath it,
and from there to the next tree, and the next.
With these roots chosen from many different trees
she has woven her basket.

Now when we come together like this
it is as if we have been fashioned into the Basket of Nations.
After it is woven,
it is placed here before you,
my aunts and uncles,
so that you may place within this basket
the feelings of loss and sorrow you have for Angela,
who has departed from us.

And it is as if this basket has been lined with down feathers
to make it soft enough to hold your grief.
My hope is that our words of encouragement
will be like these down feathers,
that they may comfort your souls with their warmth.

This is why we have come together here,
so that your minds may be lifted by our love.
May it be so for you,
my aunts and uncles,
may you find the strength to take up your lives again
with faith and hope.

Ách áyá yê yanakhêch tlagù khâwu,
Hà xhàdî wùch xhùt yawdzi.à.
Wùch xhùt yawdzi.àyi às xhàdî
yê hà wdudliyàkhw:
tléł àdé wûshdáxh hà naxhdudziyìghî yé.
wûsht wuduwa.agi yé yáxh yatì hà khustìyî.

Á áyá yê kkhwałayâkhw,
Nà yìkhágu áyá uhân.
Ùwayâ khákw wudu.àgú shàwátch.
Yâtà às áyá a tayìdáxh yê adàné a xhàdî,
adaxh tsu hêt'à, kha tsu hêt'à.
Yá łdakát yêdáxh ayawsihayi à às xhàtx'î
khákwxh ałyêxh.

Yê áyá yâx' hà yawdahàyî
Nà yìkháguxh hà wdudliyexhi yé yáxh hà yatì.
Ch'as k'adên yan wudu.àgîdáxh
yì wakhshiyìt wuduwatán,
axh àt hás, axh sani hás,
a tû yé naxhyi.ùwu yîs
du dàtùwú
yú hà nákh wùgùdi axh ât, Stûw.

K'e xh'wâł' tsú a tâde wdudli.àt k'adên,
Yì tùwú nîgughâ kagaxhshaxh'wâł'shán.
Gu.àł kwshé yê nghatì hà yù xh'atángi,
yì tùwú axhłat'à.

Ha ách xhâyá wûsht wutudi.át
yì tùwú gaxhłatsìnî khusaxhán tûnáxh.
Ha yê áyá nghatì yì tùwú,
axh àt hás, axh sani hás.

Skookum Jim's Frog Helper

by Angela Sidney

To start with, they (Skookum Jim's family) built a little log house there in Dyea. People used to go there a long time ago, before Skagway was a city. They had only one store there. They stayed there all the time, Skookum Jim's family. But in fall time the ground is getting frozen already. But it's coast, you know, different climate.

Here he went to bathroom outside. When he's coming back, he hear something making noise. "Whoo", just like sand pouring down. So he stopped and listened. Here there was a ditch alongside the house there where they dig up the sand and put it on top of the moss for roofing. That's what they used long time ago.

So he went on the edge and looked down and here sure enough there was a big frog — coast frogs are bigger than this frog, you know. Long way from water, too, they said. Here it was trying to jump up and trying to get back. But he fall down, keep doing that, I don't know how long. Gravel fell down with him. That's what's making the noise.

Anyway, Skookum Jim saw it, so he was looking around for a board. Here he found a board and he shoved it down that hole there, and then that frog crawled on that board. So Uncle Skookum Jim just lifted it up, lifted it up and carry it and took it down to the creek. There must be a creek there. This is Dyea. So anyway, he left it there. He let it go.

And about a year or so after, here he got kicked in the stomach by a drunkard man. And it got festered. Oh, he was sick, they say. It happened somewhere around winter time. He was so sick he couldn't walk no more. And here it broke open toward the outside.

That's when my mother was looking after him. Well, he's my daddy's cousin. Their mothers were sisters. My mother's got three kids — four altogether with my oldest brother. And she's got one baby and twin girls, four altogether. My mother was looking after them.

Skookum Jim's wife and my daddy, they go pack stuff. They're freighting over the summit toward Bennett. They get paid for packing stuff. Flour, soap, everything like that. And that's what my father was doing, and my mother stayed home and looked after the kids and my Uncle Skookum Jim.

And here, one morning in June, his stomach broke out. Sun was way out already when my mother heard Skookum Jim calling her: "Mrs. John, Mrs. John, *la'ùshtla, la'ùshtla,* wake up. Come on!" Well, she got up. She's young person. She jump up and went over there.

"Look at this thing here." Here he was too hot, it was just burning, that sore place. So he had his blanket way up and his shirt way open and he pulled off those bandages because it was too hot. He want to air it, open place. And here he feel something tickle there. That's why he looked down. Here it was a frog licking that sore place and that's what it was that wake him up. My mother see it. Then she just got a board or something and put that frog on that. It never jumped, too — nothing, just stay like that.

Well, my mother used to have silk thread and beads and stuff too. She was good then. She wasn't blind then. They gave him silk thread and some beads. Swan down feathers. Put it all around him too, and then she took it down to the creek and left it there. That's payment for Skookum Jim to that frog. They pay him.

And here, two or three days after, he's starting to feel better and that started to heal up too. So it healed up good in no time, just in a week or so. He's all better and he's able to walk around good again.

I don't know how long after that he wants to see his mother. His mother lives at Carcross — *Natasahin* they call it in Tlingit: "water running through the narrows." Tagish way they call it *Todezani*: "blowing all the time." He wants to see if his mother is okay. It's getting fall time. The ground is frozen already, but no snow yet. So he went through the pass there (between Tagish and Carcross), *Shash zetigi*: "grizzly bear throat" they call it, because there's always north wind blowing through there. It's open there too, just like down a throat.

So, through there he went to see his mother, down in Carcross. And here he camped half–way, around the first lake from here (Crag Lake), just right in the middle. There's camp places there all the time, brush camp there all the time, and here he camped there. He slept there.

That's the time he dreamt a nice–looking lady came to him. Gee, she's just pure, just like you can see through here, just like shining gold shining. He said that lady tell him, "I come for you. I want you to go with me. I come for you now. I want you to marry me," she said. And my uncle said, "No, I can't marry you. I got wife already. My wife and children are in Tagish." That's what he dreamed he told this lady, he said.

"Well," she said, "If you can't go with me, I'll give you my walking stick." She give it to him. Well, that walking stick just looks like gold. Well, he knows gold after that! Just shiny as could be, that walking stick. So he took it. He tells her, "Thank you."

"You save me one time," she said. "I was almost starving and I was just about going to die, and here you saved me one time. And I'm the one that saved you too when you were sick. When you were sick, I saved you. I helped you. I medicine you, that's why you got better.

That's what that lady supposed to tell him, 'cause he dreamt that. And that lady tell him when she gave him that walking stick, "You're going to find the bottom of this walking stick. You're going to find it this way." So he looked at it and, gee, everything is shining, looks like gold. "Look this way," she said, pointing towards Atlin. "Look this way."

He looks and he sees just like a search light coming up.

"That's not for you though; that's for somebody else. You go down this way (and) you're going to have luck, your walking stick" (toward Dawson). That's what that lady is supposed to tell him.

When he woke up in the morning, here there was snow on top of him, about a foot deep, they say. It snowed that night. I guess he slept open place. He didn't sleep under anything.

After he eat breakfast, he went down to Carcross. He got to Carcross that night, and his mother (and those people), they're fine. It's okay. That's after his father died, I guess, because they never mention his father when they tell this story. They just say his mother. Some of her grandchildren are staying with them. There are some other people there, too, I guess. But they just mentioned his mother. She was fine, nothing wrong, lots of wood, lots to eat. Everything.

So he just stayed one night and he started to go back and he camped on the way back too. Then he finally got home. He thought he's gone four days. (When he got there) they tell him, "What kept you so long then; you're gone eleven days." He don't believe it. "No," they said, "You're gone eleven days."

Well, after that, he forgot about his dream. About a year later, though, that's the time he went down the (Yukon) river. Didn't think any more about it until he went down the river and found gold.

Until recently, Indian children in the Yukon learned about their world either from their own personal experiences or from instruction by elders. Other people told stories about how the world as we know it came to be. Many of ... [Mrs. Sidney's] stories deal with the origins of the world and the transformations or changes which took place in the time when animals acted and looked like human beings. They also describe ways to deal with the tremendous powers present throughout the universe. Dealing with such powers is an important theme in most of ... [her] stories. The stories give both practical instruction about how to survive and philosophical instruction about the nature of the universe.

From the Introduction to Tagish Stories,
by Julie Cruikshank

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