

SASQUATCH STORY

By Tom Sewid

Every family within the *Kwakwaka'wakw* and *Laichwiltach* Tribes of Northeastern and Northwestern Vancouver Island, British Columbia, has different stories about what an ancestor experienced when encountering a Dzoonakwa/Sasquatch. These stories come to life in legends that have been passed down for thousands of years and come to life in dance at our Potlatch ceremonies.

Every Tribe and family has a legend about the 'Dzoonakwa', 'Sasquatch' or 'Wildwoman of the Woods' taking children away that are bad. They say Dzoonakwa always watches from the forest children and young people. She's not allowed to take them unless they misbehave. If they act up, steal, whine, are lazy, pull tantrums, don't do their chores, fight or don't listen to their scout leaders, she can take that bad child or young person.

Dzoonakwa runs from the forest and grabs the bad young person with her big, hairy arm. They say she will reach through a window or tear through a tent. She then rubs Spruce tree sap into the eyes of the bad

young person so they are blind and cannot see. The child is tossed into her basket on her back or stuffed into a sack woven from red cedar bark. It's like a giant coffee bean or potato sack.

Dzoonakwa then runs into the forest, up a tall mountain to her invisible home, and that's where she boils up the bad children and eats them. So you young people, always ensure you behave, especially when you are out in the forest. You must remember that Dzoonakwa is always watching to ensure that you behave yourself, do what is asked of you, and always remember to listen to your elders, especially your Scout leaders.

Now, you young people, remember one thing about life: They say you will meet people from all over. Some will even come from other parts of the world.

THE LEGEND OF *DZOOKAKWA OR SASQUATCH*

Thousands of years ago, in one of our villages, a young boy was born from his mother's nose. They say he looked like what comes from your nose, felt slippery like what comes from your nose and was even the same colour as what comes from your nose. Everyone called him Booger Boy.

He was just like that young girl or boy you know from school or Scouts who is singled out, picked on, ridiculed, and bullied all because they seem a little different. That is wrong, and one should never judge someone just because they seem different. Well, that was Booger Boy, and he had no friends.

He did make friends with a blind old man from the village who made knives, arrowheads and spearheads by napping rocks like flint, obsidian and chert. Booger Boy would wake the old man up each day, grab his hand, and walk him through the village to the stream so both could wash and fill their wooden box with water for drinking throughout the day. Booger Boy would then grab his hand and walk him through the village, missing all the totem poles and outside benches to put the old man where he knapped the stone to make tools and weapons for the villagers. The old man made the boy an obsidian knife to use and wear with a sheath on his belt.

Booger Boy would then go into the forest and play with the animals, for they were his friends. He could not play in the village, for the other boys and girls would bully him and make fun of him because he came from a different place than they had come, he felt different, and he was a different colour.

One late afternoon, he saw that the sun was falling, so not wanting to misbehave, he knew it was time to go home for dinner. Just as he came to the edge of the forest by the village, he saw all the other children playing in a field. He was asked to join them in their game similar to baseball.

Young Booger Boy could not believe what he heard when an older boy who always picked on him told him to stay by the forest edge and catch the balls that were hit there. Booger Boy was so excited that he did not know he was being picked on again, for he was standing where all the prickly bushes and stinging nettles were. Regardless, he felt he was finally being included in the game with the village children. They all played on for a long time, not noticing the sun going down and Booger Boy not feeling the stings and pricks of thorns in his excitement of being included.

Dzoonakwa, The Wildwoman of the Woods, waited until the sun went behind an island to the west. She bolted from the forest and started grabbing the kids with her big hairy arm and big hand, all the misbehaving children! One by one she grabbed each child and tossed them in her sack.

When her sack was almost full, she looked around and saw Booger Boy, this different-coloured child, standing at the forest edge. She ran at Booger Boy and reached out to grab him, but her big hand slipped, for he was slippery! Running away, Booger Boy tried to save himself, but Dzoonakwa kept chasing and grabbing until finally she got her big hairy arm around him and stuffed him in her sack.

She threw the sack full of screaming and crying children on her back and ran deep into the forest. She smiled and licked her lips, knowing she had a whole sack of bad children to boil up and eat!

Inside the sack, Booger Boy said to all, *“Because I am slippery and I am at the top of all you children, I will wiggle and slip my way through you all to the bottom of the sack. I will take out my obsidian knife, which the old man Flintnapper made me, and cut the sack. We will all spill out, and they say Dzoonakwa is kind of slow in mind, so she will not notice we are gone from her sack. I will then lead us back to the village.”*

Booger Boy did exactly as he said, and when they all spilled out on the dark forest floor, they watched Dzoonakwa keep running deeper into the forest. Booger Boy then called to his friends, the animals, to help direct him and the children back to their village. It took them a long time in the dark night, but they all made it safely home.

They say the Chief of the village had a big Potlatch celebration in Booger Boys’ honour for being so brave and saving all the children in the village. The Chief gave Booger Boy a new name and commanded his people to call him that forever due to his bravery, for one cannot be called Booger Boy forever. The Chief also admitted he had singled out Booger Boy as everyone else had, and now it was his command that this never happens again.

Moral of the Story

The moral of this legend for you Scouts is that you will meet people from different places than you. Some will be a different colour, they may speak differently, and their hair may even feel different.

You must be like the old man Flintnapper. He loved Booger Boy, and that’s why he made him an obsidian knife. Booger Boy led him to and from the stream to bathe and get drinking water. He held the old man’s hand and led him through the village.

You see, the old man was blind; he couldn’t judge people based on how they looked. He could only judge on how good they were and how good their

heart was. Booger Boy may have come from a different place than other children, looked different, and even felt different, but Flintnapper knew he was just another good person. **So, remember, singling out someone for their difference is bad, for it’s what we call bigotry or prejudice.**

Never ever do that, and if you do, you best look over your shoulder, especially at a Scout camp, for Dzoonakwa is watching, and she will grab you with a big hairy arm! She will rub spruce sap in your eyes to make you blind and toss you in her basket on her back or in her sack. She will then take you deep into the woods to her invisible home atop a mountain and boil you up and eat you! Now behave and listen to your Scout leaders!

Halla Kas La/Go In Peace

—Thomas Sewid

About Tom Sewid:

My name is Thomas Sewid, and I am a Kwakwaka’wakw and Cree First Nation who grew up on Northern Vancouver Island, British Columbia. As far back as I can remember, I saw masks and regalia performed in our great ceremonial building called *Guk’dzi* in our *Kwak’wala* language, otherwise known as a Big House. Posts and pillars were carved with animal crests, and in most Big House’s, one sees *Dzoonakwa*, The Wild Woman of the Woods, otherwise known as Sasquatch, is carved, for it is our Tribes highest ranked crest.

As a young boy and even now that I am a 58-year-old man, I love seeing family regalia of Dzoonakwa come to life in dance, song and drumming in our great ceremonies in a Big House called Potlatch.

