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Prophet at Yandeistakye

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“Glate Ankow”

Sideways rain turns to sleet, crusting six bodies huddled against the blast. One white man and five Tlingits have waited in their tents all day for *Glate Ankow*—Ice Chief—to emerge from the tempest. He arose before light and set off on a glacial traverse from which he has yet to return.

“Muir must be a witch to seek knowledge in a place like this,” the wizened headman declares, “and in such miserable weather.” What other reason could lead a *gunuk* onto the ice-giants on a day like this?

Another man, largest in the group, adds to the signal fire a stump left over from a forgotten Ice Age. Flames shoot into the wind, streaking the darkness. The elder’s words give voice to his thoughts. “This is a bad-luck place. No protection in the storm. Rolling icebergs may eat our canoe, but I say leave while we are still alive.”

Just before midnight, when all traces of day are compressed to black despair, the men hear the faint crunch of footsteps. Moments later, *Glate Ankow* appears. From under sopping oilskins emerges a long face framed by an unruly beard. Firelight spills from his eyes. Embarrassed and angry, the Tlingits stare at the ground as their white companion rises to shake hands with his associate.

“Ah!” sighs John Muir. “I’m glad to be in camp, the glacier almost got me this time. If it had not been for the beacon and old To’watte, I might have had to spend the night on the ice...I was actually going farther in the glacier when I caught the flash of light.”

The Native crew feared him lost, says missionary Hall Young. He assures them that Muir walks with God’s blessing, but the men take little comfort, and insist on decamping.

The old chief, To’watte, lifts his head. “My heart is not strong. We need my canoe to get out of this ice-prison, but I fear it’s too late, and wind will smash us into the icebergs.”

A sudden gust moans its reply, straining the guy-lines of the two canvas tents.

The big man, a Hoona seal hunter, stands to face John Muir a few dark inches away. “If you like danger so much, we will leave you with all the danger you want. Do you know why my people never come here this time of year? We want to live a little longer.”

The adventurer clucks once, and squats in the lee of the tent. One by one, the others hunch around him. Young hands him a plate of hot food, which Muir ignores as he speaks through the interpreter, Stickeen John. In a bold tongue powered by his fervor for the natural world, Muir assures his companions that for ten years he “wandered alone in the mountains and storms, and good luck always followed me; that with me...they need fear nothing. The storm would soon cease and the sun would shine to show us the way we should go, for God cares for us and guides us as long as we are trustful and brave, therefore all childish fear must be put away.”

There is a long pause as the men consider the authority of Muir’s speech. Over the windstorm, the missionary adds a few words about faith. Perhaps to show his bravery, the young man Kadachan brightens and says he likes to travel with “good-luck people.” To’watte adds that Muir’s talk makes his heart strong again, and that he won’t fear the canoe breaking up, for if it does he will go to heaven in good company.

As the men drift back to their tents, Muir focuses his attentions on giving a full account to Young. He describes “a thousand rooms of God’s crystal temple...a thousand feet down in the crevasses, with matchless domes and sculpted figures and carved ice-work all around me...I was tempted to stay there and feast my soul, and softly freeze until I would become part of the glacier. What a great death that would be!” Muir’s fervid monologue lasts three or four hours.

Steered by Muir’s boundless faith, the crew lingers in the bay two more days, then navigates an outgoing tide back into an island kingdom of forests and bears and people.

The Hoona guide returns to his village. After overnighting at a Tlingit fish camp behind Point Couverden, the crew heads north into Chilkat Territory carrying news of a Presbyterian God to the last heathen Indians on the Pacific West Coast.

At forty-one, John Muir is just beginning to hone the voice that shaped modern American ecological conscience. Years of exploring Yosemite’s wild Sierras make him a

regional celebrity, but in October 1879 he is not yet nationally known as a wilderness crusader. A vigorous international debate spurs Muir's visit to Alaska to prove that glaciers—not wind, rain, and earthquakes—carved California's "Range of Light." The famed naturalist's tempest-tossed exploration of Glacier Bay confirms his geologic theory. But in the following week, Muir is forced to re-examine his understanding of humanity, indigenous and civilized, as he witnesses the fortitude of unconquered people. His role as an agent of Manifest Destiny brings the mighty Chilkat Tlingits to a cultural divide, setting off a chain of events that offers unique insights into the survival of a frontier community.

Staged against a backdrop of glaciers, Tolkeinian peaks, and trackless forests, the wilderness prophet alters forever the relationship between a people and their place. In a speech that is part Christian homily, part Transcendental panegyric, Muir pitches brotherhood to proud stewards who open their land to the crush of outsiders eager to recast themselves in frontier clay. Seven generations later, the twenty-five hundred residents of Chilkat Valley are consumed by a series of battles, the aftershocks of which stir a nation, and still echo in my hometown of Haines, Alaska.



Frontier Rhetoric

A hundred summers bloom and fade before my jet hits the tarmac at Juneau International where I walk into a clash of cultures no less vivid than that which confronted Muir. Eager to be away from the intensity of a graduate teaching fellowship in rhetoric at the University of Oregon, supervising teenage work crews in some of the hairiest corners of Southeast Alaska sounds exciting. Kids come from every major region of the state—Tlingit, Athapaskan, Yup'ik, Inupiaq, and Aleut kids fresh from their villages, along with urban non-Natives from Anchorage, Fairbanks, Juneau. In the scant three-month season, choppers and twin-engines gun through coastal cloudscapes to offload us on remote islands where we dig and hack and schlep until the planes appear ten or so days later.

For a month of spike camps, my crew and I slog waist-deep in muck, whacking miles of devil's club and root wad to connect lakes on a cross-island canoe route. In the brochures, Admiralty is called "Fortress of the Bears" because it sustains the densest population of brown bears on earth. A .375 H&H magnum bolt action rifle hangs on my shoulder at all times. At the end of a dinner of canned chicken and potatoes, we hear heavy noise in the food tent. I crouch between eight teens and the intruder. We holler and bang cookware; I lock a bullet in the chamber. A furry head pushes aside a blue tarp flap, tinned ham wreckage gleaming in her mouth. A 17-year old Aleut girl behind me wails, "What am I, a slave? I'm not getting paid enough for this shit!" At \$3.85 an hour, she's right. It is a summer of high cultural irony.

When the kids go home at season's end, co-whackers Jon and Andy conspire with me on a traverse up Muir Inlet in Glacier Bay National Park. From Muir's descriptions in *Travels in Alaska*, I hope to identify and explore literary territory. A day-boat drops us off at Wolf Point, which was covered with ice several hundred feet thick when Muir observed his namesake glacier from its terminus. A century of melt pushed the glacier back thirty miles, revealing *terra incognita*. An hour's thrash through woven alder breaks us out into the stark relief of newborn land. For a week we wander over old ice and fresh earth, on gravel and scraped bedrock recently exposed by retreating glaciers. Every foothold is loose; shed-sized boulders dislodge with the slightest nudge. I keep looking into the air, imagining John Muir clambering on ice twenty stories overhead.

One startlingly clear day begins with a trudge up to the rim of White Thunder Ridge where we take in views across the narrow fjord to McBride and Riggs Glaciers. Wide, crystalline freeways stretch from black-rock battlements on the horizon down a few miles to a wall of blue turrets poised for a tumble into seawater. The fjord finger crooks westward into the face of Muir Glacier. Ice-towers topple into berg-clogged seawater the color of a troubled sky. I imagine the terrain John Muir surveyed a century ago, "a prairie-like expanse" of ice dotted by barren shoals that became ridgetops like this one. So much has melted away.

Twelve hundred feet below our viewpoint, a falling tide sucks frozen flotillas toward the main body of Glacier Bay. We descend bouldered slopes to a huge lunch-rock protruding just above tidewater, a perch on which we sprawl in sunshine as icebergs bob

by. At the fjord's terminus four miles away, the towering face of Muir Glacier. Any attempt to utter meaningful description feels trite, like staring at the Sistine Chapel or through a grove of redwoods. Other than an occasional lichen, cotton-grass, or dwarf fireweed, the scene is devoid of biota. We are vulnerable, exposed, numbed by magnificence. In silence, my friends and I gaze into the "solitude of ice and snow and newborn rocks." Only the rimmed aperture of blue sky reminds us of a living world beyond these walls.

In graduate school, I fantasized about this place from within the glass umbilicus of my study carrel at the University of Oregon library. Muir's photocopied visage stared over my shoulder, gaze crackling with prescience, framed in a prophet's beard. His first glimpse into glacial panoramas at once "dim, drear, mysterious," captivated me as much as his use of persuasive language to incite a national conservation movement. Intent on assembling a rhetoric of American conservation, I immersed myself in the language of Muir, Teddy Roosevelt, Robert Marshall, Aldo Leopold, and Rachel Carson.

Not long into my research, I realized that a fair study of America's environmental debate required equal time for the opposition. To comprehend the language of conservation, I needed to sit in a circle with the standard-bearers of Manifest Destiny: George Custer, Andrew Carnegie, Gifford Pinchot, Ayn Rand, and presidents Jackson, Grant, and again, TR. When the weight of conducting a "fair" study sunk in it became apparent that I must acknowledge the influence of Native American oratory on the national wordscape.

Land use rhetoric—whether promoting jobs, ecosystems, ownership, or policy—is borne of passion for a perceived opportunity or imminent disaster, often both. From the certainty of a Truth emanates a Mission, details be damned. To defend a vision for land is to lay bare your soul.

That arguments could be won on anything less than pure logic was shocking. I grew up believing that most people used language to negotiate toward a higher truth. To argue without regard for others seemed skewed, almost criminal. After debating my way to honors and scholarships in high school and college, now as a grad assistant coach I knew firsthand the values and pitfalls of passion in public debate. Emotion clouds the issues, which can be good or bad, depending on who's doing the clouding. Issues,

Aristotle assured me, arose from a rhetorical exigency, a urgent need from which messages arise. The U.S. needs energy. These people must have jobs. This place must be kept ecologically intact.

Conflict alerts the rhetorical warriors (citizen advocates, lawyers, politicians, corporations) who use media to convey persuasive messages to anyone who will listen. When advocates attach passion to a place—this tree, town, ocean, planet—they hitch their hearts to universal themes: health, respect, consequences, future generations. Out of the fray, I believed, well-meaning people would persevere to a better way built on laws, decrees, promises.

Promises, though, melt in the heat of the public's perceived need. Vows to the natural world, I learned, mean little to some whose language is fueled by profit. While agreements are regularly forged to protect land and natural resources, the door remains ajar. Wilderness areas are not "forever wild." Endangered species can still vanish. No real guarantees govern clean air and water. No silver bullet or tongue exists that will quell debate over the best use of America's lands. It is an endless discussion. The quality of my research required that I listen to all sides, even empathize with those I might have cast as adversaries. Rather than work under the aegis of "conservation rhetoric" and its pro-con paradigm, I embraced the messy totality, which I justified to my professors as "frontier rhetoric."

In the first five minutes of my final thesis review, I realized that only one professor on the committee—my roommate—had read the 262-page doorstop. Teachers of graduate seminars on the rhetoric of race, women, and presidents had little to say about frontier. How is this topic relevant? Isn't the frontier dead? And who was this man—John Muir? He sounds like a reckless fool driven by religious delusion. Bewildered by my fervor, committee members nonetheless approved the thesis weeks later. I was back in Alaska when I heard the news.

A crack splits the air, followed by several detonations and a roar that reverberates for a full minute in the canyon-fjord. A third of Muir Glacier's mile-wide face—tens of thousands of tons of ice—sloughs into the sea. The plunging mass heaves a single wave ten feet high, gnashing huge bergs as it thunders down the corridor. Pure reflex sends us scrambling back up the boulder slope just far enough to watch the surge smash into our

picnic overlook. Car-sized ice chunks clatter and collide across the ledge where moments before we munched on nuts and chocolate, dreaming in rarified sunlight.

More than its power, the sheer indifference of the wave spooks us. We discuss our cosmic insignificance as we climb toward the ridegetop. Solid reasoning kept the Tlingits out of here. Not far from the summit, our ledge-walk ends at a gravel chute, one of thousands that plunge down these denuded slopes. Jon and I scurry forty feet up the pea-gravel funnel to another, bigger shelf, and a clear route to the summit of White Thunder Ridge. We eat more chocolate, waiting.

“Whooa. I don’t know about this,” we hear Andy say as he arrives at the notch. “That’s an awfully long way down.”

For the first time, we focus on the chute—a thousand-foot luge to an angel’s plunge into icy seawater.

“Don’t look down,” Jon and I command with voices more assured than we feel. Andy is reluctant. Over the next hour, we talk him into the chute, then cheer his belly-crawl toward our perch. About ten feet from our outstretched hands, Andy’s head goes down, shoulders heaving. His wool-clad body slides a few inches.

“This is it,” he wheezes. “I should have known better. My mother—“ He breaks. “My mother will be so upset if I die.”

“Andy,” Jon and I harmonize, casting words like rope. “Andy, you’re almost there,” I say. “Stick with us, man. We’re “good-luck people,” remember? Just like Muir. We all come out okay in the end. Dig your toes in, bud. Step up. Nothing’s gonna happen. Dig in, Andy. Dig in and let’s get out of here.”

A spasm of spider-steps brings Andy within our clutches. He laughs wildly as we pull him up onto us, splashing us with his relief. ““Good-luck people!’ Ri-ight.” We revive Andy with chocolate, then recount close calls all the way back to camp.

Later, when the three of us are sardined in a two-man tent, our exploits seem haphazard and foolish. In the brief interlude between our delicious snuggle into sleeping bags and the hibernation that follows, someone says something about finding a home.

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Homefires

Stubbornness, mostly, led me to hew a home base on a semi-remote coast thirty miles east of Muir Glacier, as the bald eagle flies. Some days, when I collect seaweed mulch on the beach or paddle to my car, I gaze into the ice-wracked Takhinsha Mountains and remember the week we walked on new land. After thirty years of in-depth exploration it is easy to imagine an eagle's eye view.

Wings outstretched to a seven-foot plane, a bald eagle launches from the summit of White Thunder Ridge. He glides over two mountain ranges yoked together by ice, then downdrafts a williwaw above Davidson Glacier to enter Lynn Canal, biggest fjord in North America. The bird rockets ahead, Davidson Lake below, and across the forested fan moraine, then over three miles of seawater to the tip of a peninsula that divides Lynn Canal into two inlets, Chilkat and Chilkoot. About halfway up the fifteen-mile partition, Mud Bay bites a mile-long estuary out of otherwise rocky shores. He swoops in for a scan. My house is one among a dozen or so built on the roadless shore, accessed by humans on foot or in boats. No food-scrap in sight, so the eagle hitches a draft over the peninsula's mountainous spine for a flight north along the plunging coastline, to rest finally in a big spruce overlooking today's best chances for a snack—the downtown waterfront of Haines, Alaska.

While Saturday morning humanity clatters about, the eagle drops to the mid-tide beach to gulp the remains of a filleted halibut carcass, then returns to an upper branch of the big spruce. He needs hardly extend a wing to the afternoon's freshening sou'easter to ascend from the treetop and soar northwest over town and up the Chilkat River valley. A key source of nutrition for eagles, bears, and local humans, *jil'kaat* means "salmon storehouse" in Tlingit. Still full of halibut, he traverses twenty miles of braided glacial channels until arriving at Klukwan, "mother village" of the Chilkat people. The outsized bird alights on a prominent cottonwood branch to survey the muscular current below, milky with glacial flour, and the delta expanse beyond.

Come fall, upwards of four thousand American bald eagles will gather on these "Council Grounds" to feast on a late chum salmon run. Although sub-freezing weather is the norm, water stays open due to warm upwellings flushed in the confluence of three

ivers. The water wriggles with food. Nothing as easy as the halibut, though, so the eagle, flaps several long, steady beats across the flats, angles over Klukwan, and rides the thermals back two dozen river miles.

After a general northwest slant, the upper Chilkat twists northeast and stairsteps into cloud-hemmed peaks toward its origins in Yukon ice. Instead of following the stream beyond treeline, the bird rises over a pass in the Takshanuk Range, slants east, and drops into the head of another river valley hemmed by mountains. From two thousand feet aloft, he scans the deep forest of the upper Chilkoot watershed as it flows ten miles south to Chilkoot Lake. At the lake end far opposite the river mouth, the grand glacial valley narrows to a few hundred yards where the Chilkoot River leaves the lake for its last mile to the sea.

The great bird descends for a closer look at the river, a misty corridor walled by old growth spruce. Its mate is hunched atop an coho carcass on a grassy bank. He shrieks an acknowledgement and lands a few yards away on a boulder jumble seamed with moss and blueberry. Bolted to stone, a small metal sign announces the man-name: Deer Rock. He scans for any other obvious snacks—seeing none, opens his wings and maneuvers out to his mate. She delivers a piercing admonition. He returns to the rock, and sulks.

In the lazy, late morning that it takes to wing from Glacier Bay to Deer Rock, the eagle outlines much of a 2.6 million-acre homeland once considered the property of Chilkat and Chilkoot people. They still claim it. Contrary to common perceptions of Native Americans as communistic, Tlingit identity hinges on ownership of *aat.oow* that includes personal effects such as regalia or weapons as well as landscape—lakes, stream mouths, berry patches, beaches—even stars. As custodians of two coveted passes into interior lands, northern Tlingits historically required that visitors ask permission, and likely pay for, use of their territory.

In the centuries before 1867, when Chilkats and Chilkoots acceded control to the United States, traditional conflicts usually ignited around rights of entry, resource use, or personal affront. Reverend Young held that Tlingits derive from the ancient Jews because of their “ready acceptance of the doctrine of blood-atonement.” Tlingit law dictated that wrongs be avenged equally, sparking fierce, bloody warfare between villages and clan groups.

To prevent perpetual grudge matches, each Tlingit community established a “peace rock” where embattled local parties resolved grievances and recommitted themselves to unity. Becoming American changed that, too. In the dozen years that followed purchase, a trickle of white strangers penetrated the northern territory seeking to traverse the Chilkat and Chilkoot passes. Some made it through, some were refused, some disappeared. Months before his week among the northern Tlingit, John Muir reported that “like the Macedonians, these savages (are) warlike and inflexible in their opposition to the entrance of miners into their mountains.” Not so much, he believed, to those who brought God’s Word.

Opposition to newcomers softened when the enterprising Tlingit learned that the growing stream of prospectors meant tolls and employment as packers. When inevitable conflicts arose, however, American gunships quashed traditional solutions in favor of legal sanctions, requiring Natives to settle differences in a court of law. Shrewd and adaptable, Tlingits worked the system, producing a remarkable fellowship of attorneys, politicians, and business leaders.

In the rough-and-tumble arena of Alaska politics and finance, Deer Rock is little more than a sign at a turn-out on a one-lane road. But to this frontier rhetorician, Deer Rock is a lodestone. Since settling in Haines in the early 1980s, I’ve often visited the rock, imagined the peacemaking ceremony. A shaman tosses eagle down into a faint breeze. Drums thud. Men become deer, meet in sacred space, dance, and embrace. Food is shared while listening to oratory honoring former enemies. I listen to the river’s voice as I crouch on its banks, journal in hand, or stand in chest waders with a fishing rod poised for a strike, bottleglass water twisting around me. On the wall next to this computer is a black-and-white photo of my then-5-year-old son, Charlie Skyhawk Henry, leaning over the low, metal sign. *Guwakaan teiyee*. Deer Rock. It haunts me.

In an America in which contemporary discourse seeks to red-pen, rather than merge, our differences, Deer Rock is a reminder of other pathways leading to reconciliation. Beyond the stream of words, language is empty unless guided by prospects for resolution. Without hope for real, lasting peace, the patter of polarization hardens us. I came to Haines fresh out of graduate school looking for a case study in the language of land use. It took only a few weeks to realize that Haines was a vital subject. Three decades of notes and interviews from the epicenters of my community’s most explosive rhetorical events leave me with a house full of paper and more questions: What are the sources of our conflicts? Can we learn to anticipate them, and form our

messages in ways that still honor all participants? How do we make up and move on? How do we bequeath peace-making strategies to our children?

To communities bound by the razor wire of partisan politics, where is our Deer Rock?

I am wed to these questions. Born first-generation-off-the-ranch to a teacher and a nurse who fled rural Oregon for the suburbs when I was six, I grew up straddling a rural-urban divide. Rural meant farm chores, hunting, fishing, camping, and evening storytelling; urban offered school, debate contests, plays, concerts, and the mall. In frontier rhetoric, I discovered my passion for the clash over perceived “wise use” of natural resources. For the next thirty years I pursued a fascination with what Wallace Stegner called the “unbroken double song of love and lamentation,” sung by besieged conservationists against the destruction of habitat for which we are ultimately culpable. In a democracy, rhetorical engagement is an inevitable part of the journey. As long as citizens meet in public to process our different visions, we will leap, stumble, and slouch toward resolving conflict between the side of ourselves honoring the natural world and the other demanding utility and profit.

What if, like Tlingits, we danced?

I am searching for the steps. As a debate coach, I pore over sets of arguments, and consider their relative successes and failures. As a member of a community hanging by the thread of its exploitable resources, I regularly witness public execration over opposing visions. As a property owner, I wince at neighbors who revile each other based on differing views of land on which we are intimately joined. As a father, I pray that my son is prepared to accept opposition as part of a natural, even necessary, process.

In a state known for obstreperous politics, Haines is legendary. Ours suits the model devised by Frederick Jackson Turner, who grew up ten miles from John Muir’s home. In his 1892 essay announcing the closure of the country’s frontier, Turner described the growth of a nation characterized in part by its edge where opportunists, pariahs, and dreamers could escape the withering reins of domestic society. Unable to reconcile the rise of regulation and refinement that marks civilization, the restless few discovered zones of “perennial rebirth” where they devised ways to pursue their visions in concert with harsh landscapes and unorthodox neighbors. Through these enclaves of edge-dwellers, Turner wrote, America sustained her identity as Land of the Free.

If that's so, Haines is a free-for-all. Our Shakespearean squabbles prompted a member of the Alaska Tolerance Commission in 2001 to say that, statewide, "Haines has a reputation, and it's no secret." John Muir opened the gates for us—stubborn dreamers dedicated to an American myth here on the margin of vast wilderness.

Right, left, or none of the above, those who move here cherish freedom with the ferocity of an eagle protecting her supper. Many come looking to be left alone, yet find themselves increasingly interdependent and concerned about who controls what. Never conquered by military, Tlingits act like they own the place. Loggers and miners (who are sometimes Tlingit) can't understand why more local resources aren't extracted to create jobs. Environmentalists (including Tlingits) can't understand the unnatural laws that encourage the Corporate Ones to continue eating ecosystems. Artists (plenty of whom are Tlingit) can't understand why anyone would want to wreck the natural beauty of this place. Put us all in a room together and ask us to make a decision. I dare you.

No one except the occasional government employee is transferred to Haines; all the rest of us come here to make a stand. We are a community of twenty-five hundred righteous know-it-alls who discovered something like paradise in this place. Meetings about human incursions into wilderness—timber sales, heli-skiers, gold mines, cruise ships, parks, fish, bears, eagles, noise, water, zoning, roads—draw lively, contentious crowds. Let these pages stand as testament to the magnitude of my neighbors' disharmony over competing mythologies, the language we use to bolster our visions, and the manner in which our words reflect the rhetorical gunplay that sets frontier town halls ablaze. And let me suggest possible outcomes of community shoot-outs—wisdom and forbearance. Maybe even a kind of peace.



Glacial Mission

On the morning of October 30, John Muir's crew paddled out of Glacier Bay and east along the north shore of Icy Strait until intersecting with Chatham Strait. On the left, the largest fjord in North America cut north into Chilkat country. They beached at a fish camp in the jigsaw islands behind Point Couverden, a clan outpost Tlingit people called Grouse Fort. Men emerged from thick woods and strode to water's edge. After a short

palaver, they helped pull the canoe and supplies beyond high tide's reach. The Chilkat are at peace, they say, and safe to approach. Along the path to the headman's house, Muir noted a storage hut packed to the rafters with salmon, fish oil, and mountain-goat mutton enough for the hard winter ahead.

As they entered the large timber-frame dwelling, the travelers found residents distilling hootch. Abashed, clan members hid the operation while the headman tendered profuse apologies for the lack of "Boston food." The visitors gave him hope that "the light of a better day" would soon shine on them so they were resolved to "gladly do whatever the white teachers (tell) him to do and have no will of his own." Gifts of tobacco and rice followed Reverend Young's brief service for which the headman thanked them repeatedly. He promised to pray daily and asks the missionary to replace the "luck board" nailed over his door which read: "The Lord will bless those who do his will. When you rise in the morning and when you retire at night, give him thanks. Heccla Hockla Popla." If the white men gave him a new board, the headman explained, he would present the old board to a rival tribe to spite them with his generosity.

Later that night, Kadachan and To'watte approached Muir and Young at their tent in the beachgrass. They were offended by the white men's reactions to their host's overtures. To make friends and influence enemies, share food and sleep under the same roof. "If this is the way you are to do up at Chilkat, we will be ashamed of you." Properly chastised, the missionary and the naturalist promised to "behave like good Chilkats."

A brisk north breeze blew the next morning, bringing clear sky and a chilly headwind. The carved bow of the 36-foot cedar canoe sliced oncoming whitecaps in half. At the stern, the ancient Stickeen headman, To'watte, gripped the rudder with both knotted hands, resolute against the wind and spray. Kneeling in front of the elder, a broad-shouldered man rolled his powerful shoulders into each stroke. Sitka Charley was a well-traveled Tlingit canoeist, widely respected for his familiarity with the region.

Two paddlers amidships wore peacoats and oilskins, one in mutton-chops, the other a long beard. Muir's whiskers straggled wildly across his chest, hosannas rising intermittently over the blustering sea. Young gestured at the black peaks ahead whose sheer walls constrict the fjord into a funnel.

Forward, Stickeen John and Kadachan leaned into each stroke cleaving the green-water waves. Blunt-force high pressure from the north pummeled the exposed, inner waters, forcing the crew to fight for every inch. To raise the dual sprit sails to a following sea is preferred, but opposing force requires strong backs. Though Muir and Young were often up to their necks in expostulation, both fell silent in the paddle grind. Young gazed past the spray to the highest mountains ahead, imagining sermons for the notorious Chilkats. On his mental palette, Muir sketched the grand entrance into Lynn Canal on this day so clear that all glacial evidence is laid bare. Permitted only cloud-clotted glimpses of Glacier Bay the panorama was a godsend for Muir, sure evidence of glacial force on a grand scale.

In 1879, Muir was not yet a nationally celebrated writer and naturalist. Oldest son of Daniel and Ann Muir, John was eleven years old when his family emigrated in 1849 from Dunbar, Scotland to the Wisconsin frontier. An ardent Campbellite (a literalist offshoot of Calvinism), Daniel subjected his children to a severe diet of evangelism and hard work. John's youth was tethered by seventeen-hour days of toil, including excavating hundreds of stumps and digging a ninety-foot well in which he nearly died from gas poisoning. Despite harsh conditions, John thrived on physical challenges and possessed a searing intellect and eye for detail that produced myriad inventions. Among his creations, Muir's "early rising machine" garnered enough attention at the Wisconsin State Fair to give him the momentum he needed to get off the farm. At twenty-two, Muir set off to Madison where he attended the University of Wisconsin and met several key influences, including his lifelong mentor, Jeanne Carr. After two years of courses, Muir drifted into a few factory jobs in Canada, then to Indianapolis where he was determined to devote himself to sharpening his mechanical acumen.

When Muir accidentally jabbed a file into his right eye in March 1867, he broke the aqueous humor, causing sympathetic blindness in both eyes, which confined him to a dark month in bed. Once his sight returned, Muir quit his post at the carriage factory and embarked on a thousand mile "botanizing" ramble to the Gulf of Mexico. A year later he steamed into San Francisco Bay, and, at age thirty, fell in love with the Yosemite.

In the ensuing eleven years, Muir dedicated himself to exploring the central Sierra Nevada. The leatherstocking's reputation grew as a consummate mountaineer and naturalist whose penchant for storytelling enchanted visitors, including Ralph Waldo Emerson. In 1872 he began writing regular dispatches about Yosemite's natural wonders for San Francisco's *Overland Monthly*. Alaska had been a United States possession for twelve years when Muir set off to prove a theory about glaciers to resolve an international debate. California state geologist Josiah Whitney and his associates argued that the Sierra Nevadas had been shaped by rain, wind, and catastrophe. Muir's decade of tramping the backbone of California convinced him otherwise. He applied Harvard professor Louis Agassiz's observations of glaciation in the Alps to suggest that the Sierras had once been covered by a sheet of ice that gradually carved the dramatic mountain range from its granitic mass.

Stakes in the Sierra debate were high, sending Muir north to see for himself the results of active glaciation. In addition to addressing the controversy, Muir would write a few articles for the San Francisco *Daily Evening Bulletin*, and a report for the United States Geological Survey assessing the mineral potential of the territory. The Alaska trip delayed Muir's wedding to Louie Wanda Strenzel, but he promised Louie that he would better concentrate on managing her father's Martinez vineyards if he could prove his thesis to the world. She consented, and John Muir boarded the steamer *Dakota* at the San Francisco docks in May, 1879. Alaska so enthralled him that, upon his return seven months later, Muir announced plans to go again the following season.

For a thousand miles, the *Dakota* traced the West Coast north to Fort Wrangell, Alaska. Beyond personal effects, Muir's dunnage contained attitudes shaped about Native Americans from encounters with conquered subjects in the Lower 48, "not a whit more natural in their lives than we civilized whites," often existing in squalor. As he watched the ship steam away "in a dismal blurring rain" on July 14, Muir wrote that he felt "strangely alone" in the muddy gash of a town. Missionaries took him to the Presbyterian headquarters within the stockaded fort where he found a bed in the fragrant shavings piled on the carpenter's shop floor.

In the days that followed, Muir mingled with the rugged citizens of the "lawless draggle of wooden huts and houses" hacked into the primeval forest along the tideline.

‘Wrangell is a rough place,’ Muir wrote to Louie, ‘the roughest I ever saw.’ The Tlingit Indians, however, impressed him. While his love of nature led to Muir’s idealization of Native Americans, Muir never reconciled the harmful effects of civilization on indigenous people ‘‘who gain a hymnbook, without the means of living... (then) mope and doze and die... like tamed eagles in barnyard corners.’’ Tlingits, however, seemed more connected to their home, and, though Christianized, still exhibited industry and ‘‘family pride.’’

Early in his stay, John Muir bonded with thirty-year-old Samuel Hall Young, a Presbyterian missionary who agreed to accompany the explorer on his glacial mission. Besides, Young told him, he intended to Christianize the Chilkat Tlingits, the ‘‘most quarrelsome and warlike of the tribes of Alaska.’’ Fresh out of Princeton Theological Seminary, Young was ordained as minister to the Stickeen Tlingits the year he wed Fannie Kellogg, a teacher in Sitka and daughter of a Presbyterian minister. Together, Samuel and Fannie made a team whose naked ambitions were known throughout the region, annoying their revered colleagues. He organized the first Protestant church in Alaska, and established missions in Dawson, Eagle, Rampart, Nome, and Teller. In 1901 Young became superintendent of all Alaskan Presbyterian missions. Later he produced four books and a volume of poetry inspired by his days as an Alaska missionary.

As summer slipped away, Muir’s mind often strayed to the icy regions beyond Fort Wrangell. Entry into Chilkat territory was a delicate matter. Up to now, residents’ take-no-prisoners reputation chilled non-Native incursions, but attitudes were thawing. Missionaries promised powers economic and divine; northern Tlingit would not be sidelined. The previous summer, Chilkoot headman Lunaat stopped in Wrangell on his way to return several Tsimpsonian carvers to their Nass River homes. The Reverend Sheldon Jackson joined them for passage to Fort Simpson. After a few days of the Presbyterian superintendent’s company, Lunaat converted, and requested a God’s man for his *kwaan*. Young’s prayers were answered. From the deepest recesses of Lynn Canal: permission.

Driven by fantasies of fresh conversion, the Reverend Young ‘‘felt the eager zeal of an Eliot or a Martin at the prospect of telling them for the first time the Good News.’’ Young contacted his superior, Reverend Sheldon Jackson, about the Chilkats’ request. On

July 21, Young, Jackson, Muir, and seven other Presbyterian representatives and their wives boarded the *Cassiar*, a steamer chartered by the church, bound for glory. After a sixty-mile day of sailing past glaciers and islands, Muir reports that progress was slower than expected, so “the divines...esteemed the cost of reaching and saving the souls of the Chilkats as too great.” The *Cassiar* sailed back to Fort Wrangell the next day.

That week the Stickeens held a “grand dinner” for Muir, Young, and the Presbyterian guests. Muir noted the absence of Native foods, replaced by “imported canned stuff served Boston fashion.” An extended performance of Tlingit dancing followed the meal after which a succession of headmen gave speeches. A woman translated while Muir scribbled, looking up occasionally from his black journal to drink in the wealth of artwork.. Each oration emphatically denounced traditional Tlingit ways, proclaiming that villagers would relinquish their dancing, food, clothing, and beliefs. Old Chief Shakes gave the last speech, saying “Dear Brothers and Sisters, we have been long, long in the dark. You have led us into a strong guiding light and taught us the right way to live and the right way to die. I thank you for myself and all my people, and I give you my heart.” At the close of the ceremony, dancers surrendered their fine regalia to the visitors. Muir received a shaman’s head-piece. “Altogether,” he wrote, “it was a wonderful show.”

For the next ten weeks, Muir and Young explored the Stikine River system far into the interior of British Columbia where they met prospectors who had been to the northern Lynn Canal and described it as a region of mostly ice and rock—exactly what Muir desired. When the naturalist and his missionary companions returned downriver to Fort Wrangell in early October, Muir was eager to go north. Young arranged for a canoe, supplies, and four Tlingit men: To’watte, an elder captain respected for his seamanship and survival skills; Kadachan, son of a Chilkat chief living with his Stickeen mother; John, a Stickeen translator; and the guide, Sitka Charley. Beyond personal knowledge, the crew relied on the only available chart of the Alexander Archipelago, drawn in 1807 from Vancouver’s voyage of 1793-94. His ship, the *Chatham*, sailed by the mouth of the Bay when it was a crystal wall three miles wide. Given the trend toward glacial retreat, Muir assured Young, the place would be vastly transformed.

“We are going to write some history, my boy,” Muir counseled the minister, who was already mindful of the historical footnote he might earn from civilizing the fearsome Chilkats. “Think of the honor! We have been chosen to put some interesting people and some of Nature’s grandest scenes on the page of human record and on the map. Hurry! We are daily losing the most important news of all the world!”

As the men prepared to launch on the afternoon of 14 October, a knot of angry women stood nearby, two of whom approached Muir and Young with prophecies of disaster and death. No party had ever ventured out on such a long voyage this late in the year. If the storms didn’t kill them, the Chilkats would. Kadachan’s mother, a “woman of great natural dignity and force of character,” was a former wife of Ko’klux, the main Chilkat headman. When Kadachan was very young, an alleged infidelity marked his mother, who retreated to her Stickeen family with the chief’s son, never to return. Now, white men were stealing the young man back to the Chilkats. She spoke forcefully: “If my son comes not back, on you will be his blood, and you shall pay.”

Young took a few steps toward the women, and raised his hand for silence. They were on the Lord’s mission, he reminded them, and within the protective light of God. More than a divine escort, though, Young pledged himself to care for her son, promising to share all dangers “and if need be die in his defense.”

“We shall see whether or not you die,” she snapped.

Muir asked about the doomed look on To'watte's deeply creased face as he stepped into the canoe. Even if they survived Glacier Bay, he explained, his wife was certain that the Chilkats would kill him to avenge past debts. She had wailed as he left the house, and refused to shake his hand.

The crew departed from Fort Wrangell on October 9 for what would be a six-week voyage along the rocky inner passages of Southeast Alaska. The route included contact with Presbyterian missionaries, these villagers were accustomed to the routine. The Chilkats, however, had resisted Anglo-American influence, leading Young to characterize them as “rich and unscrupulous” scoundrels barricaded against change. Rumors of northern “whiskey wars” dogged Young and Muir on their voyage.

“We were received with joy everywhere,” Young wrote, “and if there was suspicion at first, old To'watte's tearful pleadings and Kadachan’s oratory speedily

brought about peace and unity.” Once Muir’s Tlingit crew assured the Natives that they came in the name of a great Sky Chief, tribal leaders assembled for tobacco, gifts, and sermonizing, conducted primarily by Young. Muir followed the preacher’s two-hour-plus discourse with his brief “brotherhood of man” speech. Noted orators themselves, Tlingit leaders usually spoke at length about tradition and conversion. Fascinated by Muir’s glacial travels, leaders encouraged him to speak, which he often deflected in deference to their divine purpose. Tlingits generally avoided glaciers, so the lanky Scot was a curiosity whose icy exploits earned him the title, *Glate Ankow*.



Aristotle in Klukwan

Stickeen John translated Muir’s moniker as “Ice Chief,” but Tlingit language instructor Marsha Hotch thinks her Chilkat forbears implied a greater honor. In Tlingit, *glate* means “white as snow.” Marsha thought a more likely meaning of *Glate Ankow* was “White Chief” to show regard for Muir’s high standing among non-Natives. Among the soldiers, miners, and government officials they had encountered in the century prior to his arrival, the northern Tlingit had met none like John Muir.

A keen appreciation for oratory spurred empathy for John Muir’s message among the Northern Tlingit. Any ambiguity in Stickeen John’s translation was burned away by *Glate Ankow*’s character: engaged, serious, passionate. Widely known for his skills as a storyteller and lecturer, Muir’s oratorical talents derived from his Scottish heritage, but perhaps even more so from a fire-and-brimstone father whose Campbellite extremism prompted him to take his family from the wind-blown moors to the prairie frontier of southcentral Wisconsin.

Muir honed a quick tongue and razor-sharp logic on the whetstone of his father’s dogmatic discourse, but his penchant for spirited debate further hardened their relationship. Daniel Muir condemned his son’s wayward liberalism with scalding jeremiads etched in Old Testament stone. Even in middle age, John Muir’s writing prompted his father’s incendiary reproach. After reading Muir’s account of a stormy night on Mount Shasta, Daniel urged his son in an 1874 letter to end his “folly” by

“getting quit of the writing and publishing” of his wild encounters: “burn it, and then it will do no more harm either to you or others.”

In the five years following his father’s letter, Muir published more articles describing the natural history of the Sierras, with increased emphasis on his own exploits. As celebrity status grew, so did demands for public appearances. Celebrated in his thirties as an inspired primitive, the Yosemite seer’s use of language linked the swelling stream of urbane notables with wild Nature, already considered a threatened national resource. A polished storyteller among individuals and small groups, “Professor Muir” was at first a reluctant rhetor, but his passion inevitably won out. An evangelistic upbringing became more evident in the Scotsman’s rhapsodies, but instead of Daniel’s red-meat harangues, John preached a gospel of connectedness. As he matured, Muir contended that Nature branched beyond the untamed to include Man in the glorious design. In November 1879, the eco-prophet’s Yandeistakye audience discovered in his speech a compelling connection with their humanity, leading them to open their homeland to the “Brotherhood of Man” beyond their remote homeland.

Among members of a society in which oratory is “one of the shining gems” of culture, Muir’s thoughtful, articulate manner struck a chord with his Tlingit audience. Called *kaan kik’ eetx’ yoo x’ata`nk*, the Tlingit term for “public speaking” may originate from “speaking around the fire.” For decades, Alaskan linguists Nora and Richard Dauenhauer catalogued and analyzed Tlingit oratory in the four-volume series *Classics of Tlingit Oral Literature*. “It defines us,” Nora told me in the mid-1980s. “Our ancestors, our *aat.ouw*, our oratory. That’s what we are.”

With that in mind, in spring of 2007 I confess to seventeen members of the Klukwan village leadership the high irony I feel in teaching their semester-long public speaking course. Tlingits set the mark for elocution, so I am humbled that they have hired me, a Scotch-English (and 1/32 Cherokee), mongrel to be their speech teacher. The people of the mother village have dealt with men of my hereditary ilk for two hundred and fifty years, most of whom had little to offer and much to take. Some were rubbed out for their impertinence. I bring them rhetorical tidings.

The class converges in the meeting hall of Klukwan’s Alaska Native Sisterhood Hall (A.N.S.), a big room with a thirty-foot traditional design covering one wall, framed

photos of ancestors on two others, and an industrial kitchen in the fourth. My students, many of whom are former students or parents of former students, keep me grounded with humor and context. When I introduce Aristotle's seminal work, *The Rhetoric*, retired Klukwan Incorporated chairman Ed Warren asks when it was written. Around 340 B.C. "Not too long ago," he quips. "He probably studied the Tlingits." The class cracks up.

The atmosphere of the room turns scholarly when we dig into a few Aristotelian fundamentals, starting with the definition of rhetoric as the art of using all available means to persuade. Bottom line, I stress, rhetoric is the art of getting what we need or want from other people. In relationships, groups, and communities, rhetoric is impossible to avoid. "Everyone living in a community with other people is inevitably a rhetorician," asserts Edward Corbett in his *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*. From asking favors to making public statements, rhetoric is a skill as much refined by the Tlingit as it was by the Greeks. Democracy is a noble concept, rhetoric is its voice.

"What about 'do it or else?'" asks Christopher Hotch, a student in his early twenties. He mimes a gun with his thumb and forefinger. Then all bets are off. Violent threats are beyond rhetoric. Members of a democratic society employ persuasive language knowing that audience members may exercise free will. Breakdown occurs when coercion or violence denies freedom of choice, tipping the balance of power toward oppression, a distinctly non-rhetorical arrangement.

To engage by violence or rhetoric was the choice of the Europeans whose gunships first plied the complex passages of Alexander Archipelago. Tlingits were adept at both. Aside from repelling invaders—notwithstanding the Russians in the 1801 Battle of Sitka—Tlingits warred between clans and counted among their slaves the Haida, Tsimpsian, and indigenes down the coast to California. Headmen displayed their regency through ownership: art collections, regalia, and numbers of slaves, sometimes sacrificed as brutal tribute. United States citizenship ended slavery and blood atonement, but Tlingits continued their rhetorical culture, deftly channeling tribal prerogatives into a democratic model. If being American meant an end to human sacrifice, these age-old power-brokers would rely on oratory.

Within a culture defined by ownership, no reputation surpassed that of the Chilkat-Chilkoot bloc. For at least a millennia (some elders say five), four villages

totaling three or four thousand residents thrived along two watersheds in the northernmost reaches of Lynn Canal. Protected on three sides by towering walls, each glacial valley offered human communities ample resources: fish, wildlife, forest, transportation, and defensible territory. Chilkats and Chilkoots controlled key trading routes to Interior Indians over their respective passes. Proximity to commerce and natural abundance sustained a culture with leisure time enough to create artwork: fabulous carvings, beadwork, and Chilkat weaving.

Throughout Muir's canoe voyage, whenever he remarked about villagers, his Tlingit crew responded: "Oh, yes, these are pretty good Indians, but wait until you have seen the Chilkats." From his encounter at Yandeistakye the naturalist took with him a fresh view of Native Americans, and left behind a new way for Tlingits to see white men.

Ninety-two years after Muir and Young, the federal law that conveyed to Alaska Natives forty-four million acres and a billion dollars also created Klukwan Inc., a corporation responsible to its shareholders, most of whom lived in the village. Within five years, its logging operation produced one of the biggest clearcuts on earth, catapulting the company into Fortune magazine's Top 500. The oldest, biggest trees in Alaska grew on Long Island, in Haida country three hundred miles south of Klukwan, a half-day's paddle from Hydaburg, whose village corporation bankrupted in the early nineties. Record dividends brought wealth to the Chilkats, who rose in regional prominence. Predictably, Haidas resented Klukwan Inc. for its corporate intrusion on their ancestral lands, evinced by public testimony and scolding letters in the *Chilkat Valley News*. In twenty-five years of logging, Klukwan Inc. never publicly responded.

Despite its financial brawn, Corporate Klukwan drifted from Village Klukwan. Shareholders privately expressed concern about corporate activities, but little surfaced in the media. Once an Alaskan success story, a combination of poor investments, bad timing, and mismanagement forced Klukwan Inc. to suspend all operations in 2008. Bad news, but hardly debilitating for people who have occupied a place for millennia. From corporate decline came a cultural renaissance. Quietly, steadily, the village council pursued cultural enrichment programs, spurring a language revival and construction of a tourist facility, *Jilkaat Kwaan* Cultural Heritage Center and Bald Eagle Observatory.

After generations of reticence, village leaders sit around me in a half-circle, squirming in speech class. Klukwan is open for business.

If the mother village is to survive, rhetoric will be her lifeline.

All that stands between them and a fat cruise ship tour contract, I remind the class, is one great presentation. And to move people from their cocoons to Klukwan, Aristotle would urge villagers to “know the nature of the soul (they) wish to persuade.” We all have needs. Your audience has needs. Make them need to come to Klukwan. To that end, Aristotle offers a blend of the three “modes” of persuasion— *logos*, construction of logical arguments; *pathos*, use of emotion; and *ethos*, projection of one’s character.

Logos is the first place Western Civilization goes to defend its views. Numbers, statistics, statutes. Aristotle devised the syllogism to systematize good reasoning: Major Premise: All men are mortal. Minor Premise: Socrates is a man. Conclusion: Socrates is mortal. Based on natural and/or human laws, cause-and-effect, and observation, *logos* is what most people accept as common sense.

Council president Kim Strong jabs a hand in the air. “What makes common sense to white society, you mean. Non-Natives like to throw around statistics, while Tlingit people speak from respect and for the good of the whole.”

“That may be true, and non-Natives can take a lesson in that.” My tone is amicable, but prodding. “Still, I’ve watched you and other Tlingit leaders effectively use statistics for years. Look at the rise of Klukwan Inc., look at land acquisitions, look at village improvements and the move toward tourism.”

Village tourism project supervisor Jim Strong expels an arid chuckle. “We didn’t want to get left in the dust. We had to compete.”

Tongue clucks and chuckles ripple around the room.

“Centuries of trading sharpened us for bargaining with our white brothers,” adds former Klukwan Inc. CEO Ed Warren. “We know the process very well.”

“But the process is not always enough,” Kim Strong asserts. When Tlingits became American citizens they took to parliamentary procedure as the proper way to conduct business. Meetings of the Alaska Native Brotherhood/Alaska Native Sisterhood follow Robert’s rules to the letter. “But I watch white people sabotage their own meetings with emotion, they throw away the rules, and distract themselves with hysteria.”

The room is silent as the class waits for my reaction.

As is appropriate in Alaska Native meetings, I let the words settle. I turn to the whiteboard and write a single word. “That would be what Aristotle called a *pathos* problem.” A few heads bend to their notes. *The Rhetoric* devotes ample space to detailed descriptions of emotions that link a speaker with her audience, including friendship, favor, calm, pity, anger, indignation, fear, shame, envy, and jealousy. Not only should the rhetor master the argument, but she must be a psychologist as well, who makes plain sense and understands emotional context, as did Aristotle who saw that “we give very different decisions under the sway of pain or joy, and liking or hatred.”

I pause, surveying my students. They gaze back with an expression that missionaries described as “sullen” or “inscrutable,” but is really just the look of Tlingits listening. “Hey. People,” I say. Heads cock, eyes quizzical. “Lighten up.” Sudden laughter. Keep the language simple, as legal lion Gerry Spence advises, to “*create pictures and action that generate feeling.*” (Spence’s emphasis) Use your understanding of emotions to lift an audience out of their seats and into the palm of your hand. They have to feel the spirit of your message.

“But what if it’s out of control?” asks Kim Strong. She recounts a bald eagle advisory council meeting when participants tried to shout each other out of the room. Others nod their silent agreement. “Haines has a history of public passion,” I allow. Students discuss raucous meetings twenty miles down road in Haines, where folks sometimes let their emotions do the talking. That would never happen in Klukwan. “Our respect for each other keeps the peace,” declares lifelong resident Elsie Spud. “We work with those we respect; others—why give them the time of day?”

Laughter up, then my cue.

Why indeed? As audience members, we are prone to snap judgments. Based on appearance, style, usable information, and relationship with the community, a speaker earns his *ethos*. Aristotle says the credible speaker evokes *phronesis*, or sound judgment; *arête*, or high moral character, and *eunoia*, or benevolence. Several hands inch up when I ask students how they weigh a speaker’s *ethos*. Experience. Length of residency. Shows respect and concern for others. Relationship to audience. Doesn’t waste words. School or training. Thinks before speaking. Trustworthy. According to the National Association for

Trial Lawyers, *ethos* is the most potent of the three modes; fraternity wins arguments for hometown heroes, while even the most clever, well-informed speaker will fail if the audience doubts his character.

I drive *ethos* home with a summary of John Muir's life, including his visit to the Chilkat Valley. Tell me this, I conclude, why, after centuries of Chilkat suspicion and hostility toward trespassers, did your ancestors connect with John Muir? A swath of dead air passes. I wait. Finally, village council head Kim Strong replies: "He was the first white man who didn't want something from us."

Deal or no deal, naturalist Muir built a bridge with the Tlingit, girded with *ethos* derived from his core humanity. Flinty Scottish grade school rhetoric, scriptural memorization, and his father's soap-box preaching all contributed to John Muir's discourse style. But to local Native people, Muir showed his soul through an abiding passion for nature and compassion for others.

Rhetorically speaking, the leap from ancient Greek to traditional Tlingit is not so far. Tlingit oratory follows a structure based in place, ancestry, and honor. Nature inspires abundant metaphor and simile from which commonly held stories supply logic and reasoning. An extended personal introduction shows connection to family, place, and audience. Respect and recognition are given to all who share responsibility in the speaker and her message, including embedded apologies for ignorance or insufficient honor paid to elders. Cloaked in traditional devices like story and tribute, the Tlingit orator's personal message is often nuanced, contextual. The welfare of the tribe is foremost, reiterated publicly at a *koo.eex*, or memorial potlatch.

Aside from a lavish exchange of blankets, regalia, and artwork, the old-time *koo.eex* featured three or more days of speeches. Contemporary *koo.eex* are half as long, featuring a few heirloom gifts mixed with cookware, tools, and cases of soda pop and motor oil. Even the shyest are expected to speak at these occasions, obligated to voice their respect and support, as custom dictates, with special attention to the grieving in-laws. Speeches can go on for hours.

Not that Tlingit oratory allows for idle extemporization. Ethnographer George Thornton Emmons observed in the late nineteenth century that Chilkats disdained "wawa," or speech, when it was rambling and long, the sure sign of a flawed person.

“Public speaking was an art greatly appreciated and was a feature of all feasts, requiring not only eloquence, but extreme tact. . . . I found when talking for any length of time the Tlingit became really tired, and even though being paid for information, would refuse to talk further.” Over the course of a semester, a few of my Klukwan students prodded me with humor when they felt I went on too long. One minute past the advertised length of our first three-hour class, Elsie Spud rises. “Gee,” she says, “how many words do you need to fill up this room?”

Everyone—including me—laughs, and leaves.



Connecting

For five days, the paddlers labored through turbulent waves. The headwind they wrestled the first day later turned south, then turned again to blow head-on as they approached their goal. From Point Couverden at the southwest corner of Lynn Canal, the Chilkat Range rose gradually on the port side until attaining a four-thousand-foot-high procession of cirques and sharp-carved ridges, flanked by year-round snowfields. As the great fjord narrowed to the north—Chilkats on the western flank, Coast Range on the east—mountain elevations hit six and seven thousand feet, eventually confining the seawater to a passage less than a mile wide.

On calm days, the sea finger is a glassy surface marred only by waterfowl and whales. The first morning of Muir’s November excursion, however, a stiff northerly hurled waves against upthrust granite shores; flinging foamy knots of kelp and bladderwrack. From his watery vantage a few hundred feet offshore, the naturalist surely noted the beach succession that proceeded above the seething margin. Mid-beach, shimmers of autumn gold reveal cinquefoil and goosetongue. A few feet higher along the shoreline, yellow beach-grass flutters under a leafless alder fringe. Three paces inland: a wall of green. A phalanx of spruce and hemlock marches away from the sea into lower glacial valleys and up sharp slopes until succumbing at two thousand feet or less. Muir noted how “remarkably well-developed” the biggest trees are, these forests out of reach of axe and saw.

A slightly different scene passed our kayak in 2000 when I paddled Muir's Lynn Canal route with my friend Kelly seeking a scintilla of the explorer's experience—camps and encounters, wildlife and scenery. Dramatic glacial retreat since Muir's visit encouraged a larger, more mature forest. Still remaining were the "picturesque" hemlocks on "outjutting" rocks, the "merry waterfalls," and "beautiful marble cliffs." At the mouths of the rivers, salmon still electrified the sea, chased by sea lion, whale, and bear as clouds of gulls scream and dive for leftovers. But something was missing. People. Memoirs from Muir and Young mention several meetings with Tlingit families along their entire five-hundred-mile canoe voyage. Whether camped at the mouths of salmon streams or en route to social gatherings, human culture thrived on the inside waterways. For the length of our kayak trip, our social network extended no further than a wave to passing fishing boat.

About ten miles out of Point Couverden, the tide turned against Muir's crew, forcing them to beach in the shelter of a tiny cove. The botanist wandered into the forest where he found a large patch of yellow cedar, a species more prevalent in the southern reaches of Southeast Alaska. Prized for its durability and range of use, yellow cedar is the preferred carving wood among Tlingit and Haida artisans and canoe-makers. The wispy ninety-foot cedars of Muir's stroll hardly equaled the prodigious trees of Prince of Wales Island (Alaska) and the Queen Charlotte Islands (British Columbia), ten days away by paddle. As for this grove, Muir noted that nearly every tree showed scars from Tlingit travelers hacking strips for thatch and portable shelters.

Despite our efforts to find the grove, Kelly and I located only a few slim cedars, none of which were hacked. In an area that generally matched Muir's description, we discovered a ten-acre spruce thicket where clearcutting methods once removed a forest. A few moss-engulfed stumps remained, too gone to tell their cedar secrets.

While sketching from a shoreline perch near the cedars, Muir attracted the attention of a Hoonaa family sailing south. The father held a child in his arms as he steered the canoe close to shore. Bad news—Sitka Jack and his relatives were in Klukwan for a big potlatch with hootch "flowing like water," which provoked war between the Ganax.teidi raven clan and the Kaagwaantaan eagles. Young and Muir discussed potential effects of the drunken spree on the expedition. It is likely that Muir expressed

his concerns. While he shrugged away mortal threats from his wilderness forays, the mountaineer was less certain about the risks in confronting a thousand drunken warriors. Muir's purpose for the voyage was over, but Young's greatest ambition resided in a Chilkat conversion. They agreed to redouble their efforts to rescue the lost souls.

When the tide turned at 8:30 pm, the white men insisted on proceeding despite To'watte's counsel against night travel. For six hours paddlers muscled the canoe into the black wind until they entered the protected waters of Saint James Bay. Just as snow began to fall, the canoe glided up to a beach encampment. When the Chilkat residents demanded to know their business, the Tlingit crew took to the huts for parley. Within an hour Muir's paddlers retired to their tents, but not before To'watte approached *Glate Ankow* and the preacher. If the white men were in a hurry, he said, they should start in early morning. But to "travel in the night like thieves" was untenable. Muir and Young concur. In upcoming days they approach Chilkat territory in the open, shielded only by the Reverend's faith and Muir's "good luck."

The "hard, dull work" of paddling another three days brought the party to the beach at the toe of Davidson Glacier, "a broad white flood reaching out two or three miles into the canal with wonderful effect." Muir studied the glacier from the writings of Professor George Davidson who visited Klukwan with Secretary of State William Henry Seward in 1869. Recording a total solar eclipse was Davidson's official business, but for the northern Tlingit the event marked access to a great nation, and assured powerful connections to a better life. A decade later, John Muir offered a compelling vision of fraternity.

The canoe landed at Glacier Point, a pebble beach that stretches along the sea for three or more miles. A hundred yards from water—the gleaming wall of Davidson Glacier. Muir surely launched from his seat to scrutinize the renowned glacier for all of their brief layover. Sketches from his journal that day convey the luminescence of an imposing white wall two to three hundred feet high, its coxcombs and promontories, ice titans crumpled on the beach. Back at the canoe, the crew's makeover startled Muir. The Tlingit men washed, perfumed and shorn and made "a complete change in their clothing, even to white shirts, new boots, new hats, and bright neckties." Owing "nothing dressy,"

Muir adorned his cap with an eagle feather. The white men displayed an American flag up the single mast.

Some contemporary elders say that the attire upgrade was as much to prepare for death as it was the welcome wagon.

Whipped up by tidal rips and a sudden, squirrely breeze, a three-foot standing chop forced Kelly and I to paddle harder on our approach to Glacier Point beach. We extracted ourselves from the cockpits at the last minute to line the double kayak ashore. Where a massive ice slab once dominated the broad delta, a forest bristles. Davidson Glacier remains, three miles back, a dirty blue avenue tucked between Glacier Bay border peaks. Meltwater gushes into Davidson Lake, which narrows into a short, violent river the color of cement. Concrete froth smacked into the sea at the river mouth where we sprawled on the beach in a rare sunlit moment. A raven barrel-rolled over our heads, stopped in mid-air, plummeted toward the water, and swooped upward just before it again dead-dropped to the water.

The well-dressed paddlers cut across open water toward Seduction Point, then turned northwest to trace the shoreline of Chilkat Peninsula. They spied a man on the beach who shouted in “a heavy, far-reaching voice:” “Who are you? What are your names? What do you want?” On receiving an answer, he shouted to another man a quarter mile away, who called to another and so on until the news reached Yandeistakye.

A quarter mile from the village, Muir and Young held up paddling at the sight of a crowd of armed men in front of the longhouse by river’s edge. To’watte barked to paddle harder up the river channel. At a signal, the throng fired a shower of musket-balls overhead, some zinging near the canoeists.

“*Gusuwah-eh?*” boomed an authoritative voice. Stickeen John: “A great preacher-chief and a great ice-chief have come to bring you a good message!”

The crowd shouted greetings, then disappeared. Just as the canoe prow touched the sand, forty or fifty men rushed down the beach chanting: “Hoo-hoo! Hoo-hoo!” The welcome party surrounded the canoe, lifted it into the air and trotted craft and occupants up the beach to Chief Daanaawaak's doorstep. The crew filed into the headman’s post-and-plank house which Young figured to be fifty by sixty feet.

Clad in a calico shirt and blanket, the old chief sat by the center house pit staring into the fire even as he shook hands with the white men. Members of the family scurried about their routines, completely ignoring the visitors for a quarter hour. Daanaawaak slowly looked up at the men, then down to the fire, and, after another long pause said, “I am troubled. It is customary when strangers visit us to offer them food in case they might be hungry, and I was about to do so when I remembered that the food of you honorable white chiefs is so much better than mine that I am ashamed to offer it.” At John’s translation, Reverend Young assured the headman that dining together would be an honor. Daanaawaak was visibly relieved. He called out to his family to produce a meal.

Muir recounted little of the supper—salmon, berries, potatoes—that Young called a “never-to-be-forgotten banquet.” Served in huge, blue Hudson Bay washbasins, “the feast of fat things” opened with dried salmon in seal grease dressing. To deflect the rancid paste, Muir and Young asked for the grease in separate bowls. Basins were removed, cleaned, and returned with large hunks of deer back fat swimming in seal grease. The third bowl brimmed with walnut-sized potatoes in seal grease. Dessert is a bowl of rosehips in more seal grease, inspiring Muir to elbow Young. “Mon, mon,” he says in his thickest Scottish brogue, “I’m fashed we’ll be floppin’ about i’ the sea, whiles, wi’ flippers an’ forked tails.”

Two hundred fifty villagers gathered in the house after dinner, among them high chief Koh’klux (“Shathitch”) with his Klukwan entourage. The Klukwan headman arrived quite late, Young suspects, “to impress us with his dignity as supreme chief.” The Presbyterian marked Koh’klux as the “worst old savage of Alaska” of legendary wealth, power, cruelty, and pride. The chief pivoted to display a chinchilla blanket hanging from his broad shoulders. Stitched in bold letters: “To Chief Shathitch, from his friend William H. Seward.”

In their opening speeches Daanawaak and Ko’klux welcomed the God’s-men, comparing their plight to being lost in a dark storm without paddles. Rescuers Muir and Young offered “light, a sheltered harbor, food and comfort” to the last godless *kwaan*.

The service began with To’watte’s invocation, a “model of kindness and diplomacy” proclaiming Tlingit membership in a greater family. “All are equal. All

remembrance of former hurts and anger and war is wiped out by this new Word. Let us be at peace. If I have offended any Chilkat, I ask his pardon.”

John and Kadachan followed with several hymns. Tobacco and other gifts were disbursed. Reverend Young proceeded with the sermon he rehearsed since seminary, the one to save wild souls: We are all sinners. As sinners we doom ourselves to hell, but there is one way out. God’s way. He loved us so much that he sent his only son to tell us the way. Sinners killed the son, but he still loved them to the end, then rose into heaven to be with his father. If you follow his way, you can go there, too. Pray and live according to the way, and eternal life is yours.

Likely, too, Young made his usual strong warning against the old ways of shamanism, slavery, and potlatches. He promised severe penalties for manufacture of hootch. Delivered in Wrangell a year earlier, Young’s well-traveled speech posed a fatal dichotomy for all forbidden acts: “Are you going to have the friendship of the captains of the war vessels and of the government of the United States, or are you going to be enemies of these great men?” Come away from darkness, brothers, into the light.

“*Gunaax’cheesh ho ho,*” said Daanawaak as Young concluded his final sermon near midnight. Thank you very much. Applause rumbled under many feet pounding floor boards.

Raven host Daanaawaak proceeded with a lengthy tribute to Koh’klux in which he recognized shared relatives and praised the *sha’dehuni*’s prowess and wealth. He turned to *Glate Ankow* and asked if he cared to honor his guest from Klukwan, who wished him to speak. Cook-fire shadows flickered in Muir’s shaggy face. He shook his head, muttered a few self-deprecations. Daanawaak repeated his request to Stickeen John who conveyed to Muir the gravity of the headman’s request. No. His mission was the wild. He sought God in mountains and ice and forests, a scripture as inspired as Reverend Young’s bible. The natural wonders of the region, he admitted, were to him “about as interesting as the gospel.”

Daanaawaak insisted. He wondered about *Glate Ankow*’s icy mission—What do you look for on glaciers? How do you walk safely? Why didn’t the ice bergs kill you?

The Ice Chief stood. From his central position at the hearth, Muir scanned the room. A large and intricate totemic design radiated out from the low doorway in the front

wall. Massive timbers comprised the post-and-beam frame, sheathed by ten-foot adze-cut planks. Crowded onto the two levels that rose from the central fire-pit, expectant listeners hushed. Fire threw light upon their fine regalia. Ornate patterns leapt from headdresses, tunics, and the fine mountain goat wool woven into Chilkat blankets. Accustomed to his role as a side act in the missionary show, Muir's tone was deferential. His prefatory use of apology warmed listeners for whom humility in oratory was essential.

For a man who liked to expostulate as much as John Muir, his Yandeistakye talks were restrained. On typical days, the Reverend Young preached "from early morning until midnight, relieved periodically by Muir and the responsive speeches of the natives." Sometimes everyone in the audience spoke, from headmen on down. On the fourth night, public pronouncements were exchanged only between guests and leaders.

As the revival came to a close, Muir gave a talk about "the wonders of God's handiwork and the beauty of clean, pure living." He marveled about the "fine foodful country" God granted the northern Tlingit," before concluding with his "brotherhood of man" sermon.

From ice, Muir likely proclaimed, all good things emerge. Mountains, rivers, forests, animals. Humans, too, depend upon gifts from the glaciers. That's what brings me to your wonderful land. I need to know more about ice, to discover how it moves mountains to bring us life. In the blue catacombs of a glacier I have seen a great, crystal heart beating to the eternal rhythm of a living planet. The blood flowing from that glacial heart pursues an ocean-bound destiny, taking with it a pulverized mountain. The greatest miracle comes from the life it brings—trees, plants, salmon, eagles, bears, whales...and you. I am honored to be a guest of such a powerful host and his tribe. Your generosity will be rewarded in Heaven when you heed the preacher's advice to follow God's word.

Then I spoke of the brotherhood of man—how we were all children of one father; sketched the characteristics of the different races of mankind, showing that no matter how far apart their countries were, how they differed in color, size, language, etc. and no matter how different and how various the ways in which they got a living, that the white man and all the people of the world were essentially alike, that we all had ten fingers and toes and our bodies were the same, whether white, brown, black or different colors, and speak different languages. If one family of Tlingit boys and girls were scattered far abroad and raised in different places, they would forget their own language, their

habits, and their looks would be colored by climate. If they all happened to meet again, they would seem strange to one another.

Muir probably concluded with a short prayer or a bit of scripture, then gestured to Young who led in a final prayer. Scarcely were amens uttered before the crowd filed out. For four nights the guests slept on bearskins and goat hides cushioned by the warmth and wealth of Daanaawaak's house. The crew, wrote Muir, felt “right at home” in the company of “our hospitable and warlike friends.”

One night a mewling baby prompted Muir’s inquiry and a reply that its mother was dead and a woman was not available to nurse an extra child. An old woman spoke to the translator who told Muir: “Maybe one, two more day it cry, then it die.” Muir asked Stikine John to retrieve all the Eagle condensed milk in the canoe, and he fetched with eight cans. Muir bathed the baby, fed it, then walked around the great house for five or six hours until the child slept. The next day Muir gave the remaining milk to the headman. Touched by his guest’s compassion, Daanawaak offered up the child, but *Glate Ankow* gently refused. When Young returned seven years later, he met the child, now a boy full of life, whom he christened John.

During their four-day visit Young led five meetings, each to a large, enthusiastic assembly. When Klanott and his band of Chilkoots arrived late on the second day, Young’s sermons literally brought down the house. The roof thundered with the weight of spectators wanting views from the smoke hole. Young describes a “ripping, tearing” sound of wall planks wrested from the building to accommodate onlookers, many of whom hung from house timbers.

Muir tried to avoid speaking at each gathering, but relented “as usual.” His audience was especially interested to hear about the contrasting intentions of white men. They must be judged on their merits, just as Native brothers who built reputations on the quality of their behavior. Compliments for “kindness and good manners” drew affirming responses from the congregation. At the close of Muir’s final talk, the oldest shaman rose to his feet for the first time:

I am an old man but I am glad to listen to those strange things you tell, and they may well be true, for what is more wonderful than the flight of birds

in the air? I remember the first white man I ever saw. Since that long, long-ago time I have seen many, but never until now have I ever truly known and felt a white man's heart. All the white men I have heretofore met wanted to get something from us. They wanted furs and they wished to pay for them as small a price as possible. They all seemed to be seeking their own good—not our good. I might say all my life I have never until now heard a white man speak. It has always seemed to me that while trying to talk to traders and those seeking gold-mines that it was like speaking to a person across a broad stream that was running fast over stones and making so loud a noise that scarce a single word could be heard. But now, for the first time, the Indian and the white man on are the same side of the river, eye to eye, heart to heart.

With his simple metaphor the shaman certified the persuasive authority of *Glate Ankow*. The naturalist's perceived empathy with his Tlingit audience met their top tribal need: unity. "Less 'me talk,' more 'us,'" Klukwan teacher Elsie Spud once told me divides non-Native and Native speaking styles. Muir didn't want something from them, he shone light toward a better way. Linking one's destiny with an audience, said rhetorician Kenneth Burke, builds common cause, or the "consubstantiality" necessary to move a group. Just as Muir used his rhetorical powers to incite support for parks and forests from America's elite, nature's evangelist inspired the unruly Chilkats to embrace the White Wave. Stickeen John assured *Glate Ankow* that his audience concurred that he "knows how to talk and beats the preacher far." Audience approval roared in the floor boards.

A day before their departure, Daanawaak asked Muir to return as their missionary, promising him as many wives as he desired and boys to remove all stones from his trails. The explorer demurred. A woman and a farm awaited in California. The world must hear the stories carved in ancient ice. Honored as he was, Muir could not comply.

In the afternoon Daanaawaak and his entourage escorted the guests to Deishu, the narrow isthmus joining the Chilkat Peninsula with the mainland, for the purpose of selecting a mission site. Muir declined the stroll, announcing his intent to climb the mountain called *Gei'saan* behind the village. Judging from sketches made that day, Muir reached a knob just above treeline, a heathery tuffet with unobstructed views down Lynn Canal seventy miles south to Admiralty Island. In the foreground of one drawing,

Davidson Glacier pours between high peaks, then spreads in a great fan to within a few feet of tidewater.

During the visit Muir and Young vacillated over Koh'klux's invitation to hold services in Klukwan, which would extend their stay a few days. Rumors of whiskey-soaked violence, however, gave voice to To'watte's growing fears. He insisted that locals held a grudge against him for a careless insult about Chilkats uttered years earlier in Fort Wrangell. Since their sartorial stop on Glacier Point, To'watte fretted that he would be killed. "I hope they shoot me here," he frequently said as he placed his hand over his heart.

On the morning of November 8, the party departed on an outgoing tide, wind in their sail. They carried a note from Daanawaak verifying that they had met with the chief and departed alive, so "he could not be held accountable in any way for our death."



Your Grandpa's House

Sequestered in the Holt-Atherton archives of the University of the Pacific in Stockton, California, I hold one of Muir's many black leather journals in surgical-gloved hands. The book opens to the scene from a mossy bench on Mount Ripinsky where I too have rested and gazed upon the commanding scene. Jagged ranges flank a broad seawater avenue, split in the foreground by the Chilkat Peninsula. Glaciers drape summits and loll like tongues from high passes. Pouring off a Glacier Bay icefield on the right, the Davidson spreads its grand, glittering mass, fanning out into Lynn Canal, cropped at seawater by a slender beachfront.

From Muir's Ripinsky vantage I gaze upon the scene in 2010, similar except for the advance of forests on mountain slopes, and the Davidson—gone. Miles from the coastline, nearly hidden between mountain shoulders, I catch an icy wink.

Muir's studious pencil shadings sharpen cirques, nunataks, seracs, and moraines—evidence of the glacial forces that yet carve these mountains into Yosemite look-a-likes. Emboldened by his icy encounters, *Glate Ankow* prepared to tell the world.

On returning from the first of his five Alaska voyages, Muir's passion for wilderness burned hotter than ever. Increased responsibilities, however, bound him to paradox. Marriage required his dedication to Louie's parents' residence and large vineyard in Martinez. Though he revered wild beauty, horticulture made him wealthy. Because Muir saw God in Nature, his Campbellite father condemned him. A nation built on the destruction of nature embraced Muir's call to preserve it. Through his writing, he drew hordes to remote places.

In the case of the Lynn Canal visit, Muir's 1880 *Daily Evening Bulletin* article surely added to a public perception that later erupted as the Klondike gold rush. Once "hostile to miners," Muir announced, the Chilkats had been pacified and were guiding prospectors into the goldfields. Although the region probably contained as much ore as the best mining districts of the West, explorers should beware the brutal climate and daunting terrain. Regardless of the obstacles, "light sooner or later is sure to come. Thousands of sturdy miners...will push their way over the whole territory and make it tell its worth."

Through his frontier experiences, Muir accepted the sacrifice of some lands so that others might be protected. But the rate at which his beloved wild places kindled in Muir a heat that ignited a national fire. A lively storyteller and lecturer, Muir became a key rhetor in a movement seeking a heroic figure around whom to build its mythology. Transformed from backwoods hermit to America's foremost environmentalist, the durable Scot prolonged our love affair with frontier by championing its right to exist.

Muir's many biographers tend to agree that his Alaska experiences precipitated a shift in his worldview from seeing humanity as a destructive force to a potentially sustainable part of an ecological whole. For the first time, Muir witnessed people who thrived in a "wild" place. Fabulous artwork and oratory aside, Tlingits impressed Muir as people who knew how to live closely with their environment. On the other hand, he was alarmed by the environmental and cultural damage wreaked by white prospectors and traders, and called upon government to rescue the Tlingit nation: "A few good missionaries, a few good cannon with men behind them, and fair play, protection from whiskey, is all the Alaska Indians require. Uncle Sam has no better subjects, white, black, or brown, or any more deserving of his considerate care."

Once blissfully cloistered from the world, John Muir was reborn as a husband, father, businessman, and apostle.

The role of movement luminary kept Muir out of the mountains and into the fray. Instead of dangling from a precipice, he was trainbound to speaking engagements, tramping the halls of Congress, entertaining power-brokers, or at his “Scribble Room” writing letters and essays as cannon-blasts in his mounting offensive. In 1890, three years before Frederick Jackson Turner declared the closure of the American frontier, Muir’s campaign to preserve remaining wild places secured establishment of Yosemite National Park.

As threats to Nature mounted, Muir wielded a righteous sword in defense of wilderness values—beauty, spirit, refuge—against the destroyers’ credo—profit, utility, growth. Saving Nature, Muir maintained, was a crusade by those who would protect God’s handiwork from “every action that the unweariable thieves and robbers present.” Ascension to gladiator status required in Muir the religious passion of his father, tempered by scientific truth. In a speech to his newly-formed Sierra Club in 1895, Muir declared that their fight was “part of the eternal conflict between right and wrong,” setting the rhetorical stage from which ensuing generations recited their “love and lamentation” for the American wild.

As messenger from a romantic landscape, Muir’s *ethos* grew in a young nation yearning for Eden, demanding Cornucopia.

Ninety-eight years after Muir’s concession to eternal battle, I listen to Daanawaak warn a parka-puffed crowd standing on fresh pavement about damage done by those who disrupt the cycle of life. We gather under a cool, clay-toned sky on this day in October 1993 to dedicate a plaque to Yandeistakye, the place where “everything from afar drifts ashore,” most of which lies under the tarmac at the renovated Haines Airport. Sharp bits of sleet pelt Gore-Tex while old Daanaawaak’s kin and namesake heralds the eternal life-cycle of salmon, bear, and human. “We are all part of a rainbow, my children. All of us,” Daanawaak/Austin Hammond says. In a strong voice full of sorrow, he decries those who show disrespect to any living thing. “You gotta take care take care of your grandpa’s house,” he charges. “It needs you.”

Clad in Chilkat blankets, ermine boots, beaded vests and ornate headdresses, the *Gei'saan* Dancers join Daanawaak to sing and move in ways ordained centuries ago. I lean on my Subaru in the airport parking lot among a hundred others, all watching ancient dancing among pick-up trucks, Cessnas, and tour buses. Prefabs occupy space once covered by lodges and smokehouses. At my back, the somber cliffs of Mount Ripinsky tower over a steep forest-shoulder, Haines Highway, and the airport. The dancers focus their eyes upward, beyond us. They dance for their ancestors, who first loved *Gei'saan*.

When the group breaks up, a five-minute walk through devil's club and salmonberry takes me to the slumped frame of the last clan house standing in Yandeistakye. Raven Wing House was salvaged from the mudslide at 19-mile that took out Kuthwultu a century earlier, abandoned in the thirties by the final influenza wave. A dank pungency fills my nostrils as I step inside a crooked doorway. Floorboards glisten with rot and glass. Like fractured bones, snapped ceiling joists jut under the weight of a collapsing roof. Whose grandpa lived in this house? Did he run into the tide to lift Muir's canoe? Did he hang from Daanaawaak's rafters, absorbed in the oratory of an ice chief? How did he tell the story to his children?

The heavy snows of 1998 pushed the roof to the floor.

Years after Muir's visit to Yandeistakye a Bay Area socialite described a dinner she hosted for the craggy Scotsman at which he seemed remote until finally she asked him to tell the party of his travels in Alaska. For the rest of the evening, she alleged, Muir regaled the party with exploits and advocacy without interruption.

Imagine a cluster of San Francisco's elite around a banquet table as John Muir punctuates the air, conducting his orchestra. Harrowing tales of glacial exploration blend with accounts of an indigenous society little known beyond its realm. The hostess inquires about the heathens, and how they have taken to Christianity. Among tribes in the States, Muir opines, conversion often means being drawn away from traditions that sustained them, leading to alcohol or sloth. On the contrary, Tlingits are hard-working and reliable. They take to the Word naturally, as they have always adhered to strict laws of atonement.

And—Muir stops, raises a lofty eyebrow as his gaze touches each fellow diner—Tlingit artwork has no rival. From under the table, he lifts a worn rucksack from which he

slowly extracts a shaman's headpiece. He holds the ermine-covered crown for all to see.
Eagle talon, bear claw, sea lion whiskers. Muir nods. Yes, these were a powerful people.