



LIḡʷIL̥DAḡʷ RESEARCH CENTRE

It's a new year, and we are continuing newsletter updates to share exciting history from the Archives with the communities. Some of you already know these stories well, while for others this may be the first time. It is my pleasure to share V.3 – Ed. 1 of **Tales from the Vault**, which brings forward an old story of Siwidi, remembered and told in different ways.

### **Siwidi and the Journey Below**

*This story draws from early recorded versions of Siwidi's journey, including accounts documented by Edward Curtis in *The North American Indian* (1915) and a later narrative shared by Mrs. Jane Cook of Alert Bay. The story is shared here recognizing that many families and communities carry their own tellings and understandings of Siwidi's story.*



BULLHEAD SEA RAVEN TRANSFORMATION MASK, 1988 - AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY PTC-3845

Ḳumugaḡto'yi had a son named Siwidi. As a boy, Siwidi was often thought of as delicate. His father had hoped his son would grow into someone widely admired, and when another young man once saved the people from danger, Siwidi's father felt disappointment more deeply.



One day, Siwidi was playing along the beach with a goat-catcher made of grass. He watched the water and caught several bullheads as they swam by. After a time, a very small bullhead appeared. It was especially beautiful, with many colours. Siwidi tried for a long while to catch it. At last, the fish placed its head through the noose. When Siwidi pulled, the bullhead grew suddenly enormous, leapt from the water, and swallowed him.

Inside the fish, Siwidi found himself in another place. It was like a country beneath the sea, with grass and trees, and many beings who appeared as fish in human form. As he travelled through this place, he was shown many things and told about what he saw.

At one point, he came upon a giant who looked as though he were made of clotted blood. Those guiding Siwidi warned him, “Do not look at him. Do not look at him too much.” This being was known as kla-an, an awful one, said to poison clams and mussels at certain times of the year, when the water turned red.

Siwidi was also taken deeper still, to the bottom of the sea. There, in the undersea world of Kumuḡwe, also known as Kumuḡwe, he was allowed to see many powerful beings. After a long time, when he had seen all that he was meant to see, he was returned to the surface and set ashore. The bullhead skin he had worn beneath the water was removed when he reached land.

When Siwidi came back among his people, they asked him if he had seen the King of the Sea. He answered only, “I do not know. I saw many beings, and they all appeared wealthy and great.”

Siwidi did not return unchanged. For a time, he passed through difficult trials before he could fully resume the life of an ordinary person. In the end, his father came to rejoice in him. Siwidi grew into someone respected and powerful in his own way, carrying with him what he had seen below, even if much of it was never spoken aloud.

This story is remembered as the beginning of what later became known as the bullhead dance, first brought out during a red bark ceremony, when Siwidi appeared to approach across the water as though walking upon it, carried by the bullhead itself. From that time on, he was known by the name Nalanukwəmgi’lakw, From the Deepest.