



LIŖWIŁDAŖW RESEARCH CENTRE

We are continuing regular newsletter updates to share exciting history from the Archives with the communities. Many of you know these stories well, while others might be hearing them for the first time. And so, it is a privilege to share with you: V.3, Edition five of **Tales from the Vault**.



ARTWORK BY CONNIE WATTS - VANCOUVER AIRPORT, 2000

The War with Thunderbird

THIS RETELLING DRAWS PRIMARILY FROM *KWAKIUTL TEXTS: SECOND SERIES* BY GEORGE HUNT AND FRANZ BOAS (1906) AND *KWAKIUTL CULTURE AS REFLECTED IN MYTHOLOGY* BY FRANZ BOAS (1935). WHILE MANY VERSIONS OF THIS STORY CONTINUE TO BE SHARED IN KWAKWAKA'WAKW COMMUNITIES, THIS ARTICLE PRESENTS ONE RECORDED ACCOUNT.

There are different tellings of how the war with Thunderbird began.

In one telling, Omał (also known as Kwekwaxawe), a great chief, had a son named Kexenet. Thunderbird carried Kexenet away to Kunwaas, the village of the birds. Kunwaas, "of the birds of the sky," was not far from Qa'logwis. Thunderbird was the chief of the birds, and because of his rank he alone owned a salmon trap.

Another telling begins with a game between the birds of Kunwaas and the animals of Qa'logwis. At the end of the game, Thunderbird carried away Thrush, whose song could produce berries. Her husband, Woodpecker, then called upon the animals to make an artificial whale with which they would make war upon Thunderbird.

After Kexenet was taken, Wren proposed that the animals should overcome Thunderbird by taking the forms of salmon. The others listened to Wren because he was known for his cleverness. In an earlier war against the Southeast Wind, Wren had flown into the enemy's stomach, started a fire inside him, and made him cough him out again.



The animals agreed to make war upon Thunderbird.

Together they built an artificial whale from cedar. Grouse and Black Woodpecker shaped the outside, while Woodworm and Ant hollowed out the inside. The whale was covered with Gum, whose melted body became the covering that sealed it. Sea Lion provided its ballast and paddles. Land Otter, Sparrow, Deer, and Grizzly Bear tended the blowhole. Mink took his place in the spout hole. Starfish guided the whale, and Squid held the hatch tightly shut after all the animals had gone aboard. Each contributing according to their own gifts.

Before they departed, the animals transformed themselves.

Mink served as Woodpecker's messenger and was sent to collect the salmon masks. The bravest warriors - Mink, Deer, Elk, and Otter - wore the masks of the spring salmon. Others wore the masks of sockeye, silvers, steelhead, and dog salmon. The weakest wore the masks of the humpback salmon. When the artificial whale had been completed, they also borrowed the whale mask so that it would move as though it were a living whale.

Hidden within the artificial whale, they travelled to Kunwaas. There they called out Thunderbird's children one by one.

First came One Whale Carrier, who was drowned. Then came Two Whale Carrier, followed by Three Whale Carrier, and finally Four Whale Carrier. Each was overcome in turn.

Grizzly Bear and Wolf were the warriors of the myth people. Wasp stung Thunderbird in the eye.

At last Thunderbird himself came out to face the animals in the artificial whale. He and his wife were killed.

Only a single child remained, an infant nine months of age who had been left in his cradle. Ashamed by the defeat of his family, the child rose into the upper world.

It is said that the infant had been painted with ochre and wore cedar straps upon his arms and legs. Because of this, children are painted with ochre and wear cedar straps when they are celebrated at their ten-moon ceremony. Recognizing that connection to the spirit world.

This is also the reason it does not thunder very often today. Thunder is heard only when Thunderbird moves between the summer and winter sides of his house, or as an omen that someone belonging to a family who bears the Thunderbird crest is about to die.