

114. Bone Game at Nitinat (La:maho:s)¹

We went onto the steamboat *Tees*, we boarded. I was Tlatw'i:,² one accompanying a gift visit party. Tlapisim³ was among those who came on the gift visit. Also Hawi:hto²is came along. Tlapisim went to Tl'i:ʔixim. He bought four boxes of Pilot bread. Hawi:hto²is also bought four boxes of Pilot bread. We were a proud bunch. We went by Tlin²owis.⁴ The sea was rough, the wind blowing hard that night. We got off at P'a:chi:na²a⁵ at the place the White people lived at, and they gave us a place where we could sleep.

When daylight came we met and discussed things. Then we sent a telegraph message saying that we were now at P'a:chi:na²a. A message came back saying that we could open Tl'i:ʔixim's house and that we should open the house of Tlawobe:y.⁶ They also said there was lots of food there, dried dog salmon, and that we were to eat them. It was very stormy, snowing and windy. I spoke to our crew:

"You guys don't be like that. We will be invited to play bone game. You should think about the fact that we are the only ones here. There are no Ni:ti:na²ath here at P'a:chi:na²a. The only thing we can do properly is pray, so let's bathe!" I said because those with us were good bone holders, Getters of many sticks.

Night came. It was very cold, snowing now. As soon as our crew went to sleep, I went outside and then set out on foot towards a distant place. Walking at night, I went to the middle of the beach. I took off my clothes and started bathing, knelt down at the spot where the waves were reaching and started to pray. In my prayer I said that I would beat my opponent when I played the bone game, that I would get a lot of tally sticks, that I would cause all of them to become confused, that I would cause everybody to forget, that my mind would take control over theirs.

"He's the one who caused them to lose' they'd be saying of me," I said in my prayer that night.

While it was very cold and snowing I was in a position like you sit in a bone game, kneeling down; that's why I was half-submerged in the water as it came up the beach. I said in my prayer that I would cause all to watch, also cause to stare at me all the good pointers of the Ni:ti:na²ath, that I would beat the Ni:ti:na²ath. I repeated this prayer every time the waves came up to me. I was shaking my hands as if they missed me. I'd have my arms spread out, pretending they missed me. I had my bones for playing the bone game in my hand. I was counting how many

times the waves came up, when it came up twenty and one times. Then I would scoop up the things that drifted in.

"All right, now I have beaten the Ni:ti:na'ath," I kept repeating.

Then I would start praying again. I was really praying ritually for playing the bone game. I was singing songs, the songs I would sing when playing the bone game. I was doing that and finished pretending to win four games, counting the incoming waves up the beach. Then I finished and put on my clothes after pretending to win four times. Then I went to sleep. I went home to find everyone was asleep although the fire was still burning in the stove. We were there for a long time. For four days I did that, bathing four nights, praying for bone game luck while it was extremely cold in the wintertime. We were there for five days. We slept there five times; that's why I had one night to sleep properly.

Then they came to get us. The weather got nice that morning so the one who came for us arrived. We set out then, went along in a launch and eventually arrived at W'a:yi,⁸ our original destination. My, we saw many Ni:ti:na'ath people! The Ni:ti:na'ath came down the beach to meet us, and we introduced ourselves. They took those who brought Pilot bread in their canoe up the beach. We were invited - we were invited by 'O:'ochis'at.⁹ Hey now, we went into the house, and the Ni:ti:na'ath began coming into the house to sit and eat with us. They fed us dried dog salmon that's been soaked, and then we had tea. When we finished eating, everyone started having conversation with one another. The Ni:ti:na'ath started saying,

"Hey! I wish they were bone game players, those strangers; we would have played bone game."

"Keep saying that please; we also came to play bone game," I said.

We then left the place where we were and went to this place where our guests stayed for two days, sleeping there twice. They began treating us as guests, all those of our crew, and they invited all the Ni:ti:na'ath that night. All right, and then the Ni:ti:na'ath came in as guests, all the people including children, and also women. It was evening as everyone came in. They must have had a meeting planning what they would do. We remained in there a long time. They met together a long time, the Ni:ti:na'ath people. All right, we were taken inside the house, and not long after we entered there came the men and the women, the girls. They must have been getting dressed up in the other house. They were gone a long time. One person came in and said to the many people,

"The Ni:ti:na'ath people are getting ready. They are nicely dressed, ready to dance."

The man left, and then they were heating water for tea. They were going to eat what we had brought, the Pilot bread. One of the Ni:ti:na'ath came:

"Stoke up the fire. They are coming," he announced.

Then the fire flared up and it got really bright in the house where we were. They started to sing there at the doorway. They had us at the front of the house. We were anxious to watch. The dancers came into view. The men came in first. They had in their hands a branch held horizontally. Many came in. They were dancing, and the many Ni:ti:na'ath were singing. At this point the ladies came in, very pretty in their costumes. When all the ladies had come in, one of the Ni:ti:na'ath spoke up:

"Dance a little more, dance a little more; you are not quite doing it right!"

Then the villagers really started dancing, beginning to use the branch they were holding. It seemed as if they were one as they all moved right in time, as they did every move according to their leader in front. They all moved up and down as one as they went from one side of the house to the other. We were really watching, amazed. We'd never seen a dance like that before; it was the first time we saw anything like that. Then they ended the song. They were many, the people, and the big house was full. They sang again, and the dancers danced just where they stood. They sang twice while just standing there. Then one man went to the middle of the floor and said,

"You stop dancing now."

Next Shi:wish sang a song. Then the Ni:ti:na'ath gathered. They went to one side of the house, and then one said,

"Ho:y!"

And the others joined in. They did that four times:

"Ho:y! Ho:y! Ho:y! Ho:y!"

One of them started a song, and the rest joined in again like before. Then out came two young men wearing wolf masks. They sang four times and stopped. And then they gave a gift to Hawi:hto'is, one dollar. They gave Tlapisim one dollar. They then gave the rest of us one dollar each.

"All right, there's another one," they said.

The same thing happened again: they danced. This time there were ladies wearing the wolf masks. After four times they stopped. They did the same to us again: gave us a gift of one dollar each. There were eight different ones who gave us gifts. Then they started to sing the song of our crew, directing it to us. They gave twenty-five dollars to Tlapisim in money and then two dollars to each of us that was with Tlapisim. Next they sang the song of the crew of Hawi:hto'is who was also receiving twenty-five dollars money and then each of his crew two dollars. Then they announced that they were finished.

"Now you may attend to the food," they said.

They took the Pilot bread and placed it in the middle of the floor. They then set tea cups in front of us. The people were talking excitedly, proud of the fact that now they would eat the gift visit food. The Ni:ti:na'ath were served and they ate. They finished eating, and everyone stopped talking. All right, it was at this time that I spoke.

"Be listening," the Ni:ti:na'ath said, "Be listening."

"All right, I guess that is how his mind is," I said. "Just to show that he has relatives here, still feels the same as how his forefathers felt who told him that it was his relatives who lived here when we went to gift visit - that is the reason that he came to visit his relatives. All right, I saw what you did, Ni:ti:na'ath, that you showed your support in singing your songs and using your wolf masks which you have for such an occasion like this, like we're doing now - that's why I am watching after your performances, watching what you are doing and how you are going about performing as your forefathers also did, you Ni:ti:na'ath. You are also descendants of a tribe called Ho:ʔi:ʔath, those of you who are here - that is why they used to take along the remains of a mat when they go to Ni:ti:na'ath, those of us from our tribe, because we were at peace with one another for a long time.¹⁰ All right, it is like this for all the Ni:ti:na'ath in the land of the place called Ho:ʔi:ʔath¹¹ because of the fact that women so-called move about from tribe to tribe - that is why most of the Ni:ti:na'ath are at the land called Ho:ʔi:ʔath. You are good, you are good, you tribe. I will take good news when I go home because I saw how you all are. All right, I will change the subject a little. Even though the Whiteman is trying to stop us from doing this, trying to stop us from having a meal with one another, it is good for us what we are doing now like this, laughing together here in this house as these many people because many of us are eating together."

All right, that's as far as I went. Now then Hin'aʔom spoke. Hin'aʔom gave a thank you speech. He said everything regarding appreciation of all that was done for us and all that was given to us. All right, he finished. Now spoke the Ni:ti:na'ath named

Tl'iloxwa'a.

"You said just what you should, what should be said. You said everything I would have said, too, if I was speaking, how I would have spoke. I would just like to thank you for the food you brought," said he to us. "You told the truth when you said that it was true that there were Ni:ti:na'ath in the land called Ho:ʔi:ʔath. All right, it was likewise here, too, with Ho:ʔi:ʔath in the land of the Ni:ti:na'ath."

Then he started thanking for the food, that we had done him a great favour, that he had had good food to eat. All right, he finished and walked away. We went out last. We found that there was a bunch of people at the front of the house outside, Ni:ti:na'ath young men.

"All right, should we not play bone game?" they said.

"All right, all right, let's play bone game," I said.

"Let's play bone game," we started saying, all of us.

I got cold because we were going to play the bone game. I got real cold all over because I was ready, having already prayed ritually for it. All right, we walked away towards where we were to play. We went inside and settled down. A lot of people gathered there, many of them. We placed our bets to the amount of twenty dollars, and ten. We went against the Wa:ya:ʔath.¹² We started playing then. It was not long before we beat them, and we took the money we won which was ours now. A man stood up on the opposite side and he called on the Tlo:ʔowis'ath.¹³

"Come all you people from Tlo:ʔows, take our place on the opposing side," he said.

They placed their bet first, the Tlo:ʔowis'ath, their pot growing to be quite a large sum this time, a lot of money. And then we placed our bet, matching their amount. Hey then, we started playing! We were playing real hard now. There were more people on the other side, a lot of people watching. There were eight of us, eight on our team. I was glad that we were like this, just as I had said in my prayers when I was praying for the bone game. We played quite a while, but we beat the Tlo:ʔowis'ath too. We took the money, our winnings. Now then, someone stood up also from the Tlo:ʔowis'ath.

"All right, you people come," said the Chief of the P'a:chi:na'ath,¹⁴ "Let us challenge them, those of us from P'a:chi:da'."

All right, the P'a:chi:na'ath placed their bet. Their pot exceeded the amount of the bet the Tlo:ʔowis'ath had had. We

managed to match their bet again, how much they had. All the Ni:ti:na?ath bet against us. We started to play again. I was really playing! I was full of the bone game! I felt as if I had dove into a river, I was so soaked with sweat, moving around dancing, trying not to lose. It was close to daylight when we beat them again. We took the money again; we claimed our winnings. Three times we had won.

"Let's quit," said the Ni:ti:na?ath.

Then we all walked out; everyone went home. All right, that's how far we went. Then I said to our team mates,

"All right, you people, don't play bone game again for you might lose. I'm going home now."

Then I went home. I set out on foot towards Tsaxts'a:ʔa.¹⁵ They must then have played bone game when I was not there. They lost. Three times they lost. All right, that is as far as this goes. That's how this bone game business is. It's hard to be a bone game player. It's hard to bathe ritually for it, trying to beat the bone game players of all the tribes, trying to get the pointer mixed up on the opposite side. If you are not prepared, not having done ʔo:simch ritual training, when you are challenged to play bone game you will lose; you will not win. Then you will be very ashamed and embarrassed; it's shameful. But if you have ritually bathed, you will keep on winning. This is the truth about this ʔo:simch business.