



Secwepemc Stsptekwll “The Trout Children”

Secwepemc Stsptekwll are true tellings that connect the past and present of Secwepemcúlecw passing on the moral, spiritual, legal, social values laws and knowledge. They show and communicate what are the social, moral and natural consequences of past ancestors' actions. The past action of the stsptekwll, manifest in the connection between stories, place names and features on the landscape and anchor experiences to the land as collective memories and represent the Secwepemc activities on the land.

The Ajax project area is anchor to the Trout Children story. In 1891 it was reported that “One the trail which leads from Kamloops toward Trout Lake, where it runs over the bare, grassy hills about a mile north of the crossing place of Peterson or Jacko Creek the scanty remnant of an old stump protrudes from among a few stones which are piled about it. In passing the Indians always throw some little offering upon it. When I saw it in 1890, several matches had recently been laid on the stump, and a fragment of tobacco or shred of clothing is often placed there. The name of this place is Ka-whoo'sa (“crying”), and the Indians say that it nearly always rains when they pass, as though the sky wept. The story attaching to it is as follows:

Long ago there was an old woman who was called, or represented in some way, a grizzly bear, and who had neither husband nor children and was very lonely. For the sake of companionship she procured some pitch and shaped from it the figure of a girl, which became her daughter. She strictly enjoined [told] the girl, however, that when she went to the water to bathe she must not thereafter sit or lie in the sun to get warm. This special order the girl obeyed on three occasions, but on the fourth, overcome with curiosity and not yet understanding the reason of the injunction, she sat down on a stone in the sun,

and so before long melted with the heat and disappeared.

Then the old woman made a girl out of clay, and this time told her daughter that she might bathe and dry herself in the sun if she pleased, but must on no account rub herself with in the water. Three times, as before the girl obeyed, but on the fourth time disobeyed and rubbed herself away in the water and was lost.

So again the old woman was alone, but she bethought herself, and next made a daughter out of a piece of wood, telling this one that she might bathe, swim and bask in the sun or do what she pleased. Three times the girl bathed without incident, but on the fourth, as she sat on the bank of the river with her back partly turned toward it, drying herself, she saw a fine large trout jump and exclaimed, “I would like to have that fish for my husband.” Twice again the trout jumped and she repeated her wish, but on the further occasion she felt something touch her back and turning round saw a fine young man standing beside her, who said, “You wished me for a husband; now I am come to take you.”

She readily consented to go with him, so he took her on his back and told her not to open her eyes till he gave her permission to do so. Then he sprang into the river and dived toward the bottom, but halfway down the girl opened her eyes, when instantly she found herself on the bank again. This occurred three times, but on the fourth trial she managed to keep her eyes closed till her lover ordered her to open them. Then she found herself with her lover in a good country, something like that which she had left, but not the same.

In this country the two lived for sometime and two children were born to them, a boy and a girl. There were other people in this under-water country, however, and when the children began





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to grow large they were taunted by being told they had no grandmother, and came to their mother to ask her why this was. She told them that they had a grandmother, but that she lived in the upper country. They might, if they pleased go up there and if they did so would see an old woman digging roots on the hillside who was their grandmother. They were not to speak to her, but might go to her house and take there whatever they could find to eat.

This pleased the children, who accordingly thrice went up to the upper country and each time having noted the old woman to be hard at work on the hill went to her house and helped themselves to food. The woman, however, when she returned from her work, found that food had been taken and saw the footprints of the children, and said that to herself that none but her daughter's children would visit her house in that way.

So she prepared some potent "medicine" and then going to a stump on the hillside where she was accustomed to work, told the stump that when the children appeared it must move and seem to be a woman digging. The woman then concealed herself in the house and when the children came the stump acted as she had bidden. The children spied about and the boy was satisfied that he saw the old woman at work on the hill, but the girl was suspicious, so the boy went first into the house, but soon he persuaded his sister to follow him. As soon as both were in the house the woman threw the medicine on the children. It fell all over the boy, but only part reached the girl and so the former was changed to an ordinary human being, while the girl became a little dog.

The woman kept the boy whose name was Ta-kutl'-pie'e'kas'k and the dog and took care of both, but the boy did not know that the dog was his sister, and the woman never told him this but bade him on no account to beat or ill-use it. The boy soon began to shoot with a bow and arrows and one day was shooting red-headed

woodpeckers. Three times he killed one of these birds, but each time the dog ran on before him and ate the bird. Then he became angry and when the same thing happened a fourth time he struck the dog beating it with an arrow. Then the dog spoke saying, "why do you beat me, your own sister?" and ran from him. The boy followed but before he could catch the dog it turned into a chickadee and flew away.

Very sad the boy returned to his grandmother and asked her why she had not told him that they dog was really his sister, but she said to him, "If I had told you perhaps you would be more sorrowful than you now are." She then went on to tell the boy, that if when shooting his arrow should happen to lodge in a tree or anywhere above his reach, however little he must not climb to get it. Soon afterwards he three times lost his arrows in this way, but a fourth time his arrow stuck a tree not far up, and he climbed on a branch to get it; but the arrow continued to move further up, and he had to climb after it, and though he thought he has not gone very far, he looked down after a time and found that he could not even see the earth. So he went on climbing, the arrow still going before him, till at last he reached another country above, which was very pleasant and in which many people were, and there he remained. Now the old stump first mentioned is the remnant of this very tree."

In the 1909 recorded version of the story after the boy climbs up the tree he arrives in the "sky country" where he meets a very old man called "Spetlamu'lax" (spet'emlúecw = fog emerging from the land) who identified himself as the boy's grandfather. The grandfather helps the boy to train (étsexem) for powers by bathing in an ice-hole in the nearby lake and directly the boy to go inside his skin so he goes undetected. The chief of the place then announces a shooting competition, offering his daughter as wife to the winner. In the skin of the old man, the boy shoots a small owl. The boy, still in the skin of the old man, marries the chief's daughter, revealing





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himself to her. He subsequently hunts large number of deer for the people and the people kill the old man, cutting him up into small pieces thus separating the boy from the grandfather's body.

In the third version of the story from the late 1960's from the late Chief Charlie Draney from Skeetchestn adds a further element at the end of the story where "after the successful deer hunt for his brothers in law, and these have left the old man "stood up, dropped his skin in a heap and a handsome young man walked away. The brothers in law then cut the old man's skin into pieces, which get blown into the mountains becoming fog."

In 1974 the following was proclaimed about this epic story, "[The Trout Children and their Grandparents] is a folktale of surpassing beauty, great psychological depth and considerable religious-historical interest. The story opens with a lonely old woman who has lost all her relatives and it ends with an old man – her late husband in the Sky-Country – dissolving into fog. In between the whole of Shuswap – and of human – life unfolds, first in our work, then in underwater Trout-country, then once again on earth, finally in the Sky-Country (the magic number of four dividing the story as a whole, as it characterizes many of its details). The joys and apprehensions of the parent, the wishes and hesitations of the bride, the sorrows and adventures of childhood, the energy and transgressions of manhood in the fight for survival – every facet of life is reflected. The way the Trout-children for the first time eye our everyday world as something new and strange is a masterly application of ostranenie. The final scene: The grandson groping at the fog which his grandfather has dissolved, vainly trying to collect the trails that keep extending to the snowy mountains – this scene would make worthy ending for the opera, ballet or film for which this tale provides such an excellent scenario, and which deserves no less than does, saym the Novgorod bylin about Sadko."

The starting point of the Trout Children epic is an environment with a trout-bearing lake at the centre. The lake is deep, and is surrounded by open hillsides that are rich in edible root plants: when the trout children dive up to the surface of the lake and for the first time see the place where their grandmother lives, Charlie Draney tells it this way, "They looked around there, oh, a beautiful country here; they looks in the direction of the sunrise and saw a house that stood there. They looked at the hillside, oh, the country there was a beautiful open hillside. They saw an old woman digging roots there."

**The above information was compiled from and is available in the Cultural Heritage Study Final Report for the SSN dated August 27, 2014. For more information please contact Sunny LeBourdais, sunny@stkemlupsemc.ca

