

Jamie Wladyka

Alaska Studies – Period 5

Mr. Wayne

29 November 2010

Past Life of a Tlingit Teenager
(What significant things were different for teens in the past?)

Most of us do not usually take the time to think of what life was like in past times. We prefer to focus on the present day entertainment systems offered to us and the advancement of our own social status. This lifestyle has led many of us to forget how fortunate we are to have such easy and opportunity filled lives as we do, when compared to those who came before us. Many centuries ago, a person's main concern was not popularity or style, not entertainment and amusement, but simply staying alive. The Alaska native people are a model example of this reality.

For the Tlingit, survival as an individual would in most cases be impossible for any long period of time. The unforgiving wilderness and weather conditions created the need for the combined effort of a group of people to provide food, shelter, and protection for themselves. These responsibilities were given to the young Tlingit people at as early an age as possible. For a teenager of a Tlingit village, the responsibilities were similar to those of the adults. While remembering this fact, it is important to keep in mind the technology of the natives during those times required much more hard work and effort to accomplish tasks that seem simple with today's technology.

When hunting, the Tlingit used bows and arrows, lures, and cleverly concealed traps rather than rifles or shotguns. When fishing, various nets, spears and rakes were used to catch fish in small groups in similar ways to today, however unlike the fast motor powered boats used today, the small boats and canoes they used were unsuitable for safe open ocean fishing, which meant most of their fishing had to be done by wading through the rivers and shallow waters. During the different seasons, the Tlingit people moved to various hunting and fishing grounds, setting up small shelters and huts until the next season. Unlike today, large loads of food and other supplies had to be carried from place to place by foot, rather than by automobiles or airlift. This made it much more practical to travel to each area, utilize its resources, and then move on, rather than to bring everything back to a single village. These many different aspects of Tlingit life were as much a part of a teen's life as an adult's.

As children grew older, their responsibilities within their clan grew. They did not have excessive amounts of time to spend idly, but instead devoted more time to their education in their tribal customs and traditions. Unlike today however, young Tlingit teens did not attend organized schools to learn. Instead, they were taught by their elders and parents. Accumulated knowledge gained by their ancestors and themselves was passed down from one generation to the next. From calling a deer with a leaf, to performing at a potlatch, their tribal culture was taught to the young with in mind the fact that someday they themselves would hold the responsibility of passing it down to their own children and grandchildren. This knowledge helped the Tlingit people throughout the centuries to not only survive, but to prosper.

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Ancient Southeast Alaska

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