

LOST ART REGAINED - PUYALLUP TRIBE RAISES TOTEM TO - News Tribune, The (Tacoma, WA) - June 7, 1996 - page B1

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Golden Eagle stands at the top, sternly surveying the land he protects. Below him are his two squabbling wives, Black Bear and Giant Woman.

Long before people came to the Pacific Northwest, Giant Woman was jealous of Black Bear. In their arguments and battles, they created the shape of the world. When Giant Woman chased Golden Eagle, he dragged his claws through the earth, forming mountains.

The three world-shapers stand at the top of a 36-foot cedar story pole in front of the Puyallup Tribe of Indians' new school, Chief Leschi.

Thursday, about 500 tribal members and their friends held a four-hour ceremony to raise and bless the story pole - and to celebrate a revival of their native art.

Shaun Peterson, the 21-year-old carver who designed the story pole, explained the legends it represents.

"They created this Earth," he said of the figures.

Many people don't believe Puyallups have their own native art, Peterson said. Over years of neglect, "Puyallup art was dying," he said.

"The time has come for us to stand up and show people that we have our own art. We have our own culture, we have our own language, we have our own ways."

It's been about 150 years since Puyallup Indians held a ceremony and raised a traditional story pole, said Jay Simchen, president of the Puyallup Tribe's school board.

And it's been nearly that long since Puyallup Indians' art was widely encouraged and appreciated, he said.

Simchen believes the tribe lost its art and other traditions as the area became more urban.

Other speakers Thursday talked about the times when their parents weren't allowed to speak their native tongue; when they struggled with alcohol; when they were mocked for being American Indian and lost their pride in their heritage.

"The struggle for our identity is not easy," said Don "Mac" McCloud Jr.

But the Puyallup Tribe has worked hard to value and cherish American Indian ways.

Children at the tribal school learn their native tongue, Twelshootseed - sung and spoken at

Thursday's ceremony. Tribal members also dressed in traditional regalia, sang new and old songs and carried bits of sacred cedar and sage.

"We're bringing our traditions back," Simchen said. "We're coming home. You will witness a rebirth of the Puyallup Nation as we come home."

Peterson was one of a handful of carvers who worked on the pole for the last six months. Binah Paz, who organized Thursday's ceremony, worked closely with him and the other carvers and told the crowd of their stalwart efforts.

"As you're watching this pole raised," Paz told the crowd, "be thinking about watching the sun rise, because you haven't made it home the night before - because you're working on something that will honor your people."

Peterson said that over the last two weeks, he worked night and day on the pole, "as long as I could stay awake." He thought of his family, and that helped him.

But at times he became lonely, so lonely he thought about the two whales he and the other carvers created at the bottom of the pole.

After a great flood, the two black whales were trapped in a lake on Mount Takopid - what is now called Mount Rainier.

The whales were lonely. They missed their people. They swam right through the mountain, plowing their way through to the Puget Sound. The channel they dug became the Puyallup River.

"I apologize to all of you for not speaking as well as I wanted to, but I am tired. I have lost so much sleep," Peterson said. "I put my heart into that pole. ... We have brought this to life."

The pole received a special, unexpected blessing Thursday.

As school employees Don Coats and Frank Castillo fastened the pole to a metal support beam, a hawk and a crow soared into the wide, cloud-speckled sky and circled near the pole. The crowd gasped, pointed and clapped.

"That's a good omen," elder Arnold Sylvester said later. "I think that good things are going to happen from now on."

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