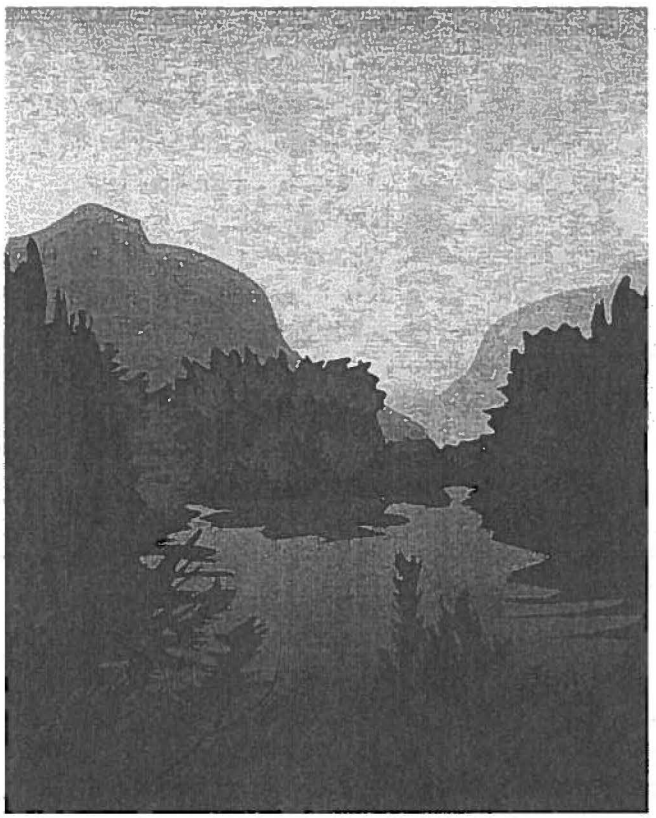

The Flood

Long, long ago, when the Squamish Indians were first created, they were given three Special Helpers. These were the sxw7umtn, Indian doctor, the kwts'i7s, Ritualist/Medicine man, and the ésyew, the Prophet. The sxw7umtn, Indian doctor had trained for many years while fasting until he found the power of his Spirit. He could help anyone who was sick and that person would immediately become well again. This was because he was so powerful.

A kwts'i7s, Ritualist, could also help a sick person if the sxw7umtn was not around to help the family. He didn't have the power of the sxw7umtn but had learned certain magical chants and words and knew the secret ways to use the temlh, Indian red paint, on the sick person's body to heal him. The kwts'i7s was also said to have cast evil spells as well as good.

The ésyew, Ritualist, didn't have the power to heal or the special words or paint. What he did have was the gift to see into the future and predict what was going to happen to a person.

Well, in the early days, the old people gave the young ones good advice on how to live and behave. Such as how to be humble and kind. The young people followed this advice and also learned how to help anyone who was in trouble or need. They shared their food and everyone was happy. There was plenty to eat. Deer, bear and berries. When the fish were running the rivers were full.

If anyone became sick they would call for the sxw7umtn. Who healed them. As time passed however, the people began to forget the old ways. They didn't listen to the good advice of the old people. They didn't share their food, they didn't help those in need.

One day the ésyew stood up in front of the people and said, " My friends I have been told to warn you. Your way of life is not right. You do not help one another as the people used to do when they were first created. I am warning you. You must change your ways. " He sat down and the people were silent. Then an old man stood up and thanked the ésyew. " Listen to the words of the ésyew. He knows what will happen if you do not change. "

After the ésyew finished speaking he looked around to see what the people would do. Some of them laughed and others made fun of him. " Listen to that gloomy old man! What does he know? " " Why should we listen to what these old people say? " " We'll live our own lives. Nobody can tell us what to do. " Sadly the ésyew and the old people watched as their words go unheeded. Everyone behaved as they pleased. No one helped their neighbor, none were humble and kind.

Then all of the game on this land began to disappear, deer, bear, all land animals. The people were unable to hunt and they all went hungry. Again the ésyew stood up. " You have received one of your punishments. Listen now and return to the right ways or something more terrible will happen. " Still the young turned aside and went their selfish ways. Soon the fish began to disappear from all the little streams and creeks. When the berry season came, there were no berries to be found. The people began to grow hungrier and began to fight and quarrel among themselves.

Once more the ésyew stood up and said, " This is the last time I can warn you. Now you have received this severe punishment. Oh change your ways now, for if you will not, a punishment so strong, I cannot speak of, will happen. " The old people pleaded as well with the others, tried to get them to listen. But the people seemed to become deaf to good advice. Now they were getting worse, fighting, quarreling. No one was happy. No one listened.

Then one day it began to rain. The river started to rise. The sxw7umtn seemed to lose his power. He could no longer cure the sick and his patients died. The kwts'i7s also lost his power. His special words and paint no longer worked.

The rain continued and the river rose higher. The ésyew used to be able to control the flooding of a heavy rain by taking a cedar stick, painting it and chanting his magic words of power over it. Then he would place the stick on the riverbank. When the rising river reached the stick the water would stop. This time though, the water would not stop. The river kept rising higher and higher.

When the river was about to come over the riverbank those who had canoes put their families in them and rose with the water. The others went into their homes with their families and animals. Gradually the waters rose until it covered the homes and those inside drowned. The people in canoes headed for the highest grounds to camp. And they had to go higher still.

Finally all the land was covered and only the mountain tops were showing. They floated to the highest peak in Squamish and anchored their canoes. Day after day the sxw7umtn continued writing on the side of the mountain to try to stop the flood waters. Day after day the waters rose until they looked around and all that they could see was the peak of Mt Garibaldi and another peak further south down river.

The people headed their canoes for Mt Garibaldi. The river was running very swiftly now and after their canoes were anchored, some of them broke loose. The water was too swift to paddle back. So some people from that group headed for the other mountain down river. Those still anchored to Mt Garibaldi stayed there. Then the water started to go down. At first, very

quickly. Then it slowed down until a large lake formed. The people from Squamish went back to their old home site. Others from further up the Squamish River stayed there and still others stayed at Cheakamesh. Those who survived were happy to be alive and back home. But they remembered with sadness their friends who had drowned. At last the Squamish people returned to their senses. When the old people spoke, everyone listened. People helped one another and everyone was happy again. The sxw7umtn and the kwts'i7s were powerful once again. The animals which the people used for food returned to the land. The creeks were once again filled with fish and there was an abundance of berries. Everyone remembered to be humble and kind.

Never again would the Squamish people suffer this terrible punishment. Never again would the water cover the land. It is said that the sxw7umtn's paint can still be seen on the face of the mountain that some of the people were anchored to. The Squamish word for this mountain is sxáltsu, meaning " Painted Face. "

The mountain peak away to the south of the Squamish River, where some of the people landed is called, sxwts'ak, " Mount Baker. " In the Washington State in the U.S.A.