

# The Story of Kaax'achgōok

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This is a true story.

It happened on salt water, maybe near Sitka.

It goes with that song I sing — I'll tell you about it.

This man, Kaax'achgōok, was a great hunter for seal.

He was going hunting at fall.

He has eight nephews on his side, his sisters' sons.

Kaax'achgōok is Crow and so are those boys.

They all went out together in a boat.

Early in the morning, they left.

Fog was down low on the ocean.

He's captain: he sat in the back, guiding the boat.

He heard a baby cry that time, "Wah, wah."

"Stop. Listen. Stop that, baby, now!

Don't you know this is Kaax'achgōok's hunting ground?"

He listened quite a long time.

Here it was baby seal crying.

That's bad luck.

That voice even called his name, "Kaax'achgōok."

So he told his nephews that's bad luck:

"Let's go back."

They came back that same evening.

He brought up his boat, paddles, spears, and he tells those boys to chop it all up.

"I'll never hunt again."

He knows it's something. It's bad luck to hunt now.

After that, he just stayed home, I guess.

Anyway, he didn't hunt anymore that one year —

Stayed home all year until fall.

Maybe he goes out a little bit, but he never hunts.

Finally, someone else killed sea lion.

They invited both those two wives of Ƙaax'achgōok.

When those wives of Ƙaax'achgōok came back, he asked the youngest one,

“Did they give you any fat? Any fat left over they give you to bring home?”

“No, just meat,” she answered.

Then he asked his older wife,

“Did they give you any fat to bring home? Any left over?”

“No, no fat, just all meat.”

“How come they're so stingy to not give you women any fat!”  
He thinks maybe his luck will change.

Next morning he asks his older wife,

“Go ask your brother if I can borrow his boat.

I want to go out just a little ways.

Want to borrow boat, spear, hunting outfit.

I'm lonesome — tired of staying home.”

She goes to her brother.

“I want you to lend my husband your boat, spear, your hunting outfit.

He wants to go out just a little ways.

Not far.”

“Okay,” he says.

“The boys will bring it over later this evening.”

He's got eight boys too —

That's Ƙaax'achgōok's wife's people, Wolf people — they call them Killer Whale on the coast —

That evening they packed over a brand new boat — dugout.

Spears, oars, everything in there already.

Ƙaax'achgōok tells those wives,

“You girls better cook up meat in saltwater for us.”

Next morning, those boys get water ready in sealskin.

Cook things.

Then, when they are ready, Kaax'achgōok goes out again.  
Not far, north wind starts to blow.  
You know North wind blows in falltime?

Kaax'achgōok thinks,  
“Gee, we should go back while it’s not too rough.  
Let’s go back,” he tells his nephews.  
They turn around.  
Right away, that wind came up — they row and row.  
Soon waves are as big as this house.

Kaax'achgōok is captain: what he does, the rest of the boys do.  
He throws his paddle in the boat.  
Those boys do that too.  
Kaax'achgōok pulled up a blanket and went to sleep.  
Those boys, too, they sleep.  
They went the whole night and the next day like that.

Towards the second morning, Kaax'achgōok woke up.  
He feels the boat not moving, but he hears waves sucking back.  
He pulled the blanket down and looked.  
By gosh, they drifted onto an island —  
Nice sandy beach.

“Wake up you boys. What’s this I hear?”

It sounds like when the wave goes out, goes back.

Next oldest boy looks up too.  
“Yes, we’re on land,” he said.  
“Well, might as well go on shore.”

Those boys run around.  
They see a leaf like an umbrella —  
It’s a stem with a hole that is full of rainwater.  
‘Frog leaf,’ they call it.

“Eh, save that [fresh] water.”  
Each has his own sealskin water bag.  
He looks around.  
“Take your time.  
Go back and see if there’s a good place to make a fire.”  
They found a good place, sheltered from the north wind.

“Let’s go there.”  
Big trees around there.  
They make brush camp out of bark.  
They carry that bark with them in boat.  
Just that quick they had camp put up.  
Look for wood — lots of driftwood.  
“You boys are not to run all over. We’ll check all around  
first.”

On the south side of the island, there’s a rocky point.  
All kinds of sea lions, seals, all kinds of animals.  
When they’re on rocks, the tide is out.  
He thinks that’s the best time to club them.  
That’s what they did.  
Each boy made a club.  
They killed off as much as they needed —  
Sea otter, sea lion, seal.  
Not too much — just what they can handle.  
He told them to look after that meat good.

Some people say he was there over a year —  
Some say ’til next spring.  
He dreamed he was at home all the time.  
“I gave up hope, then I dreamed I was home.”

That man, *K̄aax'achgɔok*, he always goes to northwind side every day.

He goes out on the point — never tells anyone.

He marks when the sun comes out in the morning —

Marks it with a stick.

In the evening, he goes out again,

Marks a stick where the sun goes down.

He never tells anyone why he does this.

He just does it all the time.

Finally, that stick is in the same place for two days.

He knows this marks the return of spring.

Then the sun starts to come back in June, the longest day.

In the meantime, he said to the boys,

“Make twisted snowshoe string out of sealskin.

Dry it; stretch it.

Make two big piles.

One for the head of the boat, one for the back of the boat.”

Finally, when the sun starts back in June,

He sees it behind the mountain called *Tloox*, near Sitka.

In June, that sun is in the same place for one, two days.

He tells those boys just before the end they're going to start back.

Tells those boys to cook meat, put it in seal stomach.

Once they're out on the ocean, there's no way to make fire so they've got to cook first.

They prepare ahead.

Sealskin rope is for anchor.

When the sun goes back again on the summer side, they start.

“Put everything in the boat.”

He knows there's a long calm time in late June when the sun starts back.

No wind —

They start anyway.

They think how they're going to make it.

Those boys think, “Our uncle make a mistake.

We were okay on the island, but now we are really lost.”

Row, row, row.

Finally, sun came out right in front of the boat.  
Evening, goes out at the back.  
Kaax'achgōok anchors the boat and he tells those boys to sleep.

I used to know how many days that trip took — it's a long time,  
though.

I was ten when I heard this story first —  
My auntie Mrs. Austin told me the story first time.  
Later, I heard my father tell it to the boys.

Sun down.  
They anchor the boat when it goes down on the steering side.  
Next morning, the sun came out same way at the head of the boat.  
He knows what is going on —  
They're right on course.  
They keep doing that I don't know how long.

Finally, one time, just after the sun goes down,  
He sees something like a seagull.  
When the sun comes up, it disappears.  
Evening, sundown, he sees it again.  
Four days, he sees it.

The second day he sees it, he asks,  
"What's that ahead of our boat? Seagull?"  
They think so.  
Where could seagull come from in the middle of the ocean?

They camp again.  
It gets bigger.  
Finally it looks like a mountain.  
They don't stop to rest anymore!  
Four paddle all day — four paddle all night.  
Their uncle is their boss: he sleeps all day, I guess. I don't  
know.  
Finally, they see it.

Early in the morning, *K̄aax'achgōok*'s oldest wife comes down to  
cry for her husband.

That youngest wife they already gave to another husband.

Finally, all of a sudden, she sees boat coming.

She quits crying — she notices how her husband used to paddle,  
Same as the man in the boat.

She runs back to the house.

“It looks like *K̄aax'achgōok* when he paddles!  
Get up! Everybody up!”

“How do you expect that?”

It's a whole year now.

You think they live yet?”

Then he comes around the point —

People all pack around that boat.

They took him for dead — already make potlatch for him.

So he gave otter skin to everyone who potlatched for him.

Sea otter skin cost one thousand dollars, those days.

Then he sang songs he made up on that trip.

He made one up when he gave up the oars.

“I gave up my life out on the deep for the shark.”

That song he gave to *Gaanax'adi* people.

Then he made up a song for the sun who saved him:

“The sun came up and saved people.”

He made that song during winter

And he sang it when he made a potlatch.

Then that song he sang,

“I gave up hope and then I dreamed I was home.”

That's the one I sing.

*Deisheetaan* people, we own that song,

Because long before, our people captured *K̄aax'achgōok*'s  
brother.

When they started to make peace, he sang that song and gave it to  
us for our potlatch.

Then we freed his brother. That's how come we own it.

That's why we claim that song.

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At the official opening of Yukon College on 1 October 1988, Mrs. Angela Sidney was one of the honoured guests. To commemorate the event, she sang an ancient Tlingit song that she says conveys her feelings about what Yukon College may mean to young people in the Territory.

"The reason I sang this song is because that Yukon College is going to be like a Sun for those students. Instead of going to Vancouver, or Victoria, they're going to be able to stay here and go to school here. We're not going to lose our kids anymore. It's just going to be like the Sun for them!"

The *K̄aax'achgōok* song was given to Mrs. Sidney's *Deisheetaan* clan by the *Kiks'adi* clan many years ago. Mrs. Angela Sidney is a well-known Native Elder who lives in Tagish, Yukon. She was born in 1902 and grew up speaking Tlingit, English, and Tagish Athapaskan. She is now one of the last surviving speakers of the Tagish language. Mrs. Sidney has worked with anthropologists and linguists for many years to document the oral traditions of her people. Her publications include *Place-Names of the Tagish Region, Southern Yukon* (1980), *Tagish Tlaagu — Tagish Stories* (1982), and *Haa Shagoon — Our Family History* (1983), all available from the Yukon Native Language Centre, Yukon College. In 1986 Mrs. Sidney was awarded the Order of Canada.

"The Story of *K̄aax'achgōok*" has been transcribed and submitted by Julie Cruikshank.