

THE COMING OF SLAHAL

This story is told in different ways by the tribes of Western Washington about the order of the world and how the world is to be and how people live in that world.

A long time ago, the people way back then were just like us people today, really pitiful. Because if you think about it, we're pitiful. We don't have any fur to keep us warm in the wintertime. We don't have sharp claws and teeth to hunt other animals with. We don't have wings and feathers to fly in the sky like a bird. We have nothing. We are pitiful. And because of that the animals looked at the people and said they should be our food. They have nothing, no claws, no fur, no feathers. They should be our food and the animals made plans to eat the people. But the people said but we have a brain. Our brain compensates for this. Our brain makes up for it. In fact, it gives us a powerful advantage over you animals. If we don't have fur, we can make clothes. If we don't have sharp claws and teeth, we can make spears and bows and arrows. If we don't have wings and feathers, we can make an airplane. This is how smart we are. And because we are so smart with our brain, we should eat you animals. So, the animals and the people had a big argument. Arguing who should eat who. They knew they could not solve this problem by arguing so they went to an old woman in the forest and explained the problem. She told them to come back in two days. And when they did, she said you shall play a game. It will be a very simple game. What you do is dig up bones from under the earth, the old ones who came before. You carve these bones until they fit in your hands. Two bones. One bone shall have marks upon it which will be the male, the man bone. The other will have no marks on it. It will be the female, the woman bone. And the object of the game is to hide those bones behind your back. Whoever is holding them, hide them behind your back and put the hands out so people cannot see which bones you are holding in your hand. Then you have someone choose which hand holds the female, the unmarked bone. If the person chooses correctly, they choose the unmarked bone, the female, they get the bones. And now it's their turn. But if they lose, the person hiding them gets to keep the bones and keep going on. That's how simple it is. It sounds like a guessing game. But it's not a guessing game. The Native people believe if your guessing, you're playing it wrong. There are ways to know, including the spirit power. Well the old woman further explained that we shall have a game then. This game is to be called Slahal, the bone game, because you are using bones and hiding them, and people choosing those bones, so it's called the bone game. It's a gambling game that Native people play even to this day. This game is a gambling game so I'd like to remind people that Indians were gambling before casinos. So, the old woman explained

how the game was to be played between two teams; the animals and the people. There will be a line of animals on one side and across from them should be a line of people, facing each other. Between them there shall be 20 counting sticks, she said. One team will have the bones to be hiding them. The other team will be choosing. Now if the one side choosing got that female bone, made the right choice, they will get the bones and they would also get a stick. If they chose the wrong hand, the other side would keep the bones and they would get a stick. So, this game goes back and forth, back and forth because you're winning getting a stick, and losing you're putting a stick back. And it goes on until someone wins all 20 sticks. The game could take not just hours to play but even days to play until one team wins all 20 sticks. And whoever won the 20th stick, they would eat the other. So, the animals and the people started that game. Two teams facing each other. And the animals as they played the game had something the people did not have. They had a song that they would sing as they played. This is called the laughing song. The animals are laughing at the people. Laughing at them because there is no way the people can win. (song and drums playing) Ho, ho, ho, he-o, ho, ho, ho, he-o, ho, ho, he he-o, ha, ha, ha, ha, e-o, ha, ha, ha, e-o. They would sing this song and they would win. They would win and get stick after stick after stick. Even if the people were lucky one time and got it, they would lose right away and have to put back their stick. So, remember, the object of the game is to win 20 sticks. After a while, the animals had 18 sticks and the people only had two. And the people were frightened because the animals were jumping around and drooling and slobbering and pointing and say I'm going to eat that one there; I'm going to eat that person there. They were going to eat when the game was over. So, the people were frightened; they were going to lose. So, they went back to the old woman and they begged her. Please give us a song that we might win. Please give us a song so we can have a chance. And the old woman took pity on the people. She felt sorry for them. So, she gave them a song. And now when they play the game, they can sing the song. Wo-o-wo, he-o, wo-o-ho, wo, he-o, way, he-o, he-o, he, wa, he-o, hey-o, way, he-o, he-o, he, wa, he-o, hey-o. And now the people began to win. They were winning stick after stick after stick and the animals were losing putting back stick after stick after stick. After a while now the people had 18 sticks and the animals had only 2. Now the animals were frightened because the people were jumping around slobbering, drooling and pointing saying I'm going to eat that one there and I'm going to eat two of those there. They were choosing the animals they were going to eat. And then, the people won the 20th stick and they won the game. And the animals were frightened. They jumped up and ran away. The elk ran into the mountain. The deer ran into the forest. The seal ran to the saltwater. The salmon ran to the river. And that is where those animals are today. Hiding from us. The elk in the mountain, the deer in the forest, the seal in the saltwater, the salmon in the river. They're

hiding from us because we can eat them, and they cannot eat us because we won the first game of Slahal. And that is all.