

The Story of Tsuwhilum

by Abel Joe

On the day Tsuwhilum was born there was a great storm. The thunder sounded, the sky was on fire, and the four winds blew most fiercely. The baby was deformed with a large head and a hunch back. The baby cried lustily as Tsuwhilum's father, a member of the Qwumi'yugun's shouted in anger,

"Ah see what the spirits sent me. This will never be a man. Throw it on the clam shell piles."

He grabbed at the child, but Tsuwhilum's mother, a member of the Qumi'ugun village, protected her baby, and caught

her husband's arm.

"Leave the child," she pleaded.
"He is a strong baby. Indeed he will
be a man and a fighter. Leave him.
You will see."

PART TWO

Three years passed before Tsuwhilum
had a baby brother. When this child was
a few months old, cruel warlike Indians
raided the village. The frightened villagers
ran in all directions. Many met with
death, others were captured and tied
by their hair to the crosspieces of the
great canoes from the north. Their fate
was to be slavery far from their
own village. There in the northern

village they would be isolated through a lack of knowledge of the language, and they would be despised as inferior.

Tsuwhilum had been helping his grandmother pick berries when the pillage took place. As they neared the village the grandmother hid Tsuwhilum and crept forward to view the horror of the scene. She watched her daughter with the baby in her arms, tied in place and the large canoe being paddled toward the narrows.

As the canoes, ten in all, sped through the turbulent waters, Tsuwhilum's

baby brother began to cry. One of the warriors shouted in a strange language. He kicked at the baby, and the child cried louder. The warrior caught hold of the baby's legs, and flung the child far out into the boiling water. The poor mother cried, screamed and tore at her strong black hair. She was tied so tightly, she could not free herself. She continued to struggle in agony until the warrior took his knife, and cut her hair. With a desperate cry she leapt into the water, spluttering and drowning as her baby had done before her. A great wind began to blow scattering the canoes until

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they paddled for the shore to await the end of the storm.

One of the prisoners escaped that night. Stealthily she left the camped warriors and made her way along the beach shore until she reached the water. Exhausted with fright and horror, she gasped out the story of the dreadful deeds of the northern warrior.

Tsuwhilum lived with his grandmother. She did not let a day pass without reminding him of the foul action done to his mother and brother, by the cruel northern people. She taught Tsuwhilum to be strong, to be

a fighter, and to trust no-one. Tsuw̄h̄ilum became fierce, knew no fear and was ugly to look at. When he was still young he would creep to the fire, take hot ashes and eat them. He bathed in the river and lakes every day when he rubbed his skin with hemlock boughs Tsuw̄h̄ilum would run in the woods to gain spiritual powers of strength. Always he preferred to be alone.

From Tsuw̄h̄ilum's boyhood he had been a strange being. He passed most of his time roaming in the forest or mountains. Once when he was at Saanich a shne'um looked into Tsuw̄h̄ilum's

shifting eyes. The boy stared at the Shne'um and was about to run away. The shne'um caught him, and directed the people to get some trailing blackberry brambles. He took the brambles and rubbed the boy's face saying as he did so,

"I hope your eyes will now keep strong."

The boy's face was severely cut with the thorns of the brambles. Tzuwhilum did not cry but grinned all the time. When the shne'um let him go with the command

"Run!"

he ran off by himself into the forest again.

PART THREE

When Tsuwhikum got home from Saanich he wandered through the forest. He heard a noise like the growling of a dog over a bone. He crept forward and saw a hairy forest monster, who with his wife and children were devouring the body of a youth. The monster held the victim on his knees, and with his long claws tore off the flesh and passed it to his children. The monster spoke to Tsuwhikum, bidding him to sit down and partake of the flesh. Tsuwhikum agreed.

When they finished their bloody

meal the monster said,

“When you fight and kill people I will be with you. Come here and lie down. There is something in your eyes. The shne'um did a good job when he rubbed your face, but he only did half the work. I will finish it.”

The monster lifted up his hands and caught a hummingbird. He took the bill and thrust it in the corner of the boy's eyes.

“Look up until you can see the stars.”

Presently the stars became visible through the blood of his eyes, and Tsuwhilum cried out,

"Yes, I can see them now."

The monster stopped his grisly task.

"From this time on, you will be able to see as well in the dark as in the light. Night and day will be the same to you."

Tsuwhilum went to his cave home where he danced and sang his mystery song.

PART FOUR

One day Tsuwhilum was hunting on the mountain. He walked for many miles without success, until he reached the top of the mountain. By this time he was tired so he lay down beside a log

and went to sleep.

When he woke it was quite dark, and rain was beginning to fall. Tsuwñilum decided to search for shelter when he noticed a light. He stood quite still watching the light which did not move. He crept closer and closer until he could touch it. Very carefully he put out his hands, and thought it must be a root. He took hold of it and pulled, but it was held by a big tree which had fallen over it. He began turning and twisting it until it broke. It was a thick cedar bark rope. Tsuwñilum gathered all the rope he could

manage to take home. He placed the rope where no-one would find it.

One evening the elders were gathered around the fire telling legends of how Heels, the Transformer, had changed people into rocks, and how the deer had changed from human to animal. Tzuwhilum was listening. Finally one of his uncles was talking about the big flood which had happened many years ago. It had rained for many days and nights, and the whole valley was under water. People were saved by standing on Pepam, the rising rock on Cowichan mountain. The people had a large canoe which they

anchored close to the mountain with a cedar woven bark made into a rope. The elders told of how some people had seen the rope coiled up at the mountain rock. In order to be able to see the rope the person had to be very powerful.

Tsuwhilum leapt up, saying,

"I'll be right back."

The elders continued the saga of the Great Flood when Tsuwhilum returned with an armful of rope made from cedar bark, woven and twisted.

"Is this what you were talking about?"

The elders agreed it was indeed the piece of the rope that held the canoe when the Great Flood was upon the land. Everyone crowded around trying to touch the rope.

"Keep away!"

Tsuwhilum thundered,

"The spirit which saved the Cowichans' lives lives in this rope. It will make me strong to fight my enemies, and make me greater than any chief."

Tsuwhilum made himself a harness criss-cross of the rope. This he always wore and it became one of his greatest powers.

When he went to sleep he sometimes

used it to rest his head on, recalling always

how the northern people had killed his mother and younger brother by drowning them at the narrows. Someday he would have his revenge.

PART FIVE

One day Tsuiwhitum viewed the sea beckoning him to the sparkling waters. He took a running dive from the rocks of the mountain ledge into the sea. Down, down he went until he was nearly out of breath. Far below the surface of the sea he saw a cave. It was a strange place. He walked and walked through the underground passages until a voice stopped him by asking

"What are you doing?"

Tsuwhilum replied truthfully,

"I was purifying myself. I hope to receive the strength and power to be a good man."

He was led by a woman to her leader.

There on a rock throne she sat, arms resting on the rocky arms. All around the throne were beautiful smiling women.

Tsuwhilum was at a loss for words. The leader spoke,

"So you are looking for strength and power."

Tsuwhilum nodded. As he looked around the women were laughing. He thought they are making fun of me. Everything

a man could want was here, and he wanted to stay. Then the leader spoke and brought him back to reality,

"You are lucky for you are the first man ever to set foot in our home. Why are you looking for power?"

Tsuwhilum thought for a moment and said,

"My people need a good leader."

A smile flashed on the face of the woman who was the leader.

"I am going to give you the power of a woman. You must be very careful how you use it. If you go too far it will be a woman who will kill you."

Tsuwhilum smiled, but the leader said evenly

and strongly,

"I am warning you. We women are more powerful than men. So do not forget, if you go too far, it will be a woman who will kill you."

That was the last thing he remembered as he came to, on the shore. Many times he tried to find the cave again but he did not succeed in finding it. But Tsuwhilum pondered,

"What did she mean, if I go too far?"

PART SIX

Time passed, and Tsuwhilum wanted to honour the memory of his mother and

brother. He appointed his uncle to speak for him.

"My nephew, Tsuwhilum, wants to put up a memorial ceremony for his late mother and brother. We will each look after one thing; the fetching of the wood, the inviting ..."

but before the details could be discussed

Tsuwhilum announced,

"I want to use all the Shwuy'hwi dancers that are available!"

The uncle responded,

"But we do not belong to the masked dancers. They might not co-operate."

Undaunted, Tsuwhilum shot the first Shwuy'hwi dancer who refused him. The rest accepted out of fear of being killed.

Tsuwhilum did not have a family song of the Shwuy'hwi, so he made up,

"It's true I am not a noble man. Oh! me!"

Although the rules of the Shwuy'hwi demand that only the masked dancers belonging to the original family, Tsuwhilum broke the rules. He was so powerful that no one in Cowichan would dare go against him. The purpose of the dancers is to wipe the tears or sorrow in the family away. Tsuwhilum's mother's and brother's images were honoured. The image of his mother was made by tying blankets together to form a person. The image for his late brother was

put on a blanket swing to portray the rocking of a baby. The occasion lasted four days and four nights, with dancing, feasting and the giving of Indian woven goat wool blankets

During the occasion Tsuwhilum gave many blankets piled on the huy'shun, the blanket rack, to his honoured friends when all the blankets on the huy'shun had been thrown for scramble, Tsuwhilum walked to the river. There, from a canoe which was piled high with blankets, muskets and money, he threw items into the water. Tsuwhilum watched impassively as men were diving into the river to retrieve them. At one point, a man

coming up for air and exhausted from diving, hung on to Tsuwhilum's canoe. Tsuwhilum ordered the man to let go of the canoe in case the canoe tipped. As the man dived, panting at the side of the canoe, Tsuwhilum shot him and watched him drown.

One of Tsuwhilum's relatives hated him because Tsuwhilum had taken his wife. In those days a man was allowed to have as many wives as he wanted provided he could provide for them. But a man was not allowed to take a wife from someone else. The relative who hated Tsuwhilum decided to give a pottatch. When Tsuwhilum's name

was to be called, two men were to hide in the longhouse overlooking the huy'shun, and were to shoot T̄suw̄h̄ilum at the right moment.

When his name was called T̄suw̄h̄ilum did not respond immediately. There was tension in the air as his name was repeated several times. Then flanking a mocking T̄suw̄h̄ilum were two of his uncles. T̄suw̄h̄ilum danced zigzagging to the left. T̄suw̄h̄ilum shot one of the men, and then faced the unnerved relative who said,

"Don't shoot me! Don't shoot me!
Here is your gift."

T̄suw̄h̄ilum took the blanket, twisted

it around his musket, and still zigzagging backwards, eying the stricken relative with a fierce glare, he disappeared into the crowd. Tsuwhilum's vision from an encounter with a forest monster, and the piercing of his eyes with the hummingbird's bill had given him the power to foresee. It also allowed him to put his enemies to sleep. He also had the power to see equally well day or night.

So it was, Tsuwhilum put his relative who wanted to kill him, to sleep for four days. Everyone thought the relative was dying. The shne'ums could not do anything

because Tsuwhilum's power was too great Tsuwhilum told everyone he would remove his power over his relative if the man would never try to kill him again.

PART SEVEN

Tsuwhilum's power and fame spread

Everyone was afraid of the man with the strong power to cure or kill. Tthul'qus, a man who lived on the mainland, saw an elderly couple paddling their canoe near his home. He asked from where they came, and the tired couple replied they from the village where Tsuwhilum lived. Tthul'qus invited the couple to his home, and fed them with sun dried sockeye salmon, wild

potatoes (spen'hw), onions and wild blackberry jam. When the meal was finished Ithul'qus plied the couple with questions about Tsuwhilum, including,

"Does Tsuwhilum travel often?"

The couple who greatly feared Tsuwhilum answered,

"Yes, he is always on the move, and he is always up to something."

Ithul'qus went to another part of his longhouse, and returned with two scallop shells.

"I would like to challenge this Tsuwhilum, and find out who is

the better man. Give these shells to Tsuw̄h̄ilum, and tell him I want to meet him at his place or mine. Tell him I am T̄thul'qus the mighty."

As the old couple left, T̄thul'qus gave them two Indian blankets and food.

Five days later when the old couple reached home, they went directly to Tsuw̄h̄ilum's longhouse. The message was delivered, and then Tsuw̄h̄ilum questioned the trembling couple. They were fed a delicious meal, and given four Indian blankets for bringing the message from T̄thul'qus. The old couple promised to show Tsuw̄h̄ilum the way when he was ready

But Tsuw̄h̄ilum's uncle was afraid, for

Tthul'qus was powerful.

Tsuwhilum laughed,

"Are you afraid he might kill me? Do you think I have no power, or that my power is not great enough for Tthul'qus. Uncle, I am not afraid of any man. Tthul'qus sent me two shells, and I will meet him at his place."

Altogether there were thirty five to forty canoes as all the relatives accompanied Tsuwhilum to the mainland. They took their time through Sqtheq, camped at Tthhwumqsun, and then headed toward the direction of the rising sun, across the big sea to the home of Tthul'qus. They crossed the water, and directed by the

elderly couple they found the longhouse of Tthul'qus. About a mile from shore they formed a V formation with their canoes. Tsuw'ihilum's canoe was in the lead like the leader of the wild geese. Tsuw'ihilum sang his attacking song with the power to hypnotize. Everyone waited for the signal to go but the song continued. When they were still a long way from shore Tsuw'ihilum ordered the canoes to be still.

"I am going in alone,"

he commanded.

Tsuw'ihilum paddled to the shore alone. He took one of the muskets, walked

up to the house. All of Tthul'qus' dogs were asleep. Tsuwhilum stepped over them, kicked open the door and there all of the relations of Tthul'qus were asleep, including Tthul'qus who was sleeping on one of the mat beds. Tsuwhilum's power had worked.

Tsuwhilum pointed his musket with deer hoof rattlers on the handle. He danced in his zig-zagging fashion over to Tthul'qus. Tsuwhilum pointed his musket at the chest of Tthul'qus.

"I am here now. I am Tsuwhilum. You sent two shells, all I need is one."

Tthul'qus begged Tsuwhilum not to shoot
him,

"I'll give you anything you want,
even one of my wives. Look around.
You can have all of my wealth if
you spare my life."

Tsuwhilum looked around smiling, and saw
a woman which pleased him,

"I'll take her with me."

"Oh, good."

sighed Tthul'qus.

"You can have two."

Tsuwhilum frowned,

"No, I am only taking one,"

and at this he yelled out loud, and the

musket fired. Tthul'qus lay dead on his mat.
Tsuwñilum danced over to the wife he had
 chosen, and touched her. As she came out of
 her hypnotic state she asked,

"Who are you? My husband will kill
 you if he finds you here. Please go!"

Tsuwñilum showed the trembling woman
 her husband's body, and said,

"He sent me two shells but he
 got one back. I'll save the other
 shell for someone else."

The wife of Tthul'qus was afraid she
 might get the other shell, and so she
 got ready to leave with Tsuwñilum.

He signalled his people to come to shore

to help themselves to anything they wanted. His uncles noticed that all were sleeping, and so the job of plundering was made easy.

PART EIGHT

At home, at a place called Hinupsum at the foot of Cowichan mountain, in front of his s'il'tuw'thu, Tsuwhilum relaxed by playing slahel' with his friends. The game of slahel' was played using only one bone. The guessor had to guess which hand held the plain bone. Ten sticks were used as tallies.

Tsuqwtun, a gambler, took to the forest to gain power. He wanted

to beat Tsuwhilum. But Tsuqwtun did not gain power, instead he learned to cheat. Tsuqwtun bet his half of his longhouse in a match against Tsuwhilum. A date was set for the match, and Tsuqwtun planned how to cheat Tsuwhilum. He got some straight spirea and copied Tsuwhilum's set of bones. He also copied Tsuwhilum's song, only changing the words as he moved his

Temutlu thuna sluhe-eli ye'

(I'm calling on my marker bone)

Temutlu thuna sluhe-eli ye'

La'lukw thuna sluhe-e-eli ye'

(my bone is flying)

La'lukw thuna sluhe-e-eli ye'

clenched fists rapidly back and forth
switching the bone under the blanket
on the first day of the match the

bones certainly did fly! Everytime Tsuwhilum guessed Tlsuqwtun threw one bone away. Hidden under his blanket he had the copied identical bones. Tsuwhilum was beginning to think Tlsuqwtun had more power.

"My spirits are leaving me," thought Tsuwhilum. Every time he guessed, Tlsuqwtun's hand was empty. And so it was Tlsuqwtun beat the powerful Tsuwhilum.

Early the next morning one of Tsuwhilum's wives was cleaning up the house. She noticed all the bones lying on the floor. She glanced around her, and when no-one was watching she buried them outside. Tsuwhilum's wife did not tell anyone of all the bones she had found for she knew her husband

would surely kill Isuqwtun for cheating. He was the only man to have beaten Tsuwhilum in a bone game. Today Isuqwtun has many descendants.

The sight of Tsuwhilum put the fear into many people. With his height, hunch back and his long hair twisted with a live snake and fastened to the top of his head, made people tremble when he approached.

Tsuwhilum heard of the white skinned people who had built a strange enclosure on the site known as Fort Victoria. He took fifty canoes and headed south to meet the white people. When he arrived, looking so fierce, the people inside the enclosure would not open the gates of the fort until Tsuwhilum fired two musket shots. Then the order was given

to let Tsuwhilum, the warrior of the Cowichans, into the fort. Tsuwhilum and four of his uncles entered. Inside they were given Hudson Bay blankets and food. They were also given rum to drink. Tsuwhilum thought he was being poisoned, for he began to feel dizzy. On the trip home his uncles gave Tsuwhilum a medicine to make him vomit. Tsuwhilum was very ill but he was saved. Never again would he trust the white men.

Tsuwhilum was now ready to visit the northern people,

"Be ready for war. I will lead you and you must not have fear. I am ready."

All of the Cowichan warriors went north with Tsuwhilum. They all met together

at Sansum Narrows. When T̄suwh̄ilum gave the order for all to paddle, the sounds of yells could be heard for a long way. The songs of the paddles, the Shne'um's incantations, the ordinary yells and the rhythm of the paddles sounded like thunder. People from villages of the Coast Salish villages joined in. So when T̄suwh̄ilum reached the first northern village there were hundreds of canoes. T̄suwh̄ilum and his men wiped out many villages until his revenge was slaked.

"I have avenged my mother and my brother; now, let us return home."

T̄suwh̄ilum grew more selfish. Then one hot summer day everyone had gone down to the seashore to cool off. As T̄suwh̄ilum lay in the shade he noticed one of his wives was not there. He got up

slowly and went back to his house. There he caught one of his cousins embracing his wife! Slowly Tsuwhilum backed up, and went to his cave to get one of his muskets. He was back in no time. He called his cousin by name.

"Come out and see me face to face. Why are you trying to steal my wife. Can't you find a woman of your own. Of course you can't. You are not old enough."

His cousin tried to run from Tsuwhilum, but Tsuwhilum was too fast for him, and the young man was killed. It was a poor move on the part of Tsuwhilum because the cousin he killed was the favoured son of one of Tsuwhilum's uncles. The uncle, in fact, who prided himself with the task of loading Tsuwhilum's guns, and having the muskets ready at all times.

And so began Tsuwhilum's fatal journey to Hw̄lum'ēitsu to acquire Shchuleme'tun's tall beautiful wife, whose name was Isamuli. For many months Tsuwhilum had wanted the wife of Shchuleme'tun, and at last he made up his mind to go and take her. He asked his second brother Skwi'lum to go with him. This brother had a different mother from Tsuwhilum, whose father had many wives. The uncle who took pride in looking after Tsuwhilum's muskets decided to have his revenge on his nephew who had shot his son. The uncle took all the bullets out of the muskets leaving only the powder in.

When Tsuwhilum arrived at Hw̄lum'ēitsu he walked into Shchuleme'tun's longhouse. A girl smiled at the fierce warrior. Tsuwhilum stopped, and spoke,

"You smiled at me, now come with me!"

She replied,

"No! no, I am already married. I cannot go with you."

Tsuwhilum was angry. He shot and killed her with the last musket shell. He went into another longhouse where Tsamuli was hiding behind a big post just inside the door. Tsuwhilum started to dance. He shot at one of the men, but the shot did not kill him. He grabbed another musket from his uncle, but again nothing happened. The people were frightened and they ran to hid. But the brave Tsamuli waited with a thick clam digging stick (sqeluh). As Tsuwhilum walked backwards to the entrance Tsamuli quickly stepped out, put her sqeluh across his chest, and held his arms pinned back. She shouted to her husband to come and kill Tsuwhilum.

Someone came forward to cut off his head. Tsuwñilum struggled hard to break away from her, and tried to get at his knife, but Tsamuli held him fast. She shouted again for her husband. Her cries brought an old woman to the door who called out

"Has he got you down?"

"No, no, I have him down. Tell my husband to come quickly and bring the other men with him."

Presently the husband rushed in, followed by other men. As they entered the house the woman said,

"Don't use your guns. Attack him with your axes!"

This they did. They cut off his head which rolled on the floor. Tsuwñilum danced for a long time, blood shooting out. It was a long time before Tsuwñilum dropped and died.

So it was that Tsuwhilum was slain by the wit and pluck of a woman as it had been foretold by the woman leader who lived in a cave under the sea. She had warned him, "If you go too far, it is going to take a woman to kill you."

When the Hwium'eitsu people cut him open they found his heart and stomach were smaller than those of any ordinary man. These organs were the size of a duck. Later the Hwium'eitsu people sent the body of Tsuwhilum back to his village but they kept the head. They placed the skull on a pole. When they wanted a westerly wind they would face the skull to the west. They could control the winds. Until one day they painted the skull black. A storm started with lightning and hail.

Shchuleme'tun was frightened.

"We must leave the head alone or we might all be killed by the storm. There must have been something very powerful in Tsuwhilum. The skull is dangerous. Wrap it in a swuwqwa'i and place it in the burial hut to the east of the village. Do not forget before you come back to the longhouse, bathe. Then wipe yourselves with four cedar branches. Face the east when you do this purification ritual. When you are finished put the cedar branches on four different trees. Do not turn your backs to the branches. Step four paces backwards before you turn and then you will know Tsuwhilum's sul'i is not on you. Tell no one where his head is in case people want to receive the power that is on the skull."

And so the Hwium'eitsu people did as they were ordered.

Time passed. Tsuwhilum's family decided it was time to travel to the island (Kuper Island) to claim their leader's head. Skweluqup now was the leader of

the Cowichans. He gave an order

"We shall all go to Hwīlum'eitsu, and we shall bring Tsuwhilum's head."

They gathered at Cowichan Bay, and there were so many canoes that Cowichan Bay was filled. When the Cowichans reached Hwīlum'eitsu they asked for the coveted skull. No-one answered Skweluqup's order for returning the skull. A shot was heard, and one Cowichan fell dead.

Skweluqup gave the dreaded order

"Qay te' lu 'eiltun."

(Kill them!)

That was what happened. The Hwīlum'eitsu people were wiped out. The Cowichans searched for Tsuwhilum's head, and brought it back for a proper burial in a cave on Cowichan mountain. The mountain's name

was changed to Tsuwhilum mountain because the fierce warrior had lived at the foot of the mountain. A white man by the name of Gore-Langton built his house where Tsuwhilum had his fort.

The forest power was beaten by the sea power. The sea power belongs to women. Tsamuli, the woman Tsuwhilum wanted for a wife, tall, beautiful and strong, and having the power of the women under the sea, was able to overcome Tsuwhilum's dark powers of the forest.