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Creation Tale: The Story of South Wind
on Saddle Mountain
Lower Columbia River/Coast

The following is the Story of South Wind, who created the Chinook and many other tribes of the Northwest Coast, each with a similar origin story (Wahkiaikum, Whillipa, Cathlamet, Chinook, Clatsop, Nehalem, Tillamook, Nestucca and Siletz). The following, from **Ella Clark (*Indian Legends of the Pacific Northwest*, University of California Press, 1953: 135-136)**, is adapted from the version recorded by James Swan in 1857, as reviewed and enhanced by members of the Chinook Tribe in the 1950s.

“Long, long ago, when Old Man South Wind was traveling north, he met an old woman who was a giant.

“Will you give me some food?” asked South Wind. “I am very hungry.”

“I have no food,” answered the giantess, “but here is a net. You can catch some fish for yourself if you wish.”

So Old Man South Wind dragged the net down to the ocean and with it caught a little whale. Taking out his knife, he was about to cut the whale and take out the blubber.

But the old giantess cried out, “Do not cut it with a knife, and do not cut it crossways. Take a sharp shell and split it down the back.”

But South Wind did not take to heart what the old woman was saying. He cut the fish crossways with his knife and began to take off some blubber. He was startled to see the fish change into a huge bird. It was so big that when it flew into the air, it hid the sun, and the noise of its wings shook the earth. It was Thunderbird.

Thunderbird flew to the north and lit on the top of Saddle Mountain, near the mouth of the Columbia River. There it laid a nest full of eggs. The old giantess followed the bird until she found its nest. She broke one egg, but it was not good. So she threw it down the mountainside. Before the egg reached the valley, it became an Indian.

The old giantess broke some other eggs and then threw them down the mountainside. They too became Indians. Each of Thunderbird’s eggs became an Indian.

When Thunderbird came back and found its eggs gone, it went to South Wind. Together they tried to find the old giantess, to get revenge on her. But they never found her, although they traveled north together every year.

That is how the Chinook were created. And that is why Indians never cut the first salmon across the back. They know that if they should cut the fish the wrong way, the salmon would cease to run. Always, even to this day, they slit the first salmon down the back, lengthwise.”

From *The Northwest Coast* by James Swan, 1857: 203-204. Fairfield, WA: Ye Galleon Press, 1966.

“The tale of the origin of mankind, or, rather, of their tribe, for the Chenook and Chehalis appear to have the same account, was related to me several times by different Indians, but they did not agree together in detail. The substance of the tradition is this: Ages ago, an old man named Toolux (or the South Wind) was traveling to the north, met an old woman, named Quoots-hooi, who was an ogress and a giantess. He asked her for food, when she gave him a net, telling him that she had nothing to eat, and he must go try to catch some fish. He accordingly dragged the net, and succeeded in catching a grampus, or, as the Indians called it, “a little whale.” This he was about to cut with his knife, when the old woman cried out to him to take a sharp shell, and not cut the fish crossways, but split it down the back. He, without giving heed to what she said, cut the fish across the side, and was about to take off a piece of blubber, but the fish immediately changed into an immense bird, that when flying completely obscured the sun, and the noise made by its wings shook the earth. This bird, which they called Hahness, then flew back away to the north, and lit on the top of the Saddleback Mountain, near the Columbia River. Toolux and the old woman then journeyed north in search of Hahness, and one day, while Quoots-hooi was engaged in picking berries on the side of the mountain, she found the nest of the thunder-bird, full of eggs, which she commenced breaking and eating, and from these mankind were produced.

The thunder-bird came back, and, finding its nest destroyed, returned to Toolux for redress; but neither of them ever after could find the ogress, although they regularly returned to the north every year.

It is probably this tradition which has caused their present superstitious belief that the first salmon caught must not be cut across, but must be split down the back, and then split in thin flakes. If it should be cut contrary to their practice, then all the salmon will leave, and no more be taken that season. The same result would ensue if a salmon’s heart should be lost or eaten by a dog.”

For more on Chinook and Clatsop origin stories, see <http://www.trailtribes.org/fortclatsop/since-time-immemorial.htm#oral>