

Old Woman and Rabbit Blanket Story, by Rose Dennis

Edited and compiled by John Alderete, 2007

This is a sample of a number of traditional narratives told by Mrs. Rose Dennis to John Alderete in her home at IR#9 in December of 1999. A similar story was documented almost a century before with both Tahltan and Kaska people.¹ The transcription below uses the Tahltan Alphabet and was compiled by John Alderete, with assistance from Patrick and Edith Carlick, Margery Inkster, Tanya Bob, Melva Quock, and Tad McIlwraith, whose initials are used to give them credit in the linguistic (LN) and cultural (CN) notes. Mrs. Dennis signed a consent form okayed by her council, stating that the language data she provided can be used for research and educational purposes. The sound recording for this story is archived with Mrs Dennis' descendants and the Tahltan Central Council (Tahltan Language and Culture CD 010), and can be accessed by petitioning these people. An English synopsis and additional technical information are provided at the end.

Short summary: Before winter, an old woman is left behind by the group because of famine. She survives on her own by catching rabbits and returns the following spring to feed the whole community with her stash.

Tehgūn hots'i den tinidētl LN² CN³ CN⁴
tehgūn to people pull-out
People pulled out to Tehgūn

Kākize den lādel
kākize people came-to
People came to Chesley

'ai eshjāndene
that old-person
That old lady

¹ James Teit recorded versions of this story with the Tahltan and Kaska. In each case, he called the story 'The Deserted Woman.' See Teit, James A. 1917. Kaska Tales. Journal of American Folklore 30(118):455-457, Story #12 and Teit, James A. 1921. Tahltan Tales. Journal of American Folklore 34(133):232-233, Story #38. Teit's Tahltan version includes an English-language transcript of the song the woman sang when she returned to the village.

² *den* is a (perhaps idiolectal) variant of the more commonly use *dene*.

³ PC has heard this story originating from a different place; Tegūn is rather far north, between Atlin and Chesley. Fletcher Day told TM in 1999 that Tegun is the Tlingit name for the site. The Tahltan name is Ts'lo or Ts'lā.

⁴ At several points in the English version, Rosie insists that this is a true story and the old woman was real; she just forgot her name.

(Eshjāndene means old lady)

Eshjāndene eyinh ātsedet'in LN⁵
old-person there they-left
They left the old lady there

Dene tah deni bedi LN⁶
people X people hungry
A lot of people are hungry

Bede ānh
food no/without
No food

Jande hōda'aneh LN⁷
here let-her-stay
Let her stay here

Duwede' edōneṣ jānanach'esh denekas
if-not child they-will-starve by-people
If not, the children will starve by people

Tseze shāda janōtl'i
everybody X will-starve
Everybody will starve

Jān hodah'ani
here let-her-stay
Let her stay here

Hujede meghah den tinidetl LN⁸
now X people-left-her
Now people left her

Kudets kudehk'an
there? she-made-fire
She made a fire there

⁵ Another way to translate *ātsedet'in* is 'they threw it away'.

⁶ *tah* here may be a variant of *ta'ahni* 'every/all'

⁷ *hōda* is the typical way to say 'let her stay', suggesting that final is an enclitic of some sort.

⁸ The first word is a variant of *kuji* 'now'; [k] to [h] is a typical pattern of free variation. EC and MI think *meghah* may be a variant of *meghat*.

Nestin yehkah gah
she-went-to-sleep there-was-rabbit rabbit
She went to sleep, there were rabbits

Dekimoyehda da'etsed LN⁹
her-house-around they-eating
They were eating around her house

Yusetla
she-hears-them
She hears them

Chichōlone ts'ūyaz kadeshya LN¹⁰
in-the-morning little-spruce-tree she-went-to-get
In the morning she went to get little spruce tree

(Ts'ūyaz means little spruce)

Eyed ts'ūyazezage gahmił ayila CN¹¹
that little-spruce-bark rabbit-snare she-made
She made rabbit snare's from little spruce tree bark

Gah khana estl'ūn
rabbit X she-set-snares
She sets snares for rabbit

Chichōlon yetandesja
in-the-morning she-runs-snares
In the morning she runs the snares

Mił duda 'anet'e yelone te gah yek'e'ilu'u
snare how many she-set? X rabbit X she-caught-u?
How many snares she set, that's how many rabbits she caught

Gah daiłu ye tani'ganh LN¹²
rabbit X X she-dried
She dried all the rabbits

⁹ EC and MI believe the stem-final segment [d] is reduced from [ts].

¹⁰ First word is a variant of the more common *chachōlone*.

¹¹ PC and EC note that it may be difficult to make rabbit snares from spruce tree bark.

¹² MI thinks *daiłu* may be a variant of *yīlu'i* 'a lot'.

Du'anet'ez yayiteni LN¹³
X she-froze-them
She froze them

Yetanigunh en
X X dried and?
She dried a lot of them

Gahzes ch'ede ayila
rabbit-skin blanket she-made
She made a rabbit skin blanket

Tāt'ē ch'ede
three blanket
Three blankets

Gahzes ch'ede ayila
rabbit-skin blanket she-made
She made rabbit skin blankets

Eyinja' taltan hotsi' iskiye lēnt'ē mekandadel LN¹⁴
right-now Tahltan from boy four they-get-her
Four boys from Tahltan go to get her

Medze'nātset de' eyinde mek'edāk'āde'
if-she-starved right-there burn-her-up
If she starved burn her up right there

Tushan'estenh duwede' metsanatl'et CN¹⁵
she-must-froze or she-must-starve
She must have froze or starved to death

Di'aih k'etsena zedidene
X X the-leader(of boys on trail)
Translation unclear.

Hots'i' hadeliyegah hedetsi tideshya
to they-come ?? she-come
They were coming to her; she came out to (meet) them

¹³ *du'anet'ez* may be a variant of *duda 'anet'e*.

¹⁴ MI says that your grandfather said *taltan* as *talalastan*.

¹⁵ EC points out that 'to starve to death' is equated by 'the heart must have stopped'.

Eyinh nadāyah
there you-stand
Stand right there

Dah ch'i' deshjił LN¹⁶
you?-to I-will-sing
I'm going to sing to you

Ekune'iskiye nahezzzet
those-boy they-stand
Those boys stand there

Dekime yanaja tidesh yayegat
house she-went-in she-went-back-out
She went in her house and she went back out

Gahch'ede'eł nanetl'un
rabbit-blanket she-dress-up
She dress up with the rabbit blanket

Kuji hededahkajin
now she-sing
Now she started to sing

Ye'eki deshjidajān'aste
what I'm-living-on
What I'm living on

Gaduska'eda duska'e gaduska'e
I kill rabbits, I kill a lot of rabbits

Ye'eki deshjidajān'aste
what I'm-living-on
What I'm living on

Daduska'e daduska'e daduska go'
I kill rabbits, I kill a lot of rabbits

An 'esghaiyadeł
Come on in (a lot of boys) (in the house)

Yani dehi'e kah gah
They came in, there was rabbits (a lot around the house)

¹⁶ *chi'* may be a variant of *tsi'*, which is found elsewhere in RD's speech.

Yeh tani gani
She dried it

Ni'idah gē
(She tells to boys) go and pack

Taŋtan eyinh
Tahltan there

Bede dena āliŋ
They are running out of food

Bede deneghadu'tsan
They are running out of food

Dahghele eda'ahchich
(She said to whole bunch of them) latch up your (all boys) pack

Tinādēŋ
Let's pull out

Kuj gah deda'inah a'i hedeghele
Now they fill it up (their packs) with rabbits

Kuj tinidetŋ
Now they pull out

Taŋtan hodzih hadēŋ
They're coming to Tahltan

Jān nadesseŋ
I'm going to stand right here

Essodi'eŋ kotan'adeŋ
Go to them, and tell them my story

Gadeshjihudahdi'
Tell them I'm still alive

Kune'iski'e dahelyedas
The boys said she's coming with us

Gah kidegilā'ih
(Boys telling the people) she lived on rabbits

Gah tani gantōdeyah
She dried a lot of rabbits

Meghele jādīt lādahwahtel LN¹⁷
(The boys said) they brought us all here

E dene t̄senazedidene (*that's chief*)
The leader of the people (chief)

Dents̄senazedidene go' 'ani
The chief said come (to the old lady)

Yechitideshya
(The chief) he went out to her

Kugi deyeshjandeneyet hedech'i' elīn
Now that old lady danced to them

Gakh z̄eṣ t'ade'e chuz
She put on the rabbit blanket

Ekhin'ekh
With that song

Ye'eki deshjidajān'aste
What I'm living on

Daduska'e daduska'e daduska daduska daduska'e
I kill rabbits, I kill a lot of rabbits

Gah hedimeki
I live on rabbit

Nasaht'in gah tanigan tōdeyah
You see me again

'Ekhedi dahji'ast'in
I dried a lot of rabbit

Bede dahghadu t̄sonhodi
I'm coming to you with (something)

Edone jidon'edi t̄setse'edi megha
I think about the kids

¹⁷ It should say *hughele*... since, they're talking about 'their pack'.

Anet'atoni ganidi gah
How many rabbit I dried (how amazing)

Di'esdene toniyah
She join the people with (rabbit?)

Yehgadejī
Here she was living

Kuji k'at
That's it

Synopsis in English

An old woman and her people from Tegun (Tagun, Tagoon), near Sheslay, are living at Tahltan Village. In the fall, no one in the Tegun group could find game, and some people had already died of starvation. When they arrived at Sheslay, the camp boss (in charge of setting up camp) says that they will lose more people if they try to keep and care for the old woman. He decides that the best course of action is to leave her behind and return in the spring to burn her body. They leave her, but one woman left a spark for her under a tree so the old woman can build a fire. When they leave her, the old woman builds a fire and a brush house out of spruce brush. One night, she hears something chewing on the brush outside her house. In the morning, she sees several rabbit tracks around her shelter. The old woman creates a plan to catch rabbits by heating and stripping small spruce tree roots and setting out the root fibers (about the size of twine) around her shelter. In the morning, she has caught several rabbits. She catches so many rabbits this way that she makes several rabbit skin blankets. In spring time, the Chief in Tahltan Village tells four boys to go back to Sheslay with a ground hog blanket and wrap and burn the old woman's body. Approaching Sheslay, the boys see smoke close the old woman's camp. The old woman hears them and runs out to meet them. She tells them to stand up, because she is going to sing for them (calls to boys in Tahltan, 06:28). She goes into her camp, puts on the rabbit skin blanket, and returns to sing a song about how the camp left her and she survived by catching rabbits (sung in Tahltan and later in English 06:59). The boys go in her brush house and see lots of dried rabbit. Then the old woman asks about the people back at Tahltan Village. When the boys tell her they are short of food, the old woman tells them to pack as much food as they can for the people back home. Then they start back to Tahltan Village, and when they get close to Tahltan, she tells them that she's going to wait in an open place. She tells the boys to go tell the people that she's living and she'd going to sing to them. The boys return and report back to the people, and the Chief calls her back to the village. When she comes, she dances and sings again about how she survived on rabbits (in Tahltan and then a loose English equivalent 10:01), and she contributes an ample amount of rabbit meat for the people.

Appendix

Catalogue entry

- Title: Old Woman and Rabbit Blanket Story
- Interviewee(s): Rosie Dennis (elder)
- Interviewer(s): John Alderete (linguist)
- Interview language: English and Tahltan
- Transcriber: John Alderete
- Date: December 1999
- Location: Rosie's home, IR#9, Dease Lake, British Columbia, Canada
- People Present: John Alderete, Rose Dennis

Associated materials

- Sound file: tahSoundFolk_rd1999-12_rabbitb.aiff
- TLCCD: 010

Technical information

- Recording duration: 17:14
- Recording setup: DAT recorder with lavalier-type tie-clip (Audiotechnica) mic on interviewee, and non-amplified standard vocal mic (Shure) for background and interviewer
- Sound file attributes: 44,100 Hz, 16-bit, stereo, AIFF, 178 MB
- Grant funding: National Science Foundation SBE-9904360
- Log: The English language version starts at 0 and runs to 11:13. The Tahltan version runs from 11:14 to the end.
- Technical Notes: The left and right tracks appear to be identical, unlike most stereo recordings in this project, where the right channel is much lower.