

Poetics & Politics

Nora Marks Dauenhauer

NORA MARKS DAUENHAUER

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Nora Marks Dauenhauer: I am a Tlingit and I come from southeast Alaska, which is the panhandle of Alaska. I come from rain forests and the sea. For us, today, our tribal vehicles are high speed boats and seiners and ferries and also jets. We're highly mobile people, and I'm one of those who are mobile.

I spoke nothing but Tlingit and all the people around me were Tlingit speakers. This was my family and also the extended family of my village, my father's home village, which was Hunah. Then we have Indian land rights in Juneau.

After trapping and hunting seals and fishing, all the people in the family would come to Juneau as a stopping place to gather from the stores and oil companies and then go off again in the boats. That's the lifestyle I lived as a child.

I got married when I was eighteen and raised four children. After the last one was in high school, I went off to college. First I got a GED degree. I went to this university where they had open door policy, and I started to work on materials which you have seen in Haa Shuka. I started to work on this, and Dick saw it, and so we got married (laughs). We started to work together because it's so difficult. I was such a beginner that it was really hard. It's the most difficult thing I've ever done but it's worthwhile. It's good to do it.

We got some funding from the U.S. government, an NEH translation grant, and then we moved to Juneau from the part of Alaska where we had lived for fifteen years. There was an opening in a place called the Sealaska Heritage Foundation. Sealaska Heritage Foundation is a nonprofit organization of Sealaska people. Sealaska Regional Corporation is a moneymaking entity of our people. I am a shareholding member of that. About sixteen thousand of Tlingit and Haida are also shareholders. (I missed to tell you; I have thirteen grandchildren of whom I write poetry.) We got hired to this Sealaska Heritage Foundation in 1983 when we moved over to Juneau. We built a house there, and we're working for Sealaska Heritage Foundation still. We're there to preserve culture, language, art, songs, dances.

We have a biannual celebration. The 1992 one is coming up in June. I didn't bring my calendar so I'm not sure what date it is.

Richard Dauenhauer: It's the first week in June. If any of you are in Juneau, come for the four days of celebration.

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: (simultaneously) celebration. It's a gigantic dance. A lot of people have wept while we put on these dances, because in earlier part of the century, or maybe before, there was a move to stamp out our language, this Tlingit language in southeast Alaska. Maybe other American Indians experienced the same thing we did. For

some reason I was too tough to abandon my language, so I still speak it. A lot of our people, including our children, are no longer Tlingit speakers. Because of this we are doing these books, because our kids are used to books.

Tlingit is a hard language. There are twenty-four sounds that are not in English. When you think about it, how long it's going to take a generation to learn, it's easier to put out books and maybe tapes to go along with them. That's what we're doing. We have one book that has two cassette tapes to go with it. It's called Beginning Tlingit, and it's a grammar book to learn Tlingit.

I've been traveling around with Dick to let people know that we are into this kind of business. We have had good responses. Lately it has started to pick up for our own people to get interest in our works and they have a lot of ideas. Some are not so good. But we've been through this a long time, so we sit there holding our tongues. But, it's good that everybody's getting interested. Even the school in Juneau is now getting interested in teaching Tlingit. But we have no teacher training program, so we'll have to get on that and see if we can do that too. It would have to be in the summer. Teach a few people to teach by methods that are used by other language teachers.

I'm happy to be here. I'm happy this is one of the

trips I'm going on, even if we came a long way, by all different angles, different turns in the road.

Larry Evers: One of the things we've been trying to think about is how different audiences respond to material like you're translating. So I was interested in what you're saying about your people, how they respond or not to your translations. Could you talk more about that?

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: This is very new in our area. This is a very spiritual subject for us. The response from people our age is really great. And then there is another group who are kind of pulling back because of religious training. And there is another group who is getting on the bandwagon, do or die, which is really good. But for the young, the very young, the grade school and high school, there's miles and miles between us and them. So what we're trying to do is get into the schools to do poetry, and, when we do, we read these also. We read the Haa Shuka and the oratory book, Haa Tuvunaa-gu Yis. We read these for the kids. I really love this. It's got its own beat. It's got its own beat. So that's good. We're not the iambic types.

Vicki Broach: There are haiku in your poetry book, Droning Shaman, and then, of course, those translations you did in the back of that book are extremely interesting.

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: Han Shan. I really loved the Cold Mountain Poems because they sounded like Tlingit, especially

one there that talks about Cold Mountain where he was wintering. He goes into it's cold here, it's always cold here. He reminded me of Robert Zuboff, who is one of the storytellers in our book. I really enjoyed translating that into Tlingit because it's so much like Tlingit. And then another one that I really like is the fisherman who was holding his dream in his hand. There was a line, a fishing line going through his hand. I really liked that image, so I translated that. A lot of our people are fishermen, both women and men, so I enjoyed seeing that in a poem. So, yes, I do borrow. I've tried e. e. cummings with the help of Dick. I did "The Grasshopper."

Richard Dauenhauer: To become rearrangingly grasshopper.

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: Yes, but what I used instead of a grasshopper is a jumping jack. I don't think you'll know what a jumping jack is.

Richard Dauenhauer: It's a sand flea.

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: It's a sand flea, and you find them under rocks at the beach. When you throw a rock over, they'll start jumping around. So I used that. I geared it to the place I come from, and I also have a concrete poem in that.

Richard Dauenhauer: Could you read the Basho, the one about the old pond. Some of you may know that. It's a very famous haiku about the frog leaping into the water.

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: O.K. Frogs are really interesting in our culture. There's a clan that uses the frog as an emblem. So some of them are my sisters through the father. Tlagu aak'u ya is the old pond.

Tlagu aak'u ya  
heent wujigani xixch':  
kach'ishjaa.

Kach'ishjaa is big splash. Tlagu aak'u ya is the frog. And heent wujigani xixch is jumping in the pond or water.

Tlagu aak'u ya  
heent wujigani xixch':  
kach'ishjaa.

hmmm. (General laughter.)

Elaine Tietjen: Could you talk a little more about how you did begin to write poetry. There's quite a bit of variety in the form and content in this one collection. What do you see as some of the other influences on the poetry?

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: Well, I think I discovered I could do that. First, Dick is always a teacher. You know, I should be writing poems. I started to do this with those haikus. Basho. Basho poems. I really enjoyed it. I did it at one of Dick's poetry courses, and I translated a few of them in Tlingit. Some of my classmates didn't think that was so hot. But he didn't speak English so it didn't matter. "Who's gonna read it?" Yes, I agreed with: "Who's

gonna read it?" But at least you know I saw the words I could use. I'm familiar with old ponds, so I could see the old pond in my mind, so I did that. And after that, somebody asked me to do Cold Mountain poems. Was it Gary Snyder? No, somebody else, and then somebody else asked me to translate John Haynes's poems. He's the big poet from Alaska. He's good, and he was hard to translate. He was really difficult. But I did some of them. They're not in print yet. I don't feel good about them yet. So those are the ones that started me off. I got into doing the baked salmon poem by looking at the chili poem by Simon Ortiz. Well, might as well have fun, have fun doing it. Dick explained to me about images like that, so I got it from the oratory.

Ellen Winter: Has it been strange to write in English?

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: No, it's good. I enjoy both.

Tlingit is, is hard. It's really hard. I do it by taking it off the tape recorder like that one there. I put it down in Tlingit, and then I start translating into English. Then I do the annotations. The lines that I thought weren't familiar to people who are not Tlingit, I explained those lines. Then somebody said we should have biographies of the elders, so we did that too. Then somebody said we should have photographs, so we got those too. In that way it kept getting larger and larger.

I have this poetry in my mind somewhere. But it also comes from the Tlingit stories and the oratory. Those are my instructors, in addition to Dick, who is always my teacher. In that way I started to write in English.

Richard Dauenhauer: There may be a little bit of confusion. When Nora's talking about the transcribing, that's the elders, the oral literature which she was transcribing in Tlingit and translating. Her own poetry, though, is usually composed directly. I don't think you've ever composed anything of your own orally and transcribed it.

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: No.

Richard Dauenhauer: I think that would be a good idea, especially those short stories, just dictate the short stories. Then you can write them out.

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: That's no fun.

Richard Dauenhauer: It would be a good idea.

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: I'm arrogant about this poetry, so I don't do that. Then I struggle after I've made all the mistakes. I take it back to Dick and see what he thinks about it.

Richard Dauenhauer: I say, "It was a great line. Why did you change it?"

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: But the stories that I work with they're instructors to me for oral tradition as it was spoken by the people that I worked with. They are really

great. You know, they're just so wonderful. They're like my instructors. They help me get this out.

Larry Evers: Nora, have you ever composed an oral story, such as those in Haa Shuka, or oration?

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: No, not yet. I have done oratory, short ones. The nature of oratory in Tlingit is that you never know when you're gonna do it. When the time comes you have to do it on your feet. This is the way the old older folks that I worked with did it. I was able to do it in a short form, a little piece. It's a beginning. But I haven't composed one on the paper yet. I wouldn't know where to begin, other than addressing my relatives, which is the first part of it. You start off like that.

[tape break]

If we were having a potlatch, then we would be talking about people in the back of the hall and the hosts would be sitting there in the front. We'd be talking to them way back there. The hosts have invited their extended family, but not of the same clan. I'm a Raven, so if I was giving a potlatch, I would have the eagles sit up there. I would address them as my relatives, my fathers, my fathers' sisters, my grandfathers, etc., etc. That's how you start off. But other than that you have all kinds of props you can use. You can use the art, you can use the songs that are sung in the beginning of the ceremony. You can also use

the potlatch names for the guests, and they would be answering me. It's kind of heavy, it's really hard to do. Most people liken it to a pole. When you bring a long pole into the room, like here, you have to be careful how you turn it, otherwise it will hit somebody in the face. And in that way your words have to be just right, so you don't hit somebody in the face.

Gloria Bird: I have a question. Can you talk about the aesthetics of writing in Tlingit compared to writing in English.

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: Aesthetics.

Gloria Bird: I mean, in English you either are trying to rhyme stanzas or not, or write long lines, short lines, or free verse.

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: Yes, the visual part.

Gloria Bird: But there must be another aesthetic writing in Tlingit that is recognizable to a Tlingit.

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: Well the lines are written the way the person who is telling the story is speaking. At times he will just go from one word to the other. And then at the other times, he will go from one word to a whole line of words. And, then, the style is repetition. In parts of the story, you will hear that.

Richard Dauenhauer: There's another good example, if I can leap in, in your own writing. That is the poems for the

names of the children.

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: Yes.

Richard Dauenhauer: The idea of the kinship is something that you don't get involved with when you're writing an English poem, but if you're dealing with Tlingit now immediately you're into kinship. That leaves a lot of English readers cold. Nora's got a whole section of poems about the kids' names. People either like 'em or they don't, depending on whether they're into that Tlingit aesthetic. Your question is a good one for the problem of translation, which is more what I think Nora is getting into here. You've got this thing in Tlingit and how does it make sense in English? It's also a good question for writing. The minute you get into anything with a Tlingit theme, now you're getting into how people are related. Everybody's related to you. Either they're your family or they're not. If they're not, then they're your in-laws. And so then you go back and forth and figure it out.

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: Here's one I really like. I don't know how it's going to come off for you. My daughter is "Exaggerating the Village." That's her Tlingit name.

K'wudaan Kwoonik in Tlingit. She gave me this photograph of herself pregnant with a baby called "Lying There." She was just huge and I was so amazed. How could she do this?

Richard Dauenhauer: Shocking Mama.

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: Yeah, even me. I was just . . . .  
She's married to man who's raised in the Western society,  
and he didn't want to take a photo either (general laughs).  
"I don't want to do that." So, she finally convinced him  
and here it is. "Pregnant Image of 'Exaggerating the  
Village.'"

Under her  
exaggerated hair  
lying on  
her exaggerated belly  
lies  
"Lying There."

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: So those are two names that I  
combined.

Richard Dauenhauer: Oh this is a nice one too.

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: And then our Eagle granddaughter,  
"Breech Birth":

BREECH BIRTH

Reluctant Shkaxwul.aat, "Being  
Troubled about Herself," baby  
with her foot hanging out,  
testing the world.

Shkaxwux.aat is "Troubled about Herself." She's always  
troubled about herself. And then K'eikaxwein. K'eikaxwein  
is the word for a blossom or a flower.

Larry Evers: Let me ask you to get back to the question Gloria was raising. Aesthetics, aesthetic differences, different way of thinking about what's good in Tlingit and in English. What you started talking about was the length of lines and how in the oratory the line breaks are determined by . . . what? The pauses that the narrator makes?

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: Uh huh.

Larry Evers: Something that's really striking to me when I was reading Haa Shuka was how long all of those pieces are. They're very long, and these poems obviously are all quite short. I wonder if you'd talk about length. That's obviously something that's pleasing, that's good, in Tlingit.

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: Jeez. Well, the lengths are exactly the way that the storyteller tells it. It's the way we decided to put them in a book. And for most people that tell their stories, they're talking about who the story belongs to and why he's got a right to tell it. I guess a good example is Susie of Glacier Bay. I'll read the Tlingit, the first part of it. So she's saying that these are the people recognized as being of Glacier Bay. In other words, the owners of the area.

**Sít' Kaa Káx Kana.áa**

**Kaasgéiy x'éidáx sh kalneek**

Gathéeni yóo áwé duwasáakw  
wé haa aani.  
Gathéeni,  
wé Sit' Eeti Geey.  
A áwé á duwa.óo.  
Ldakát yéidei xáat ku.aa áwé áx ya.aa.  
A káx áwé duwa.óo; wé aanx wududliyéx.  
Ldakát yéidei xáat áwu á.  
Yak'éiyi xáat áx ya.aayéen.  
Awé chu'u áa yéi kuteeyée áwé  
wé hitx'.  
Tlax keijin yaanax giwé át udakeen  
wé hitx':  
yá Kaagwaantaan  
ka wé Wooshkeetaan  
ka wé Eechhittaan  
ka  
yá ooháan Chookaneidéx haa sateeyi,  
ldakát uhaan áwé awu. á.  
Aa yéi haa yatee.

[Glacier Bay History

told by Susie James

The name of it is Gatheeni,

that land of ours.  
Gatheeni,  
the bay where the glacier was.  
It was where people lived.  
Salmon of all kinds ran there.  
That's why the people lived there;  
                  They made it a village.  
Many kinds of salmon are there.  
Good salmon ran there.  
It was while people were still living there,  
the houses:  
the Kaagwaantaan  
and the Wooshkeetaan  
and the Eechhittaan  
and  
us, those of us who are Chookaneidi,  
all of us were there.]

And those are the people that are the owners of that area.  
And also, the story about what happened to them there and  
why they don't live there anymore. And the reason that the  
story is important for them. So here she's giving why all  
these people are the owners of the story, their house-group,  
Kaagwaantaan, Wooshkeetaan, Eechhittaan and those of us who  
are Chookaneidi. So in that way this is different than I  
guess the Western world of literature. But we do that. We

say who the story belongs to.

Richard Dauenhauer: If I could leap in here for a second, this is a major difference. If you look at the earliest editions of Tlingit literature, and then you look at what Nora's collected in the field, we have nothing that was collected in the field that does not have this kind of an introduction. And we call that a narrative frame, where they establish who owns the story, why they're telling it. On the other hand, when you look at a lot of the earlier publications, say like Swanton's Tlingit Myths and Texts, almost none of the stories have that introduction. All that we can conclude is that probably they were edited out, because that's usually what happens in the editing process. And we've had some people argue with us about this. One fairly well known linguist: "Well gee, why do you put all that crap in there? Just get to the story!" And well, wait a minute, that is the story. So, I think this is a good follow-up to the question. I have this problem when I read, for example, an Eskimo story. If I take a Yupik story, I don't know where it begins and where it ends. I don't know if it's supposed to be funny, or if it's not. Every culture has got that aesthetic. And especially with humor, you know. If it's Native American humor, you don't know if you're being put on or you're supposed to laugh. Sometimes it's very subtle.

Elaine Tietjen: Could you talk more about naming, the importance of names, and how names come about?

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: One way is at an important point in time, feasts or ceremonies. We share names between clans. This shows we're connected somehow, somewhere back in history we were one family. Grandmothers and grandfathers give names in ceremonies. "Being Misplaced" is from Yakutat. That was given to my mother for her to name my granddaughter, "Being Misplaced," by a different clan but of the same moiety, of a raven clan from Yakutat. Because they were all dying off there was no one to give that name to, so they gave it to my mother for me to give to my grandchildren. And then K'eikaxwein is also given to me by my aunt; they're of a different house than I came, the one I came from, but also we're disappearing from that group. And Kut Aan Kawuneeek is also given to me by my aunt who was from Chilkat area. And then there's "You're Smaller Than a Raven." That's his name. So, in this way, we get names from all over the place. Then we adopt people like you. You know, I could adopt Ofelia, or I could adopt anyone. And once you're adopted there's a lot of responsibilities that go with it.

Elaine Tietjen: Like what?

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: Coming to my potlatch and giving money (laughter).

Jeanne Armstrong: I'm going to ask something else about the aesthetic. This is maybe from a different perspective, because some of your poems seem to use a haiku aesthetic. I wondered if you could say something about that. What does that haiku style mean to you? Why do you like to use that?

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: Well, it's easy for me to describe something in haiku style. And I think I started to do that after I translated Basho, then it just came natural. And then there are Tlingit things that give me that ability too. There's a lot of things that come to me out of my culture, and some out of Basho's writing. Like, the "Clamming":

Like beach grass  
swaying in the wind,  
squirting from clams  
at low tide.

I think that's my own. "Canada Geese" is more like haiku.

CANADA GEESE

On Mendenhall tide  
flats, Canada geese eat their  
way through ice to spring.

Yeah, I think that's more like haiku to me. I think I've seen English haikus too, you know, done by different people. A lot of people are trying that out so I'm not the first to try it out.

Richard Dauenhauer: But the imagist poets too . . . .

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: Yeah.

Richard Dauenhauer: . . . is something Nora was reading along with the Japanese.

Dennis Selder: I just was wondering if there were jokes in the stories and maybe I was missing them.

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: Well, not so much in that. Those are clan-owned stories so they're kind of heavy. But in Tlingit we have many jokes, many people who do jokes. Raven is a joker. When we gather around as Tlingits we have a real good time but when you try to translate it into English it falls flat.

Vicki Broach: Well I thought it was sort of funny when the woman steps in the bear's excrement. Was that inappropriate humor on my part? I mean, that is a funny touch isn't it?

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: Yeah, it is. But that's the way it's told. People ask us to do kiddies' literature out of these. I don't know. The most important point in the story is the woman falling on the poop of the bear, the bear pie. Well we knocked around the word "shit," "crap," all kinds of words.

Richard Dauenhauer: We used what he says in Tlingit.

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: Yeah, well he was trying to be polite with me because I was a woman, so I decided to use a polite word, "defecated."

Richard Dauenhauer: Well, that's what he says. He's very

discreet: "The place where he went to the bathroom," or "he went out" literally.

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: Yeah, "went out." So if we ever do a children's book would we edit this part out? Kids are really into talking about poop and pee and, you know, doo-doo. They love it and (laughter), our grandson, he's just so boring at times because he loves to talk about pee-pee, ca-ca, doo-doo. He'll giggle afterwards, then he'll laugh and howl after he said it. But, here we are with this story, with the "defecate." If we had to do it for children, we would have to leave the most important word out of there.

Richard Dauenhauer: Well not necessarily, depending on who you're talking to.

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: If the schoolteachers got into it or some organizations who are into critiquing books--in Alaska one of them critiqued the American Heritage Dictionary out of the school! Because it had four letter words.

Richard Dauenhauer: But you know that's another good question because the real taboo word in there for some cultures is "bear."

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: Uh-huh.

Richard Dauenhauer: I don't know how it is with Navajo, but with northern Athabaskan, women are not supposed to utter the word "bear" directly. And in fact, if you look at the

history of European language--this is one of my favorite examples--like in Russian, there is no word for "bear" anymore. They use this word which means honey-eater. That's a circumlocution. Because anything that's so powerful you don't refer to directly. So in other words, it would be perfectly okay to use the word "shit," but it would not be okay to use the word "bear." The whole problem is what constitutes a taboo subject. With Anglo-American Victorian tradition it's usually body parts and body functions. Animals are okay. In fact, if you want to insult someone you call him various animals. Coming back to the aesthetics of this story, that is probably the single most important part of the story, when the girl steps in the bear dung. Then she can't control her thoughts. She can't control her mouth, and then she says these things. If she doesn't step in the turds, there's no motivation plot-wise to break the taboo which starts the whole story going. And so, there are versions in which you'll look with a magnifying glass to find the excrement. I mean, it's been deleted, and as a result the story makes no sense, at least from the indigenous point of view. It's like taking the crucifixion out of the Easter story, you know. As if a lot of people say, we'll take out the death, we don't want the kids to side with death. Well, okay, we'll leave you with the resurrection, but forget Good Friday. It doesn't work

that way. You've got to have both sides of the thing.

Dennis Selder: Does Dick know Tlingit?

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: [something in Tlingit]

Richard Dauenhauer: [something in Tlingit] Not as much as I would like to. I've studied lots of languages, and Tlingit is the most difficult that I've ever come up against. There's a very low degree of predictability.

Louise Lockard: I have a question on learning the language.

I was transcribing a tape from a Navajo woman who's about thirty years old; she said, "Someday I'll be a good speaker of Navajo." Would you care to comment on that?

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: Well, you're not recognized as knowing anything until you're over sixty-five. So, I'm just a child until I become sixty-five and over!

Richard Dauenhauer: Upstart!

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: (Laughter.) I think that's because at about that time you're asked to make speeches. People expect you to make a speech to the grieving, which is really hard to do, especially when you're closely related. So you have to know how to handle words so that you don't hurt somebody. You have to know how to put them together and address the people in your kinship to them. There's a lot to that. You have to know how to talk about your crests, to show them that you care, too, and how they're related to the crests. And also the owners of the art objects, who have

died before, and then you're able to talk sensitively to those who are grieving. In that way you're allowed to do many things. You can talk to the men as an equal. The men treat you as somebody who knows something. There's a speech in the oratory book by a woman which is the most important one, I think, most beautiful speech too. It's by a woman. And she must have made it when she was about seventy-seven years old.

Richard Dauenhauer: When you go to college you learn more words, you take courses in literature and you grow with the language. Nora spoke Tlingit and some of my Inupiaq students speak Eskimo. They would start working with the stories, say, transcribing and translating, and they would paraphrase. But I'd really push 'em. I'd say, well I want to know what this word means. Finally they'd come say, "I don't know--I get the feeling but I don't know." So then they go home at Christmas or vacation, and they come back and say, "I asked my grandfather." I'll never forget Hannah. She said, "It's the verb that you use when somebody that you don't know is coming out at a distance across the ice and you're not sure if it's friend or foe." The kids begin to realize, "Boy, I know the language but here's a word I don't know." The biggest frustration for me dealing with oral literature is that you've always got to bother somebody. You know I'm happy when I can go to a Greek

dictionary, and I can look up the word. But in this case you've always got to bother somebody: What does this word mean, what is that? But, as with English literature, you really grow with that. Nora may not want to say this about herself, but I see it. As you work with this for twenty or twenty-five years, you grow with it. I think that's a very important aspect. The older you get the more you pick up these new words.

Jeanne Armstrong: Could I ask again about the story that you mentioned earlier, about "The Woman Who Married the Bear"? You said something that was interesting. Women can't use certain terms like the word for "bear."

Nora Marks Dauenhauer and Richard Dauenhauer: That's in Athabaskan.

Richard Dauenhauer: At least in Koyukon and other northern Athabaskan. In Tlingit there may be things too, I don't know.

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: Well, in Tlingit, a word for the bear is [sounds like yaateenyeit] which means "something that moves," but there's a definite name for it, which is [sounds like hkoot] or [sounds like tseekg], for a black bear. [Hkoot] is brown bear. So we use the word [yateenyeit] for both, the thing that moves.

[Yattenyeit'ahk] contracted into [   ?   ].

Jeanne Armstrong: I'm trying to understand the story. It

seemed what happened to the woman was because of the way she talked about the bear. But then, it seemed as you went through the story that it had to do with some kind of bear medicine.

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: This one is Tom Peter's story?

Richard Dauenhauer: Uh huh.

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: The brothers made medicine so they could track the bear. So they would have stamina to do it. He didn't mention what kind of medicine it was, but he did say, "People are not like they are today." If a person went from here to over there, it would take one day. So I figured that he was talking about miles and miles of walking. Maybe that's what the medicine was for.

Jeanne Armstrong: And the bear skin?

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: The bear skin is hung in a certain way. Even today it's done, today. They're ceremonially dressed, from the time of the story, the hunters hang it in a certain way. [To Richard Dauenhauer:] Maybe you could tell them about the time you were coming to Alaska.

Richard Dauenhauer: The very first time I drove to Alaska was in the late sixties. We just stopped along the roadside to stretch and saw this little cache. I don't know what you'd call it, an arbor, a little roof-like thing. There was something smoldering so we just stopped because I was ready for a break. We went down off the highway. And it

was a bear skull. It was at sunset, and it was really beautiful feeling. It was late summer, long arctic sunset, and this bear head was smoldering in this fire. It was faced a certain way. And I thought, "This is very interesting." I didn't know. After that we drove up to Anchorage. And then when Nora got working with the story, you know, many years later, the southern Yukon, that's where this particular version comes from, the storyteller goes into the whole sequence there.

That's also a very typical story because it gets into just about anything you would want in a Tlingit story. It's got the taboo, the violation of the taboo, what happens. It's got the mythic covenant where the bear says it's okay to kill bears now, you can do this but the trade-off is you must treat the animal with respect and sing this song at this particular time and do this. And then, of course, the other side of it is the woman has these two children, so now we are physically related to bears. I mean those of us who are now human being we know that there are bears in our ancestry. And so now you're into this very precarious situation where you as this puny human beings are living among those enormous animals. Believe me, there've been times when I've been out hunting and all of a sudden you have this sense that there's something around and you just hightail it. Or you see these things the size of a

volkswagon and they just fade into the bushes. You want to say a few nice words to your paternal uncle.

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: Yeah, we still talk to them.

Richard Dauenhauer: But all these features are in the story. This one and the Glacier Bay are my two personal favorites in the book. This is what I had stumbled onto, literally. I didn't know what the hell it was, but it's there. People are still doing this. And with the Glacier Bay, too, in both versions of the Glacier Bay story what you do as a human being has cosmic repercussions, and if you live right, things will be right with the cosmos. It's important to balance things out.

I would love some day to get together with somebody who does computer graphics. I think that story would be a great one for animation. I don't know how you would do it without, you know, where the woman puts on the backpack and then that becomes the hump in the bear. Or she puts on the bearskin and then is transformed. And, of course, this gets you back to masks. There's so much mask tradition. That's one way of showing that you've changed, an inner spirit shape. I love that scene where the thoughts are coming in and it's like he's doing karate or something. He's bouncing the thoughts off of him but they're so obvious you don't even have to say anything, all you have to do is think about it and these animals are gonna hear you. It has a lot to

say about the arrogance of hunting.

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: I collected the story in 1972 from Tom Peter. We stopped in Teslin on our way down from Anchorage. He was very nice and he said he'd tell me this story. And then we left. He let us stay in his house, and he gave us some wood. We traded seaweed for wood, and he gave us some moose meat. We talked and then the next year we went back to see him. Here he was: "Boy, that's a good story." I read it to him, and he said, "Boy, that's the best story I ever heard." He said, "Let me tell you the rest of it!" (Laughter.) So there's part two. At least he was good enough to tell me the rest of it. That's Tom Peters.

Richard Dauenhauer: That raises other set of aesthetic questions for me I had never thought until he said that: What is it like to be the storyteller in the community? I mean, who tells you stories? It's been a year, and here's Nora reading the story. It better be good because it's his own words.

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: But he was told stories before he became a storyteller.

Richard Dauenhauer: Yeah.

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: That's where his storytelling came from.

Richard Dauenhauer: So he'd never heard one. There's

nobody of an equal skill to tell him a story.

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: Well, maybe there was. Well you know, in our family there were men--my grandfather, his son Jim, my uncle, my other uncle John, and their sister's husband John--who all told stories. They would make time for it after dinner. And they would start telling stories. They took turns telling stories. And then there are storytellers who are women. When everyone is gone, they start telling the stories. When everybody's gone hunting or gone trapping. The men would be gone for a day or so, and we would get stories from them. And then there are kids, you know, us--we would tell each other stories. I don't know how good they were, but we told them.

Susan Stevens: When I was in first grade by mother used to tell us [kootshtakaa?] stories.

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: Oh yes, a Tlingit!

Susan Stevens: I asked her to write them down when I was twenty-three, but she couldn't remember them anymore.

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: Uh huh.

Susan Stevens: Do you know any of those stories?

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: Yessss.

Susan Stevens: Those are fun. My friends were afraid to go home after she finished telling those stories.

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: Yeah. Our grandchildren all say, "Tell us [kootshtakaa] stories!" [Kootshtakaa] is part

animal, part man, saved by the land otters. [Kootshta] are land otters. They're saved by the land otters after they've been in the water. They capsize in a boat or fall overboard. They would become this part human, part animal being who eats out of the woods and off the beach. And they transform into ugly--their lips become like this, you know. They get hairy. I've never seen one (laughter), but this is what I heard. And they talk by whistling [she whistles]. These are the kind of stories she's talking about. There's one story about a [kootshtakaa] who fought with a man by the name of [sounds like Ehkhoko?]. He decided to beat up the [kootshtakaa] so that he would quit bothering the people in his village. And he ran up there and met with the [kootshtakaa] and they fought in the snow and they fought in the trees. And finally they quit fighting. The people of the village couldn't hear them anymore so they went up there to see him. There was [Ehkhoko] with a big branch stuck in his forehead, and he had him sitting up the trunk of a tree. And there was foam all over the place and seaweed all over the place. I guess this meant he killed the [kootshtakaa] but the kootshtakaa] got him, too, stabbed his head with a big branch. Now this is not the way it's told in Tlingit. But this is the way it's done in English here! (Laughter.)  
The End.

Any last questions?

Gloria Bird: How did you learn to read and write in Tlingit?

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: I just treated it like I was making medicine, I guess. When you make medicine you concentrate on it, and you're not supposed to eat or drink water. Be by yourself. I didn't do those things but I concentrated on reading and writing. It's hard to do when you're not speaking it all the time with people. And so, in that way, I tend to slide back.

Richard Dauenhauer: You should also mention you were involved in the design of it too.

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: Yeah, I was involved with the design of the orthography, the popular orthography is what we're writing. Maybe Ofelia can tell you about the linguistic orthography.

Ofelia Zepeda: In some of the earlier collections people used the international systems to represent these sounds, but they aren't always practical.

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: There's one person who collected stories and he used one letter for all kinds of sounds but you have to know what he's saying by reading the English. So in that way I learned how to read his writing.

Larry Evers: I'll ask you to read one poem to close this off.

Nora Marks Dauenhauer: I went on a Native writers' workshop

with Joy Harjo and we went to Nome, Alaska--that's way up north--and also Kotzebue. When we were in Nome, we were talking and this is the poem I came up with.

LISTENING FOR NATIVE VOICES

(Native Writers' Workshop, Nome, Alaska)

--for Joy Harjo

Trapped voices,  
frozen  
under sea ice of English,  
buckle,  
surging to be heard.

We say  
"Listen for sounds.  
They are as important  
as voices."

Listen.

Listen.

Listen.

Listen.

--April 14, 1984

Larry Evers: Thank you. Thank you very much.