

"ayayásh"

This story is told on both sides of the mountains in Washington. On Western Washington and Eastern Washington.

This story I learned a long time ago. And it comes from the Yakama area where they speak the Sahaptan language. And in the story is a word. It's "ayayásh." And the word ayayásh means crazy. It means dumb. So, this story I'm going to tell you is about a little girl. A long time ago in a village in the Yakama area, there lived a little girl. And this little girl didn't listen very well to her family, her parents, didn't listen to the adults or the elders in the village and the people would call her ayayásh. And she began to believe she was ayayásh, that she was dumb, she couldn't learn things. And then she didn't pay attention when the other children would explain things to her about the game that they were playing. And she would always mess up the game or cause their team to lose or come in last place. And the kids said she was ayayásh, too, that she was dumb, she didn't know anything. So, after a while this little girl believed that she was ayayásh. She believed she was dumb. She believed she was stupid. She believed she couldn't learn anything. And because of this, she was always alone. She didn't like to be around people now because they always made fun of her, she thought. So, one day she went up into the hills and she sat down by a tree, a big tree. She started to cry. She cried and she cried. And the tree woke up. It was a Grandma Cedar Tree. And the Cedar Tree said "Little girl. Why you cry?" And she said, "I am ayayásh. I don't know anything. I'm dumb. I can't learn." But the Cedar Tree said "Little girl. I can teach you something if you want to learn." And the little girl asked, "Yes, please teach me something." And the Cedar Tree asked her to dig up some of the roots of the tree and take off some of the bark of the tree and tear them into long strips. The girl listened and did that. She dug up some of the roots, then took off some of the bark and tore them into strips. The Cedar Tree reached his branches down like hands and guided the little girl's hands until she wove a basket. And it was a lopsided basket. A lot of big holes in it. A lot of strands hanging from it. And the Cedar Tree said, "Little girl. This is how you make a basket." But the little girl said, "Is this a good basket? Did I make a good basket?" And the Cedar Tree said, "The only way you will know is to take this basket down to the river, dip it into the water and see if it holds water." So, the little girl took the basket all the way down the hill to the river, dipped it in the

water, lifted it out. And the water poured out right away out of those big holes. So, the girl went back to the Cedar Tree and said "It didn't hold water. What do I do?" The Cedar tree said, "You have to take it apart and weave it again." The girl protested. "I don't want to. I did it once. I don't want to do it again." The Cedar Tree said, "Little girl. This is how you learn. Take it apart and weave it again." So, the girl took the basket apart and wove it again and this time it was better. It wasn't so crooked or lopsided. It only had a few strands of bark and roots hanging from it. And when she held it to the light, she could only see a few little holes. She said, "Did I make a good basket?" Now the Cedar Tree said, "The only way you will know is to take it to the river, dip it in the water, see if it holds water again." The little girl protested. "I don't want to do that. I've already done that once." "Little girl," the Cedar Tree said. "This is how you will learn." So, the little girl took the basket down to the river again, dipped it in the water. It was holding water. But the water was leaking slowly out of those little holes. So, she rushed back to the Cedar Tree. But by the time she got there, the water was gone. "Well, it almost held water. But it leaked out really slow." The Cedar Tree said, "Well then, take it apart and weave it again." The little girl protested, almost crying. "This time I don't want to. I already did it twice. Now my fingers hurt from weaving baskets." The Cedar Tree said, "You must do it little girl." And so the girl took the basket apart and wove it again. This time it wasn't crooked at all and there were no strands hanging from it. This time, holding it to the light, she could see no holes at all. "Did I make a good basket now?" she said. The Cedar Tree said, "Take it to the river. See if it holds water." So, the girl went down to the river, dipped it in the water, lifted it out and it did hold the water. This time no water leaked out at all. So, she went back to Cedar Tree and said "Look. It's holding water." The Cedar tree said "You did good little girl. It's a wonderful basket! It's a beautiful basket." So, the little girl poured water around the roots of the tree as a way of saying thank you. And she was very proud of her basket. She made it herself. It held water. But then she realized it had no designs on it. And because of that she knew it was incomplete. She needed designs for her basket. She couldn't think of any because she was ayayásh. She was dumb. What could she do? When she started crying again and the Cedar Tree said, "What are you crying now for?" She said "I need a design for the basket, but I don't know where I could get some. I'm dumb. I'm ayayásh." Cedar Tree said "go up into the mountains. Carry your basket and designs

will get themselves to you." The girl protested that she didn't want to go further up into the mountains. Couldn't Cedar Tree just tell her? The Cedar Tree told her again to go into the mountains. "Keep your eyes open. A design will give itself to you." So, the girl went up into the mountains and she walked around but couldn't find any designs. She knew it was because she was dumb and because she was ayayásh. She started to cry again. She cried and she cried and she woke up the Mountain. And the Mountain said, "Why are you crying little girl? You woke me up." The little girl explained she was looking for a design, but she couldn't find any. She said she was ayayásh and didn't know anything. And the Mountain said, "Look at me. Can you see that I'm a design?" The little girl said, "you're a triangle". And so, the Mountain said, "you can use that for the bottom of your basket." So, the girl wove a triangular design with steps going up the side and that is the mountain design. She thanked the Mountain. But she needed one more design for the rim. She walked around again looking for designs. No design was going to give itself to her. She wasn't going to find any designs because she was ayayásh. She started to cry again. At this time, she woke up a rattlesnake. And the Rattlesnake came slithering from under the rocks and said, "Why are you crying so loud little girl? You woke me up." She explained how she needed another design, but she couldn't find one. She was dumb. She couldn't learn anything. And so, the Rattlesnake said, "Little girl. Look at my back. Can you see designs on my back?" She said she could. It looks like a bunch of diamonds hooked together. The Rattlesnake said, "You can use that for the rim of your basket." So, she wove what we call the rattlesnake design. Diamonds hooked together all around the rim of her basket. She thanked the rattlesnake, went back down the mountain, and went to her village. The people saw her carrying something. They rushed up and they said, "Little girl. What is that?" She said, "A basket." They said, "Where did you get a basket?" She said, "The Cedar Tree showed me how to make it out of bark and roots." The people said, "Little girl. What are those designs in the basket?" She said, "This is the Mountain. This is Rattlesnake." They said, "Where did you get those designs?" She said, "Mountain gave me this one. Rattlesnake gave me this one." The people said, "Little girl. Can you teach us to make a basket like that?" She said, "Yes" I can." The people said, "Little girl. Can you teach us to put designs in our basket like that?" She said, "Yes, I can." And so, the little girl taught the people how to make what they call the cedar coil basket out of cedar bark and

cedar roots so tightly woven it can hold water. And she showed them how to put designs on the basket like mountain and rattlesnake. And do you think the people called her ayayásh anymore?

And that is all.