

Julia White's
imitation
nation

1881
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1946
67

hiláxs initiation of Mrs Julia White, in the nulim haláit

Informant: Mrs. Julia White, 75 years old when she died circa 1946. laxskik gispaxlo'ots, house of ga'wola and spóxs, Chief's name loxs meaning sun.

She gave a full account of her own initiation into the nulim secret society or haláit. She did not remember her first initiation as a tsf'k, but she remembered her second or hiláxs initiation.

One morning she was led by her paternal aunt to a large house. Completely nude, she was led before the haláit chief legéx. Mrs. White was of the laxskik house of spóxs and of the gispaxlo'ots tribe. There were two haláit chiefs: legéx was the head of the nulim group and ni'spalás was the head of the mi'tla group.

Julia's mother and father came in with the gifts to be presented to the chief in return for his services in sending her to the heavens to acquire power.

When the haláit chief was ready she was brought to him and her paternal uncle called out to the chief: "Oh great haláit ! Put in some of your great powers into this ordinary person."

Then the gifts were piled up in front of the haláit chief, and when he considered them sufficient the chief came and walked with the nude initiate to the centre of the house under the smoke hole. He took the initiate in his arms and made motions of throwing her through the smoke hole, but in reality the haláit attendants covered her with a robe and spirited her out to a chamber at the rear of the building.

"I was supposed to be in a trance and not knowing

anything", said the initiate, "But I did not feel anything strange about where I was hidden in the secret chamber and while there I was looking out through a crack in the wall and I saw my brother playing outside. I called to him and we spoke together a long while, although I had been told that if I had any contact with anyone who was not an initiate it would be fatal to both of us. But nothing happened. When night came I was taken away to another hiding place, where I was placed in the care of my paternal aunts. I could have no contact with any of the house. I was fed by my aunts and was never out of their sight.

"When I was ready to be presented to the chief, which signified I had returned from the heavens, I was taken to the rear of the village and one of my cousins who was very much like me in age and appearance was taken by the halait attendants and gotten ready to impersonate me for my return from the heavens. I was to return on the back of a huge swan (gak).

"Very early in the morning this swan was seen swimming towards the beach in front of the gispaxlo'ots village (at Port Simpson). There was much blowing of reed whistles (naxnox) these being the property of the halait. Then the figure of a girl arose and stood on the swan's back and then disappeared.

"Then suddenly the naxnox whistles were sounded behind the halait house and I was stood up in full view of all the spectators, being led by the halait chief legex. In my hand I had a crystal which I was supposed to have brought from the heavens. I was now led in front of the village, supposedly in a trance and under the halait influence. But I was not; I knew everything. I did and I was

perfectly normal.

I was then led into the haláit house, where all the guests who belonged to the nułim group were present, and then all the gifts were piled in front of the place where the haláit chief sat.

The chief then came forward to where I stood and removed one cedar bark ring from my head, and then I was returned to the secret chamber. The gifts were then distributed to the guests and to the haláit chief, who in turn distributed them to his attendants.

Some days after I was again led from the secret chamber and more gifts were brought in to the haláit chief. My paternal uncle spoke to the chief: "Come, great supernatural one, use your powers on this humble initiate."

Then the chief came to me and removed the last cedar bark ring from my head and only my collar remained. I was led away again to the secret chamber.

The final ceremony took place a short time after, when I was cleansed of all the haláit influence. During all this I was supposed to be in a stupor or trance. But this was not so, for I was normal at all times.

There remained only one more ceremony: the removal of the ring from my neck. When this was done the haláit then cupped his hands on my breast and sucked in air and blew this through the smoke hole, and away blew all the haláit influence.

My initiation was now complete: I could now mingle with anybody.

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