Tlingit National Anthem

As Retold by Robert Willard Jr.
(Raven/Beaver Clan Elder)

This is the story of the Tlingit national anthem, a song that entwines our people with their past and keeps our ancient heritage alive. At potlatch ceremonies, Tlingit elders sing the anthem and tell how it came about—for many years in secret, for this ritual was long forbidden by the government—always passing the story on to the new generations.

Long ago, the Tlingit Indians lived in the area now called British Columbia and the Yukon Territory. They decided to move from this region of lakes to the great ocean—now called the Pacific—where they heard the fish were abundant. When all of the clans had assembled, they began a great trek through the mountain canyons leading to the sea.

After many, many miles, the way was blocked by a glacier that filled the canyon. To go back in search of a different route would be a long and wasteful journey. To keep the people moving forward, the clansmen decided to lead the way across this frozen pass. They organized a huge parade and had the people follow in line. They sang and danced and worked as a team to move forward together.