**The Legend of Mount Baker**

[*Washington West of the Cascades*](http://www.stumpranchonline.com/skagitjournal/Washington/Whatcom/MtBaker/Baker5-IndianLegend.html#Sources), Herbert Hunt and Floyd C. Kaylor, 1917

      In the northwestern Cascades stands Mount Baker, the "Bride of the Pacific," always white robed. In the Lummi Indian tongue the mountain is called Kulshan — once an active volcano, it is now accounted extinct. It is not now known how long the mountain has borne this name nor exactly why it was given but it is very certain that Kulshan has been Kulshan for many generations. One of the most intelligent of the Lummi Indians attributes the name to the fact that the mountain was once conical and that the peak itself was destroyed by volcanic eruptions and explosions. The summit is not now conical but a cup-like crater. The name Kulshan is applied to other things than the mountain — any object that is long, slim or tall becomes Kulshan when shot at, struck and affected at the end.
      In the olden days, so the old folks tell us, Kulshan was a fair and handsome youth who grew apace to man's estate and then espoused two wives. One of these wives fully equaled her husband in beauty — she was the favorite wife and her name was Duh-hwahk. She bore Kulshan three fine sons. The other wife was no match for Duh-hwahk, in beauty but she was very amiable, very kind and very attractive in manner. This wife was named Whaht-kway. Eventually it came about that the kindness and consideration of Whaht-kway so completely won over her husband that she supplanted Duh-hwahk in the affections of Kulshan.
      This, of course, aroused furious fires of jealousy and resentment in the breast of Duh-hwahk, who constantly kept the entire household in dissension and strife by means of her temper and her jealousy. Finally Duh-hwahk resolved to regain Kulshan by artifice. Relying confidently on her beauty and on her former firm sway over her husband she conceived the plan of feigning to desert him. So, one day, when it happened that by chance she found Kulshan in amiable and mellow mood and more pliant to her purpose, she complained to him of the coldness and harshness with which she, Duh-hwahk, had been treated in the household, even more by Whaht-kway than by Kulshan. She assured her husband that she loved him but that the burden was more than even her great love for him could bear her all of her possessions.
      Kulshan resolved to be master of his own household and without hesitation informed Duh-hwahk that she could go as soon as chose and as far as she liked. Duh-hwahk was dumbfounded by this unexpected reply. She felt that she must make things appear to him in a more serious light. She felt confident of his love and sure that at the last Kulshan would relent. Indeed she could not believe that he would really permit her thus to desert him. Founding her faith in this imagination, she gathered up her possessions and made ready to go at once. She prepared her pack thoroughly, putting therein plentiful supplies of berries, fruit, sweet bulbs and even of beautiful flowering plants of many varieties.
      Thus amply provided with all that she desired she then said farewell and fared forth, leaving her three children behind. The children bewailed the going of their mother and with many lamentations besought her to remain. This greatly pleased Duh-hwahk at heart for she now felt assured of melting the indifference of Kulshan. She was sure that he would call her back before she had been able to go any very great distance. With this in mind she managed to set forth on a course that would take her the longest way. So also she traveled down the valley between the mountain ranges so as to be always in the sight of Kulshan as long as possible, thinking to give him ample opportunity to recall her.
      She had not gone far, however, before she realized her mistake and richly repented her hasty action. So, as she went along, she would ever and anon look anxiously back. Her heart surged tumultuously with a fond hoping and a vain longing to see Kulshan wildly signal for her return — how she hoped that he would do so! Alas, she had gone too far for that, perhaps, and, besides, many little hills and valleys now intervened between her and home where she had left Kulshan and the weeping children. Therefore she must needs climb the knolls and pick out the highest hills from which to gaze back with longing eyes and sinking heart.
      Standing on the very summits of these hills she would strain with all her might, up to the very tips of her toes, seeking some sign from her loved husband. Sometimes she fancied she was not quite high enough and she would raise to her tip-toes and stretch forth her head in anxious gaze, yearning all the while and striving all the while to be just a little taller. This oft-repeated wish and effort soon began to have its effect upon her and she forthwith began to grow taller. At last she had gone so far that she must of necessity make camp. She selected for her stopping place one that seemed most satisfactory to her because from it she could have a clear view of her dear home so foolishly and uselessly abandoned. Here she removed her packs and cast the contents broadcast, blessing the place with all the stores of fruit, of berries, bulbs, tubers and beautiful flowering plants of many wonderful varieties, all of which she had taken away from Kulshan.
      There, looking ever and longingly northward, Duh-hwahk remains to this day and you may see her if you wish — look to the south and east — it is Mount Rainier. Therefore we know why all these beautiful things abound about Mount Rainier where Duh-hwahk took with her. Look to the north and you will see him, but the white man calls him Mount Baker, not Kulshan! All about Kulshan too you may see the deserted and weeping children.
      In time the faithful Whaht-kway felt the premonitory pangs of childbirth. She yearned for the comfort and company of her people, and especially the advice and assistance of her old mother. None other than that old mother could give the needed care in the hour of trial. Kulshan listened to the pleadings of his faithful wife and yielded to them. Full well he knew, however, that the journey would be a hard one for Whaht-kway if she had to climb the mountains and journey over all the intervening heights and valleys. Therefore Kulshan engaged all of the animals with paws, from the lion to the mouse, to dig a long ditch from his home down to tidewater. This was done until the flow of water from his place was at last sufficient to enable a good-sized canoe to float down in safety. This stream we now know as the Nooksack River — adown it softly floated the canoe of Whaht-kway in these olden days when the river itself was new.
      At last she reached her beloved Hwulch or Puget Sound, her own country. Down between the many islands the canoe made its way and in passing each of these islets Whaht-kway made sure to leave here and there certain edible things — where they may be found to this day. When Whaht-kway at last reached home her parents greeted her fondly and asked her what position she chose to assume. She remembered how the jealous Duh-hwahk had reared herself up, up, up into the air until she became a mountain peak. Whaht-kway would not do so. She chose to lie down so that coming people would be able to reach her head without great trouble or without climbing — with Duh-hwahk, alas, it is different. Whaht-kway is now an island low lying, to the north of San Juan Island. Whaht-kway is now better known by the name of Spieden Island [also spelled Speiden] and just a little north of it is the baby island which was born after Whaht-kway reached this place. At present all of the small islands between Kulshan and Whaht-kway bear the names of fish or some of the other edible things that Whaht-kway placed there as she passed by on the journey home. Many have cause to this day to remember with gratitude the generous thoughtfulness of Whaht-kway.
      During all this time Kulshan was lonely indeed. Instead of having two wives he found himself with none. All the while he kept straining upward to see if he might not catch occasional glimpses of his departed wives. The children saw him and did likewise, profiting by the example of Kulshan. Today Kulshan and Duh-hwahk are mountains and the children are the mountains south and east of their father Kulshan. We have told you what the word means — but what does Duh-hwahk mean? It means, and how fittingly, "clear sky." So too Whaht-kway means a maiden who has just reached womanhood.
      This is the story of Kulshan, his two wives and his many children, and of how they came to be what they are and where they are.