ADVENTURES ON AN ISLAND

(Shoalwater Bay)

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On a sunny afternoon many years ago, an Indian family landed their cedar dugout canoe on Long Island at the south end of Shoalwater Bay. They planned to stay on the island for several days and dig little-neck clams. They would dry and smoke the clams over a bed of hot rocks and coals. After the clams were dried they would pack them in baskets for trading with upriver or inland Indians. The inland Indians loved saltwater clams. They did not have clams and they would trade beaver pelts, deerskin, camas bulbs and other materials for them. This Indian family came to Long Island because it had an abundant supply of clams which were easy to harvest. Many Indians on the bay gathered clams here. Lots of old clam shell piles dotted the island shore.

"John, you and Sam do not leave," said Mother. "You boys must help set up camp and unload the canoe. You can go play afterwards." John was twelve years old and Sam was eleven. They were the two boys in the family and they had a sister named Mary who was nine.

They had with them a three-year-old mongrel dog named Shag. He had gotten this name because of his long, scruffy, matted, dark fur. He was not a smart dog but he was gentle and made a good pet. He had a habit of getting into mischief.

Father was a fisherman and fur trapper. Mother made beautiful Indian baskets to sell and trade and she also ran the household. They had towed their small shallow water canoe with them. This canoe was used by Mother for gathering basket weaving material in the sloughs and marshes near their village. The boys would use it to explore the island.

They left their village on the north shore of the bay. Father and the boys paddled their dugout canoe out to the deep channel and moved with the incoming tide. As the tide got higher, a northwest wind increased and Mother helped them raise a small sail. With the tide and wind going in their direction, they made the trip to Long Island faster then Father had expected. He was pleased with the journey.

Father and the boys made a lean-to frame with poles they found on the beach and in the island woods. Mother tied cedar bark mats on the framework. She overlapped the mats, like shingles, so the water would run off if it should rain. Soon they had a nice shelter with one open side. The next task was to dig a pit in the ground, fill it with rocks, and build a fire over the rocks. The work was hard, but they all pitched in. Soon they had a rock bottom fire pit they would use all the time they were on the island.

"Children, we must gather wood for the fire. We will need lots of it," said

Mother. Father and the boys gathered driftwood and placed it near the pit. Mother and Mary unloaded food, supplies and tools from the large canoe. Next they gathered loose seaweed to use in the clam drying process. When camp was set up and everything was in order, Father built a fire, using a hard rock and flint with dry grass for kindling. Mother and Mary prepared a meal of dried salmon and fresh berries.

After the meal everyone was tired from the day's work, so they just sat around the fire and talked, then went to bed early. "John, I can hardly wait for tomorrow," said Sam.

"I can't either," said John. "There are so many things to explore on this island." As they dozed off, they could hear the ocean surf rolling on the beach on the other side of the peninsula.

Shoalwater Bay is located on the northwest coast. It is a large bay when the tide is high, but when the tide is far out, the bay is nearly dry. The area then is nearly all mudflats and sand bars, with only the main channels containing water. In many areas these mudflats are full of oysters and clams. A distinct feature of the bay is a long, sandy, tree-covered peninsula that begins near the mouth of the Columbia River and extends nearly thirty miles to the North. At that end the trees stop and the peninsula turns into a pointed sandspit that tapers off into the sea. Shoalwater Bay opens north of this peninsula. The peninsula protects the bay from the Pacific Ocean and forms the east boundary. The boundary on the west side of the bay is formed by tree covered clay banks and short sandy beaches. The distance from the peninsula to Long Island is about one mile.

Long Island is nearly seven miles long. It is tree-covered with thick underbrush. The width of the island is roughly a mile to a mile and a half but in one area it spreads out to nearly two miles. At the south end is a grass clearing where elk often feed. Often, huge flocks of ducks and geese rest here on their annual migrations. Deer and bear also make the island their home. Elk and deer trails do exist in the dense underbrush, but to one not familiar with this rough country, travel through the brush looks impossible. This is where the family would spend the next several days.

Early the next morning, the entire family was up and busy. Mother put more wood on the fire, and the rest of the family gathered small, succulent, hardshell clams. They dug the clams, put them in spruce baskets, washed them in a pool of water and emptied them near the fire. Harvesting the clams was simiple since the clams were just barely under the surface. Some were even on top of the mud. They dug into the mud with sticks until they located a clam or a huge bed of clams. The family picked out a whole layer with their hands at a time. They could fill a basket in a very short time. Before long they had all the clams they could take care of for a day. Then they ate a good morning meal that mother had prepared while they were digging. "John, Sam and Shag may explore the island after we finish the first batch of clams," said Mother.

"Oh, thank you," said Sam.

Father spread the hot coals over the rocks, and the boys spread bushels of clams

over the rocks and covered them with seaweed. As the clams became hot, the water inside the clams seeped out onto the rocks and created hot steam which caused the clams to open. The seaweed kept the steam trapped, creating more heat. In about a half hour mother removed the seaweed, exposing the clams which were now open.

"Now the tiresome part begins," said Mother. "We must remove the clams from the shell and place them on the sharp sticks which Father has brought from the woods." After Mother showed them how to place the clams on the sticks, everyone helped, and soon the sticks were filled. Mother then pushed the ends of the sticks in the ground around the fire so the clams would dry. After they dried, Mother and Mary put the clams in baskets and placed the baskets in the shelter.

The children had eaten some of the fresh clams. They were so delicious that the children almost made themselves sick eating so many. They knew the clams would not taste as good or be as tender after they were dried, but the inland Indians were still very fond of them. When the clams were dry, Mother told the boys they could go. The tide was nearly up to the beach. Father told the boys to stay on the camp side of the island and to not go any farther than the sound end of the island.

John and Sam pushed the little canoe into the water. They pulled Shag into the canoe and directed it down the island's west side, waving to Father, Mother and Mary. The day was beautiful and sunny. The sky was blue, and the water also appeared blue from the reflection. The boys paddled leisurely along the island enjoying the scenery about them. Seagulls were soaring high above them, and the ravens and crows were scolding from the island beaches. The island was completely covered with conifer trees, except for the clearing on the southern end. Pigeons fluttered in the treetops. The boys were astonished to see so many different species of birds on one island. Besides seagulls, ravens and crows they saw snipe or sandpipers in great flocks, kingfishers, blue jays and plover. "In the fall, the migrating birds will arrive. There are so many ducks, geese and black brandt that the sky will be black with them," said John. "There will also be the fish ducks and the swimming, diving birds such as the grebes, cormorants, scoters, mergansers and several other types."

"Birds must really love this bay," said Sam.

"Ark! Ark! Ark!" The boys were startled when they rounded a point and saw a great blue heron flying away, making its raucous noise of alarm.

"That's a year-round resident, and he's angry with us for scaring him away from his fishing place," said John.

In the distance, high up in the sky, they could see two bald eagles soaring, searching the beaches for something to eat. "I think this bay ought to be named Bird Bay, there are so many birds," said Sam. "What is that over there?" asked Sam.

John turned to look. About fifty feet away he saw a round shiny head, with a pair of large gleaming eyes staring at him. "It's a seal!" said John, "It's gray. I think it's a young one." The boys paddled slowly and cautiously toward the seal, but when they were a canoe length away, the round head with whiskers and no

ears sank out of sight. The boys kept going, and there it was again about fifty feet ahead of them. When they neared the seal, Shag began to bark, and the seal disappeared again. "Shag, bad dog," said Sam. Shag lowered his head in shame and did not bark again.

The seal played this game with the boys until they realized they had nearly reached the cleared field at the island's south end. The seal would let them get almost up to it and then sink out of sight again. The boys had ideas of catching it and making it a pet. They didn't realize they didn't have a chance of capturing it unless it was on land. "Look, John, isn't that an island over there?" said Sam. A short distance away from the end of Long Island, less than a half mile away, sat a small, round island a few hundred yards from the mainland.

"Yes, it's an island," said John. "I've heard some of the older people talk of it. I've heard tales that it was a Chinook Indian burial ground. That's probably the reason Father doesn't want us to go any further." The island was very small, looked perfectly round and was fully covered with trees. The shore around it appeared to be made up of small rocks. "I'm curious," said John. "We could paddle to the island, walk completely around it, get into our canoe and be on our way in a short time. The tide is almost high now, we have lots of water."

"But remember what Father said," protested Sam.

"I know," said John, "but he didn't really warn us to stay away from Round Island. I think he just didn't want us to get too far away, and we have lots of time." Sam's curiousity too, was greater than his fear and soon they had beached their canoe on the island and were walking around it. "I know father would disapprove of us coming here," said John, "let's just keep this a secret, Sam."

They had never been on an island such as this. It was perfectly round. Rocks and bits of small driftwood and grass covered the narrow beach. "The beach is covered with water during the winter tides, I would guess," said John. Shag was darting in and out of the brushy woods, but the boys had no plans of going into the brush. They were thinking that if it was an old burial ground, there must be old canoes containing bones there. It was a beautiful day so these thoughts did not frighten them.

Suddenly, Shag began barking furiously ahead of them. The boys, thinking he may have come upon a bird or an animal, ran to see what it was. As they rounded more of the island they saw the stern end of a canoe in the water. They saw the front of it up on the beach, and there was Shag bristled up, standing stiffly, barking. What he was barking at froze the boys in their tracks. There stood one of the largest, fiercest looking Indians they had ever seen! He was dressed only in a cedar bark loin cloth. Nothing covered his huge chest, which had several ugly scars the full length of it. His face was scarred, and it appeared that one eye was missing, but the other one glared at them fiercely. He had black hair to his shoulders. The boys could feel their hearts pounding wildly in their chests. They didn't know if this creature was human or not. He had a knife in one hand and a chunk of dried meat in the other.

All at once, the brute moved toward them, uttering a sound in a strange

language. When he opened his mouth, they saw that several teeth were missing. When the giant moved, the boys turned and ran faster than they had ever run before. They did not feel the rocks under their bare feet but they could feel the wind in their face. They were far ahead of Shag when they reached their canoe. With strength they did not know they had, they pushed the canoe off the beach and were several yards off shore before Shag caught up with them. They pulled him into the canoe and paddled farther away from the island before they dared look back. The huge Indian, a frightening grin on his face, was standing at the water's edge waving for them to return. The Indian watched them for a short time, then turned and walked away. That was when they noticed he had a bad limp and probably could not have caught them.

They stopped paddling and just sat in the canoe, catching their breath. They were sick with fright and wished they were back at their camp. When they recovered, they set a course for camp and did not stop paddling until they were safely home. Mother, Father and Mary were working on the last of the clams when the boys reached camp. John and Sam went to work immediately. John packed more driftwood and Sam gathered more loose seaweed for the clam pit. "My, you boys are sure ambitious today," said Mother. "I thought you'd be tired after your canoe trip."

"I did not expect you home this early," said Father.

"We got hungry and decided to come back sooner," said Sam.

"Hungry! You two ate enough clams to last most people for two days," said Mother.

"Paddling a canoe is sometimes hard work," said Father. The boys did not talk much. They were still shaken from their experience on the little island. Sometimes they would look down the bay to see if the man was coming their way in his canoe. Shag seemed to have forgotten about it. He was sleeping peacefully near the lean-to and appeared not to have a care in the world. The boys dared not tell their parents about Round Island since their father might become angry and not allow them to explore anymore.

"Father and Mary are going to catch some crab out of the tidepools," said Mother. "You boys can help me boil water to cook the crabs."

"Oh, good," said Sam, "I love fresh crab."

When the tide goes out, there are pools of water trapped in low areas. These are called tidepools. They are usually shallow. Almost always there are crabs and small fish left in them until the tide comes back in. Father showed Mary how to catch the crabs using a forked stick. They poked the stick into the sand until they hit a buried crab. When the crab tried to get away, they pitched it on the dry flats and then put it in a basket. Soon they had enough crab for the evening meal. "Oh Father, that was fun," said Mary.

"Good girl," said Father. "You did well. You caught more crabs than I did." Father did not let Mary handle the crabs. They could inflict a bad wound with their powerful claws if one got careless.

While Father and Mary caught the evening meal, John and Sam helped Mother

pack the remainder of the dried clams into the baskets. They then filled a large metal kettle with salt water from a small tidepool and placed it on hot coals. Soon the water was boiling. When Father returned, he put the squirming, kicking crabs into the water and almost immediately, their greenish colored shell turned red in the boiling water. The water from the sea contains just the right amount of salt for cooking crab. Soon the whole family was enjoying a feast of boiled crab and steamed clams.

White people had lived on Shoalwater Bay for nearly ten years now. Almost all of them were oystermen. They hired Indians to gather oysters at low tide and load them on the decks of sailing vessels. They kept the oysters watered down, and when the ship's decks were loaded, the skipper would sail to San Francisco Bay in California. Oyster buyers in San Francisco would pay the Shoalwater men a good price for the oysters.

During the last ten years, the white people had influenced the Indians greatly, especially in the use of tools, style of dress and types of cooking utensils. For example, boiling crab or any other food was much easier using a metal pot over an open fire or stove. Before the pots, Indians had placed hot rocks into a water-filled box until the water boiled. Also, the Indians now used metal instead of shells and bone for knives and other tools. Most of the Indians still clung to their old customs, although they adopted the whiteman's more useful methods.

Father had told his family often that the whiteman was here to stay, and that there were many more in far off lands that would come here to settle. Already the whiteman had control of many lands and was telling the Indians to adopt the new way or go to the reservation. John and Sam liked the Indian way better, but they were wise enough to believe their father. They both felt in their hearts that because of their father's teaching, they could deal with whatever came in the future. Right now though, they were like most Indian children, enjoying the present and the wonders of their surroundings.

After eating their fill of fresh crabs and clams, the family tidied up the camp. Father and Mother rested from their day's work. "Father, there is still time before the sun sets. May we walk around the island to the other side?" asked John.

"Yes, but be back at dusk," said Father.

"We will," said John. The boys and Shag walked around the end of the island and down the other side. They had never seen this side of the island before. The tide was low but a deep channel of water followed the shore of the island. The mainland on this side of the island was not far away. They walked on farther and rounded a point. They saw trees hanging over the channel and decided this was as far as they wanted to go since they did not want to go into the woods to get around those trees. The trees had limbs close to the ground which they could climb to pretend they were lookout guards watching the water for enemy canoes.

When they tired of their game, it was late, and they knew they would have to hurry to reach camp by dusk. As they rounded the point again, they came upon a raccoon near the water's edge. Apparently, the raccoon was out for a night of clam gathering himself. When the raccoon saw them, he turned and ran toward the

woods. Shag saw the raccoon running and became excited and chased after him. "Shag, come back! Come back!" called John. Shag did not stop. When he caught up with the raccoon, they rolled and tumbled in the mud. Shag growled and yelped while the raccoon hissed. Shag was nearly twice as big as the raccoon, but the raccoon was a vicious fighter. The raccoon was on his back with all four feet kicking and clawing. His needle sharp teeth snapped at Shag's throat.

When the boys reached the fight, Shag seemed to be getting the worst of it. When the raccoon saw the boys, it broke loose and ran toward the water. Shag caught up with it at the water's edge. Shag still would not listen to the boys as they called for him to stop. The fight continued at the water's edge. The raccoon kept moving toward deeper water. Shag did not realize that he was being tricked. In following into deeper water where he would have to swim, Shag began to have a hard time. He was slow and clumsy while the raccoon was swift and clever. About thirty feet out, the raccoon circled Shag. Before Shag could turn around the raccoon moved in and climbed on his back. The weight of the racoon forced Shag under several times. Each time he came up he was breathing heavier, snorting and coughing. The raccoon had ahold of one of Shag's ears with his teeth, and the ear was beginning to tear and bleed. Shag panicked now, knowing he could not shake the raccoon.

With a great effort Shag made it to shore. As soon as Shag's feet touched bottom, the raccoon jumped off his back and ran clumsily toward the woods. Shag did not want to chase it. He lay in the mud gasping, coughing and panting. John knelt down by him in the mud and said, "Oh, Shag, you poor dog. We thought you were going to drown. We hope you learned a lesson from this." Other than his torn ear and exhaustion, the dog was okay. Soon he was up, following the boys back to camp. Shag walked slowly with his tail nearly on the ground.

"What happened?" Father asked as they came into camp all muddy. "We were ready to go look for you."

"Shag fought with a raccoon and nearly drowned," said Sam.

"Oh, Shag, you crazy dog. You will learn, though," said Father. Shag just wagged his tail and hung his head. "I don't think he'll go into the water with a raccoon again," said Father.

The boys bathed in the salt water, and mother gave them a change of clothes before they went to bed. "John," Sam said, "I think maybe this is enough adventure for one day."

"You are right, Sam!" said John. Soon they were sound asleep.

They were up early again the next morning gathering and drying clams. Mother said in two more days they would have enough. "I'm glad," said Father. "This work makes me weary."

"Just think of the good things the upriver Indians have to trade for these clams," said Mother.

"I know," said Father, "it is worth all the work." "Soon after we get home we will gather up your baskets, the clams and some of the sea shells I've collected, and we will journey up the Chehalis River to trade. We will return for the salmon

harvest at home and then we will be ready for winter," he continued.

"We should do well in trading this year," said Mother. "We have dried clams, baskets and many beautiful sheashells. The upriver people are eager for what we have, and there are things I want from them also, especially camas bulb."

The boys helped with the clams all day. When the tide was coming in, Father noticed there was someone coming in a canoe.

John and Sam recognized the awful man they had encountered on Round Island. John asked quickly, "Mother, may we go into the woods and cut more sticks for drying clams?"

"We have enough, but if you want to cut more, you may," said Mother. John and Sam went quickly into the woods. Instead of cutting sticks, they peered out of the woods and saw that the big man was beaching his canoe at their camp. "Oh, what does he want?" asked Sam in an excited whisper.

"I don't know," said John, "but I want to stay right here." They saw Father wade out and help pull the canoe onto the beach. The big man got out of his canoe and he and Father talked. The boys were too far away to hear them. Mother and Mary put more clams away, looking at the visitor from time to time. Father and the man talked for an hour and they smoked some tobacco. Finally, they shook hands and the man got into his canoe and paddled away from the island headed north. When he was far down the bay, the boys cut a handful of sticks and came out of the woods.

"You've been gone for over an hour. Are those all the sticks you've cut?" asked Mother. "I just don't understand you boys sometimes." They couldn't tell her that they had been hiding.

"Let's put things in order and load our canoe," said Father. "We are going to the ocean beach to get some whale blubber from a whale that was beached just a couple of days ago."

"How did you find this out, Father?" asked John.

"Pete, the fur trapper from Grays Harbor, told me. Some Indians at the portage between Shoalwater Bay and the Columbia River told him. News travels fast when there is a beached whale. Why did you boys go into the woods when Pete stopped here? You missed an interesting fellow. He has traveled to many places on the coast."

"He kind of scared me," said Sam.

"Well, in spite of his appearance, he is a good man," said Father. "He has a mysterious background. This is only the second time I have talked to him, but I have heard much about him."

"Why is he scarred and crippled?" asked Mother.

"People say he moved down to Grays Harbor from his tribe on Vancouver Island way north of us. One night slave hunters attacked his village. Pete fought savagely along with his tribesmen and killed most of the attackers, and the rest of them left in their canoes. Several people in the village were killed, among them Pete's wife and child. Pete was clubbed and cut so badly he nearly died. When he recovered, he moved down to Grays Harbor and began trapping. It's a lonely life, but that's

the way he chooses to live now. He had been to Chinook on the Columbia. He sold some furs there, then he crossed the portage and stayed on Round Island two nights. Now he is on his way home." John and Sam wondered if he told Father of two boys on Round Island, for surely he must have recognized their little canoe.

Father had everyone load the dry clams in the canoe. He knew no one would bother their camp while they were gone, but he didn't want to take a chance on some wild animal, like a bear, eating their harvest. They took both canoes on the mile-long trip to the peninsula. Father had Mother and Mary stay with the canoes. He and the boys walked the mile across the peninsula to the ocean beach.

They looked up and down the beach, and sure enough, they saw a large object to the south. They walked in that direction until they came to the whale. About twenty Indians were cutting on it. It was a young, black humpback whale. Why it beached, no one knew. Father took off his shirt and cut several big chunks to take back to their canoes. The boys were not too fond of whale blubber, but Father had learned to like it when he was a boy.

When they got back to their canoes on the bay side of the peninsula, Mother and Mary had a fire going. They had smoked fish and dried clams for a meal. Since the tide was out now, they would have to get up in the middle of the night and paddle to the island when it was high again. The boys were thirsty after their hike, so they drank fresh water from seal bladder containers that Mother had in the canoe. Mother spread sleeping mats on the ground, and everyone slept until Father woke them later.

They climbed into the big canoe and paddled for the island, towing the small canoe behind them. The moon and stars were out and the crossing to the island was easy. Upon their return, they placed their mats in the shelter and went back to sleep. Fortunately, nothing had disturbed their camp.

For two more days they gathered and dried clams. The boys continued to explore in their canoe, but had no more unusual experiences. When the day came to leave, the children were just as excited as when they had left home. "It will take us two days to reach home on this trip," said Father. "The wind will be against us, and we have a heavier load with the clams and whale blubber."

When the tide came in, they left Long Island and paddled close to shore on the east side of the bay. They made camp on a short, sandy beach that afternoon. After they set up camp, John, Sam and Shag looked for wild blackberries in the woods. They came face to face with a black bear. The bear let out a "woof" and ran one way while the boys ran another.

"The bears here almost always run," said Father.

"Well, I am always going to run, too!" said Sam. They all laughed.

The next afternoon they arrived at their village on the north shore. "It's nice to be home," said Mother.

"Yes," said Father, "but soon we will be on our way up the Chehalis River to trade."

"May we go see Grandfather and Grandmother?" the children asked all at once. "We want to tell them about our trip."

"Yes, you may go," said Mother. "Father and I will be over later." Grandfather and Grandmother were Mother's parents and they lived a short distance down the beach. Father's parents lived across the bay at Goose Point, and they visited them often, too.

The grandparents and children were happy to see each other. The children told them their stories, except for Round Island. When Mother and Father arrived, a fresh salmon was prepared for the evening meal. It was late when the family returned home. They were content and happy after a good meal and nice visit. That night while lying in bed, Sam asked John, "Do you think Father knows that we disobeyed him and went to Round Island?"

"I don't know," said John. "We will tell him tomorrow."

"Yes, I think we should," said Sam. "Somehow after hearing about Pete, I do not fear him anymore," said Sam.

"No, I even feel sorry for him," said John. "He probably has been a sad and lonely man all these years after what happened."

"We have a lot of things to do yet before winter," said Sam.

"Yes, first we will trade with the inland Indians. When we return home, we will catch lots and lots of salmon. Then we will hunt deer and elk," said John.

"Oh, what good times are coming," said Sam. "It's a wonderful life we live here on Shoalwater Bay." Soon both boys were sound asleep.