

Listening
Story told by
Salinan Nation Chief Shooting Star
at the Jones Gulch Campout
October 20, 2001



Have you ever seen geese flying in the sky? Have you noticed how they fly in a “V” shape? Did you know that they fly that way because they fly farther and faster as one *connected* family than they could alone as individual birds? They can fly twice as far together than they could alone! Every year at this time of the year, when it starts to get cold at night, there is one family of geese that starts to fly south from Canada to California, to where the sun shines. In fact, this gaggle of geese in this story was on its way to Modoc National Wildlife Refuge. Right about now, the geese family is crossing from Alberta in Canada to Montana in the United States.

But on this trip, things don’t go according to the plan. This is their story.

On the night before the hardest part of the trip south to California, the father of the goose family was talking with his oldest daughter. We’ll call him Alpha. Her name is Noka.

They were finishing dinner, a scrumptious meal of worms and nuts. “Finish you dinner Noka,” the father said.

“I drank too much water before dinner,” she said. “I’m full.”

Alpha looked at her with a worried face. “You have to finish your dinner, Noka,” he said firmly to her.

“I know dad,” Noka said. “Tomorrow’s the day we fly across the great glacier...and there’s no food along the way.”

“That’s right, Noka.”

“I was thinking, dad, why don’t we take a short cut tomorrow...just before the glacier pass is that mountain pass... the one with the white snowcaps. If we take that short cut, we can reach our winter home a few days faster.”

“We talked about this last year,” he said. “Now, please don’t worry about how we fly to the land of the Modoc. Our family has been chasing the wind across that glacier for as long as I can remember. It’s the way we go. What’s shorter is not necessarily easier.”

“You never listen to my ideas.” Noka said.

And...they were silent for a while “You should concentrate on eating your dinner,” Alpha urged.

“I can’t concentrate on eating right now,” said Noka softly. And she flew away to bed. That night, the family was roused out of its sleep by a fierce lightning storm many miles away. “Get your sleep,” Alpha told everyone. “Ignore the lightning. It’s not near us.”

The next morning, as the sun rose, the family took off for the glacier. In formation they flew, connected to each other.



As they approached the valley just before the glacier pass, Alpha could see that something was wrong. Smoke was rising from the Valley floor. A wildfire was burning everywhere. "The lightning must have caused the fire last night," Alpha said. He had seen fire before, but not his children. They became scared as the flock of birds approached the smoke. Suddenly, Alpha began to cough. And the "V" formation of the birds started to fall apart. They were no longer connected. In the smoke, a voice shouted, "We have to stay together, or we will never make it." It was Noka. "Follow the sound of my voice," she shouted. And she flapped her wings forcefully to guide the family through the smoke. Noka took the lead position on what was left of the "V" formation, while Alpha struggled to keep up with the family. "We're going to fly around the fire," Noka shouted. "We're going over the mountain pass. It will be hard, but we can make it if we fly as one."

Swiftly the family pulled there before them was the was higher than anything before. But the family was was working. Alpha was position, right behind his Suddenly their flight was weren't moving fast running out of energy. I'm Noka whispered.

"Here," he said, reaching his wing with his beak. left over bits of dinner "I saved these for you," he Noka swallowed the food, reinvigorated with energy.

The mountain pass was tall, but the family flew across it successfully with Noka in the lead. Soon they were resting in the land beyond the glacier, getting ready to fly the next day to the Modoc refuge.

"You were right," Noka said to Alpha.

"About what?" her father asked.

"I should have listened to you about dinner," she said. "Thanks for bringing it."

And they sat quietly together for a while. "You were right, too," Alpha said to Noka.

"About what?" she asked.

"I should have listened to you earlier about the mountain pass," he said. "Because of your bravery,

the family is safe and connected again."

And the next day, the family flew in formation, connected and listening to each other.

And so on this beautiful October night, I add a second story to the Story Stick of the great Salinan Nation. We are not only Connected with each other, As Nation Chief Gathering Storm told us last year. But now we add a new word: Listening.



out of the smoke, and giant mountain pass. It any of them had seen flying in formation. It flying in Noka's old daughter.

getting bumpy, and they enough. "Father, I'm not strong enough,"

between the feathers on He handed Noka the from the night before. said.

and she was

The End.