

Gene Tagaban/OneCrazyRaven

Storyteller, flutist and dancer

Ferndale, Washington

As a young child, Gene Tagaban became aware of the power of the story. He recalls the words of his grandfather, “Son, you are a story. You’re a storyteller, your life is a story. Before you were even born your story was there. Then you got born and your story started to breathe. You started to crawl your story started to crawl. You started to walk, your story walked. Son your life is a story, so tell a good story.” Now a renowned storyteller, flutist and dancer, Gene has heeded his grandfather’s advice. For many years, he absorbed the stories of his grandfather and elders of Southeast Alaska’s Tlingit people, and channels that knowledge to teach, inspire, and share his traditions with people around the world.

Of Tlingit, Cherokee and Filipino background, Tagaban grew up in Alaska, learning to dance at the age of five. Although of mixed ancestry, he identifies with the Tlingit (meaning “human beings”) people who have lived in the Southeast corner of Alaska for at least the last 11,000 years. Tlingit society is divided into two clans, Raven and Eagle, which are traced through matrilineage. Gene is a member of the Tak’deintaan Clan, Raven Freshwater Sockeye clan of Hoonah Alaska. The child of the Wooshkeetaan, Eagle Shark Clan of Juneau, Alaska.

Tagaban uses his stories to teach, and impart lessons learned through the interaction of humans with the natural world and the importance of family in one’s own identity. According to Tagaban, “The spirits of our ancestors, who have much to teach, live in stories as well as in songs and dances.” Drawing upon his heritage, Gene has received acclaim for his raven dance, which is an interpretation of the raven story replete with raven regalia. Though he is called upon as a dancer, storyteller, and master native flutist, Tagaban is also sought after as a comedian, actor, and motivational speaker; all of which he incorporates into his live performance.