

about the Kaal.átk' Award

The Charlie Joseph, Sr. (Kaal.átk') Award is given to a group or individual who strives to preserve the Tlingit lifestyle before Western man through their lived experiences or teaching others.

Charlie Joseph, Sr. shared his traditional knowledge through living a subsistence lifestyle as well as teaching Tlingit traditions to students in the Sitka Native Education Program from 1974 until his death in 1986.

Through his teaching and example, similar programs began cropping up in the Southeast Alaska region, and today, many of the dance groups have adopted his approach to teach countless students.

Through his selfless efforts, Sitka and Shee Atiká owe Charlie Joseph, Sr. a debt of gratitude for passing on the knowledge and traditions of Tlingit people still being used today, almost 35 years after his passing.

past Kaal.átk' Award recipients

2006	Pauline Duncan	2013	Nancy Douglas
2008	Isabella Brady	2018	Anne Johnson
2009	Dr. Walter Soboleff	2021	SNEP Cultural Instructors
2010	Herman Kitka Sr.	2022	Herman Davis
2011	Ethel Makinen		



*Charlie Joseph, Sr.
Kaal.átk'*

According to family records, Charlie Joseph, Sr. Kaal.átk' was born in a camp in Waterfall, near Sitka, Alaska, on December 18, 1891. He was of the Eagle clan of the Kook Hít (Box House). Charlie was considered a Tlingit Tlein, a leader and spokesman for the Kaagwaantaan. He was raised the traditional Tlingit way by learning the language, songs, dances, legends, and medicines in addition to learning how to hunt and fish. Charlie's father was L'uknax.ádi (Coho clan). In Tlingit tradition, male children between ages 8 and 9 were raised by their uncles (Kaak) to help prepare them for life's hardships. However, Charlie's father kept him home and raised him himself using traditional Tlingit values.

Charlie lived as one family with his grandfather, father, mother, uncle and brother. The family worked together for their meals and their everyday survival needs. During the evenings, the family would eat dinner around a fire together; the men sitting on cardboard boxes and the women on the floor. After they ate their meal, Charlie's grandfather would tell stories of his childhood and traditional Tlingit ways. It was silent when he spoke and the children knew to keep quiet and listen. As Charlie grew older, he would continue the tradition by telling stories of his childhood and the Tlingit way of life as a way to preserve the history and pass down the cultural knowledge to the children.

When Charlie was young, his father would take him to perform rigorous activities that helped discipline his mind and physical existence. During the winter months, without wearing any clothes, Charlie would wade into the water up to his neck for periods of time up to 30 minutes. Not wearing any clothes, he would dig a hole in the snow, lie down in the hole and cover himself back up.

Charlie would collect firewood wearing only his pants and shoes; he would gather the wood, tie it up and carry it on his bare back all the way home. Charlie was also taught the importance and value of being part of the family. He learned to hunt, fish, and gather foods such as berries, gumboots, abalone, sea urchins, herring eggs, and seaweed to feed his family. Charlie learned to navigate and fish on his father's seine boat, and would later fish to sustain himself and his family.

When Charlie was 19, his parents arranged a traditional Tlingit marriage to Annie Young of the Coho clan (Raven). Although Annie was not very fond of Charlie at first, they married and had nine children. In the early 1950s, Charlie and Annie boarded a float plane to Hoonah to pick up the seine boat they purchased. Due to issues and low visibility, the plane crashed before they made it. When Charlie woke up, he realized he broke his arm and several ribs, but was able to pull his injured wife and the pilot from the burning plane before it exploded. He made a shelter with parts of the plane that broke off and started a fire to keep them safe and warm until they were rescued by Coast Guard a day later.

Although the pilot did not survive, his wife and family thanked Charlie for pulling him from the plane. Charlie felt that all his training as a child and traditional Tlingit values helped him survive the plane crash and care for his wife. After the accident, Charlie wanted to make sure that the children and grandchildren would come to know their culture, history, songs, dances, and language. He began to tell his stories and record them on tape so they could be passed down to future generations.

Charlie was very influential in the creation of the Sitka Native Education Program (SNEP). He was very hesitant on helping start it up at first because he didn't want to offend the different clans. Charlie spoke to the elders of many villages at the 1981 Sealaska Elder's Conference in Sitka and requested permission to perform and sing the different clan songs. Charlie taught the Gajáa Heen dancers how to perform and sing the songs correctly. Charlie's dream of preserving our culture and teaching our youth finally came true; he felt God saved his life from the plane crash for this reason.

Charlie has been honored with numerous awards for his contributions to cultural education, including the Governor's Award, the ANB Grand Camp Award, the Alaska Legislative Award, the Tlingit Cultural Preservation Award, and Sealaska's Cultural Preservation Award. On July 5, 1986, he passed away at the age of 94. The lessons he taught to the younger generations are still very vibrant and well known to this day. SNEP remains active and many of the original students continue sharing Charlie's stories to be passed on to future generations.