

Winter Stories 2015



Watercolor by Virginia artist Nancy Keyser, "Silent Grove" ©2012

Compiled by
Eva Marie Carney / *Ojindiskwe*

December 2015

Bozho nikanek/hello friends:

Please enjoy this compilation of traditional and contemporary stories with your families. The traditional stories here that involve Nanabozho or Wiske are told only in the winter time. This is the time when the earth and the spirits are asleep. Many of the stories included here were shared by Potawatomi friends submitted in connection with the CPN District #2 Story Contest held in early 2015.

Migwetch/thank you to all who from whom I collected these stories.

Eva Marie Carney/*Ojindiskwe*

SKY WOMAN & TURTLE ISLAND

Collected from a Potawatomi friend recounting this traditional story

Gitchi Manitou had a dream. Gitchi Manitou saw a large blue marble floating in space and a white ball circling around it lit by a star. Gitchi Manitou decided that the moon should have a woman living on it and called her Sky Woman. She watched over the earth and created fish in the water on the earth.

One day she decided to come down to earth to look around. She lowered herself down and as she reached the surface of the water a giant sea turtle came up to the surface to give her a place to stand. As she looked around she rattled her shell rattle and the sound of the rattle attracted the dirt from below the sea to come up and spread around the turtle and made an island that grew in size as she shook the rattle. After a while the land grew into what we know as Turtle Island.

Sky Woman went back to the moon but continued to watch the earth. As time went by fish from the sea crawled on to the land and became the seven clans of the Indians. They all got along except the thunders. No one could even look at the thunders without dying. So the thunders had to stay hidden. During a storm the eyes of the thunders could be seen flashing down out of the clouds.

Sky Woman was alone on the moon so Gitchi Manitou decided to send her a consort. Some say the consort was the West Wind. But at any rate the consort was mostly spirit. After a while Sky Woman gave birth to twins. The two boys lived on the moon with their mother until they were grown. Then Sky Woman said you boys should go down to the earth and live and find yourselves a mate. The boys were sent down to the earth and after a while they found mates and began the population of the earth with the Anishnabe (Original Man). Later Gitchi Manitou became displeased with the Anishnabe and sent a flood that wiped out all of them out except for Wiske. But that is another story.

THE FLOOD STORY

Shared by Justin Neely - Director, CPN Language Department

One time, long ago, the Creator Mamogosnan flooded the Earth. Original man, known as Wiske, was floating in the water along with all the Earth's other animals. To stay afloat, they each climbed onto a large log that had been carried by the current.

Wiske, tired of hanging onto the log in the cold water, decided that they needed some land to rebuild the Earth.

The other animals and Wiske talked about how to do this. They had been floating for days without any sight of land, and decided the only place they were sure it existed was under the water.

Shishibe, the Duck, was a good swimmer and volunteered to dive down and retrieve some Earth from the water below. Shishibe disappeared into the water below with the kick of his webbed feet and was gone for a long time.

Eventually, he emerged, breathing heavily and shaking his head.

"I dove as far as I could, and I couldn't even see the ground," he explained dejectedly.

The Loon, who had been sitting on top of the log waiting for the Duck to come back, volunteered to try next. Diving off the log, he disappeared into the water. The other animals waited as the Loon spent a longer time beneath the blue water than the Duck had.

Eventually, he too reappeared, saying "I got close enough that I could see the dirt at the bottom. It is there, I just couldn't hold my breath long enough to reach it."

One after another, the animals floating in the water took turns diving below the waves in hopes of reaching the bottom. Each one though, returned with nothing to show for it. As more failed, hope started to fade that they would ever be on land again.

Finally, when everyone agreed that the water was just too deep, a small voice from the far end of the log said, "Let me try."

All the creatures looked to where the voice had come from and saw a small, hairy animal that looked like a cousin of the Beaver.

"What is your name?" Wiske asked.

"I am Zheshko the Muskrat, and I am a good swimmer. I would like to try," replied the animal.

The animals all shook their heads, and Shishibe the Duck said, "If I couldn't do it, and the Loon couldn't do it, what makes you think that you can?"

“Everyone else has tried, why not let him?” someone said from the other end of the log. So Zheshko took a deep breath and jumped off the log and into the water. Soon everyone realized he had been gone longer than the duck, the loon and everyone else who had attempted to reach the bottom. Eventually, air bubbles began to emerge from the water where Zheshko went in. Soon after, Zheshko floated slowly to the surface.

Wiske and the other animals brought him to the log and sat him on top of it. Though he was no longer breathing, in his hand was a clump of Earth. In his desire to reach the bottom, Zheshko realized that if he reached the bottom, he wouldn't have enough air to get back to the surface. By grabbing the dirt, he sacrificed himself in order to help the other animals still up on the log.

Mshike the Turtle, had watched all of this happen and was touched by Zheshko's sacrifice and offered his shell as the platform to rebuild the Earth. Through Mshike and Zheshko's efforts, the Earth began to form on the shell and grew larger and larger. Eventually all the animals were able to leave the log and walk onto the newly formed land that was built on Mshike the Turtle's back.

This is the reason that to the Potawatomi, North America is known as Turtle Island.

THE SEMA (TOBACCO) STORY

The next two stories were collected from a Potawatomi friend, told as he heard them

When the twins of Sky Woman came to the newly formed earth to begin the population of the world they were not what we know as humans today.

They were strongly spiritual beings and twins but they were different from each other. They fought each other often. In one of their struggles one of the boys was stabbed by his brother and he ran away to hide. A village of Potawatomi hid the boy from his brother in a stack of wood shaped like a tipi. Unfortunately the brother heard of the hiding place and set the pile of wood on fire. The flames consumed the brother.

After the fire a ring of ash was left on the ground in the middle of the village. But in the next spring a plant grew up in the center of the ring. The plant had large leaves and the Potawatomi found it had special powers. When the people burned the leaves of this *sema* it would cure problems some of the people had when they were breathing. And the gods smiled on the village as they sent the smoke up in prayers.

The *sema* contained the spirit of the brother whose body was consumed by the flames. *Sema* should be used with respect and in ceremony. Not casually as has become the custom of the white man. Tobacco is one of the sacred herbs of the Potawatomi. Sage, sweet grass and cedar are the others. We use *sema* to bring in good spirits and to take our prayers to heaven.

ANOTHER STORY OF SEMA (TOBACCO)

Before the White Men came to this country, before the Indians were wide spread, a young Indian Maiden was found to be with child from the West Wind.

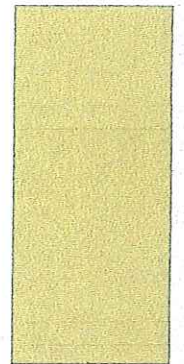
Twins were born from the maiden. The twins were more than human. Both had extreme spirits and as a consequence they fought with each other all the time.

One of the brothers was stronger than the other and during a fight he stabbed his brother with a knife. The brother that was stabbed ran for his life and managed to escape his brother's wrath. He came to a village of Potawatomi and as was their way they took him in.

One day one of village sentries saw that other brother coming – that brother was searching for his wounded brother and was intent on killing him. The Potawatomi hid the young man in a large pile of wood. But the brother found out that his brother was in the wood pile and lit it on fire. That action killed the brother but not his spirit. In the spring a large circle appeared in the earth where the fire had been. A long plant grew up in the center of that circle.

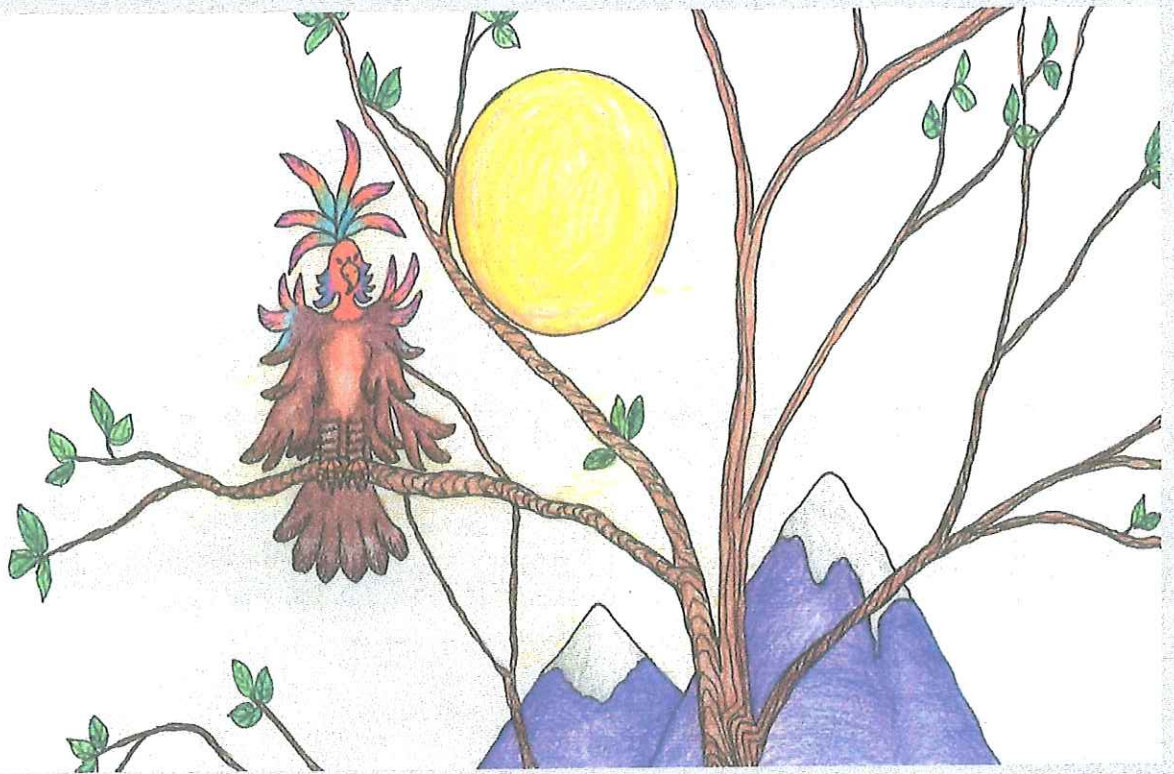
The plant was *sema* and it contained the spirit of the brother that was killed. We offer tobacco to the creator and it contains the spirit of that man. That is why it is dangerous to smoke too much tobacco: the spirit of the brother will come into you and kill you as his brother had done to him.

WISKE AND THE BUZZARD



ILLUSTRATED BY PENNY COATES

LONG AGO THE BUZZARD WAS A PRETTY BIRD. IT FELT ITSELF TO BE SUPERIOR TO ALL OTHER MEMBERS OF THE FEATHERED CLASS, AND WISKE WAS JEALOUS OF IT. THE BUZZARD ON ITS PART WOULD NOT EVEN LOOK AT WISKE, MUSH LESS TALK TO HIM. THIS MADE WISKE ANGRIER THAN EVER.



AT LENGTH, WISKE FOUND A DEAD DEER, AND COLLECTED SOME DEAD MOOSE AND OTHER ANIMALS, AND PILED THEM WHERE HE HOPED THE BUZZARD WOULD FIND THEM AND EAT SO MUCH THAT HE COULD NOT FLY. THE CROWS, RAVENS AND OTHER BIRDS FLOCKED TO THE PLACE SO NUMEROUSLY THAT WISKE COULD NOT EVEN DRIVE THEM AWAY, BUT THE BUZZARD WOULD NOT COME.



THIS MADE WISKE ANGRIER STILL. SO HE GOT ANOTHER MOOSE, AND PUT IT OUT, BUT ONLY RAVENS CAME TO FEAST ON IT.



HE FOUND STILL ANOTHER MOOSE THAT WAS DROWNED. THIS TIME THE BUZZARD CAME BUT THE RAVENS DROVE IT AWAY.



THEN WISKE TRANSFORMED HIMSELF INTO A DEAD ELK, AND DROVE OFF THE SWARMING RAVENS WITH CLUBS. SO THEY SAT ON THE TREES AND WARNED EVERYONE THAT THE DEAD ELK WAS REALLY WISKE. THE BUZZARD HEARD THEM, BUT DID NOT BELIEVE THEIR STORY, BECAUSE THE ELK SMELLED SO BADLY.



AT LAST THE BUZZARD CAME UP TO THE CARCASS AND BIT AT ITS RUMP AND FOUND IT TENDER. IT SAW SOME DELICIOUS LOOKING FAT INSIDE, AND FINALLY THRUST ITS HEAD AND NECK IN TO REACH IT.



THEN WISKE CLOSED THE OPENING AND SPRANG UP WITH THE BUZZARD ENTRAPPED.
"THERE" HE SAID "I KNEW THAT I WOULD CATCH THIS PRETTY BIRD SOMEDAY." HE WENT
EVERYWHERE AND SHOWED ALL THE PEOPLE THE HELPLESS BUZZARD CAUGHT BY THE
HEAD.



THE BIRDS, HAVING TALKED IT OVER, TOLD WISKE THAT THEY THOUGHT IT WAS NOT FAIR, AND THEY OFFERED TO TAKE WISKE AWAY UP ABOVE IF HE WOULD FREE THEIR BROTHER. WISKE THEN LOOSENED THE BUZZARD, WHO VOLUNTEERED TO CARRY HIM ALOFT ON HIS BACK.



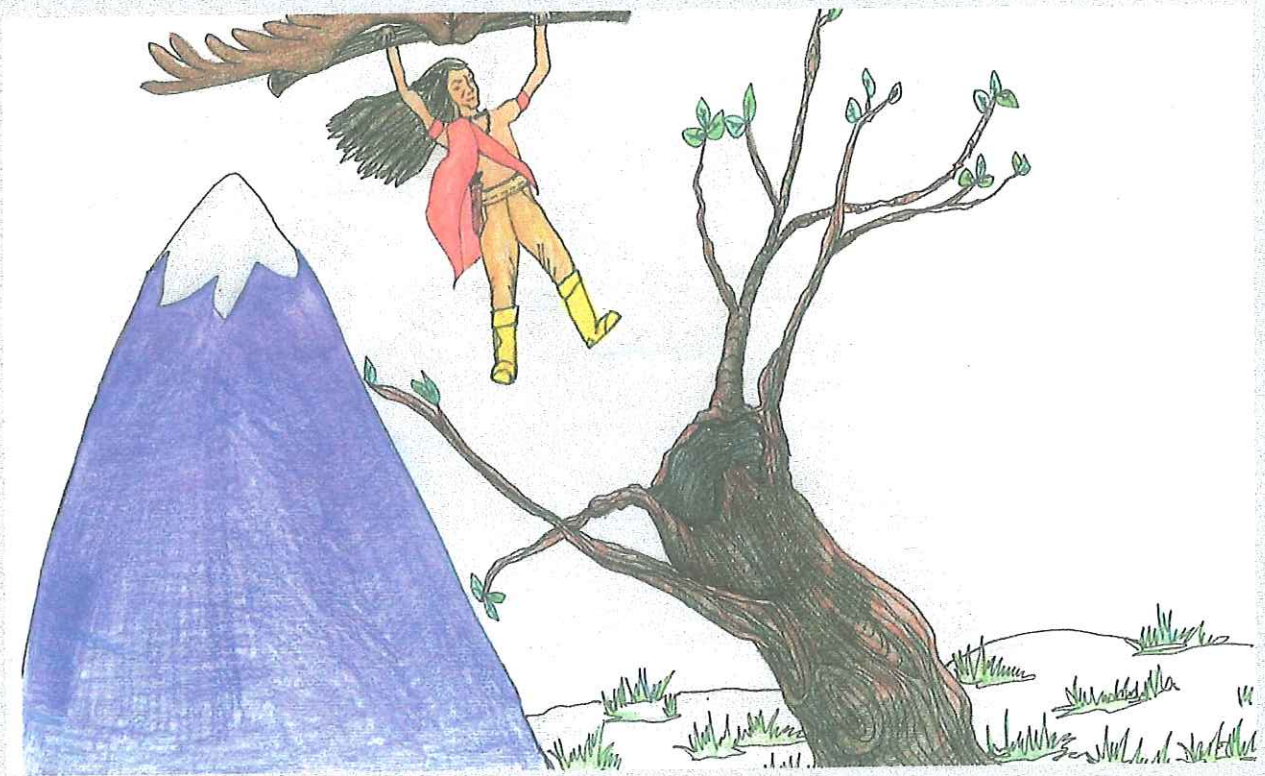
WISKE STRADDLED HIS NECK, AND THE BUZZARD TOOK HIM HIGH UP ON TOP OF A MOUNTAIN AND THERE MADE HIM DISMOUNT TELLING HIM THAT THE BIRDS WOULD RETURN FOR HIM LATER. BUT THEY NEVER DID, AND WISKE WAS LEFT IN A PLACE FROM WHICH HE COULD NOT ESCAPE.



HE BESOUGHT AN EAGLE TO HELP HIM BY BRINGING HIM A VERY BIG STICK.
WHEN THE EAGLE BROUGHT IT, WISKE SLEW THE BIRD.



STRETCHING ITS WINGS OVER THE STICK, HE JUMPED DOWN, HOLDING THE MIDDLE OF THE POLE AND RELYING ON THE WINGS TO ACT AS A PARACHUTE AND LET HIM DOWN GENTLY. HE LANDED IN A HOLLOW TREE WHICH HE FELL DOWN, AND WAS CAUGHT AGAIN.



SOME INDIANS WHO WERE HUNTING SAW THEIR DOGS BARKING AT THE TREE
WHERE WISKE WAS CAUGHT.



"I WANT TO REWARD YOU FOR SAVING ME," SAID WISKE TO THE INDIANS, "HERE ARE SOME PRETTY FEATHERS TO PUT IN YOUR SACRED BUNDLE BUT DON'T CALL THEM BUZZARD FEATHERS, FROM NOW ON THEY ARE CHANGED." THE HUNTERS TOLD THEIR PEOPLE THAT THE PLUMES WERE CALLED "CHIEF BIRD FEATHERS," AND HOW THEY HAD RESCUED WISKE FROM THE TREE AND RECEIVED THE FEATHERS AS A REWARD.



WISKE HAD HELD THE BUZZARD INSIDE HIS BODY FOR SO LONG THAT THE FEATHERS WERE ALL WORN OFF THE CREATURE'S HEAD AND IT BECAME FOUL SMELLING. IN THIS WAY HE HAD HIS REVENGE ON THE BIRD. THE BUZZARD HAS EVER SINCE BEEN OBLIGED TO LIVE IN THE SOUTH TO PROTECT HIS BALD HEAD. WISKE CLAIMED THAT HE HAD MORE POWER OVER BIRDS THAN THE GREAT SPIRIT. THE DOWNFALL OF THE BIRD WAS ONLY DUE TO HIS ARROGANCE.



WISKE

Collected from Potawatomi friends recounting this traditional story

A long time ago Wiske was hunting in the woods for something to eat. He was very hungry because he had not eaten in several days. He came to the edge of the woods and saw a flock of ducks on a pond and drew back his bow to shoot one. But then he thought if I shoot one the others will fly away and I will not have much to eat. So he took the cord off of the bow and dove into the water and swam under each duck and tied the cord to one of the legs of each duck. He then tied the end to his wrist and came to the surface. This surprised the ducks, which flew off with him at the end of the V shape. Screaming for them let him go he managed to get loose and fell head first into a hollow tree.

Stuck upside down in the tree he could only see out of a small hole that had been drilled by a wood pecker. Thinking quickly he change himself into a rabbit just as a woodpecker started hammering on the tree. He said to the woodpecker "*If you make the hole bigger you can see how beautiful I am.*" The woodpecker, not having anything to lose, made the hole bigger and Wiske managed to squeeze out of the hole but in doing so he pulled a lot of his hair out. He thanked the woodpecker for his help and gifted the woodpecker a red tuft of hair for head feathers. As Wiske ran away the woodpecker said "That Wiske doesn't look very beautiful to me."

That is the reason that woodpeckers have a red head and ducks fly in a tight formation as they think of Wiske.

THE EAGLE

Collected from Potawatomi friends recounting this traditional story

Most Nishnabe know that the Eagle is a most honored bird because he flies high in the heavens closest to Gitchi Manitou. But there is another reason we hold the Eagle as one of our sacred birds. Even after the great flood perhaps caused by a dispute between the Great Water Panther and Wiske. (Storyteller's note: Wiske's son was fishing on the great lake Michigan and the Water Panther took him down to the underworld causing a great fight that ended with the world being flooded.)

Gitchi Manitou was angry with the people. The great spirit told the Eagle that he was going to destroy the people on the earth but the Eagle told Gitchi Manitou that there were good people on the earth, the Nishnabek. The Eagle bargained with Gitchi Manitou that if the Eagle flew out over the land and saw the fires and saw the smoke from the people's offering Gitchi Manitou would not destroy the people on the earth.

It is important that the Eagle continues to fly across the skies in the morning or else the people on the earth will be wiped out and things will start over again. We remember this when we use the feather of the Eagle to fan our offering of *sema* and to light our fires.

THE STORY OF PUKAWISS

As told by Lyle Simmons

Winonah bore 4 children of a Manitou. The most well-known is probably her fourth, Nanabozho, but I want to tell you about her second son.

Almost from birth, the boy was always preoccupied with the movement of creatures. The squirrels, the dragon flies, the deer, the hawks, or any other thing that came into his sight fascinated him. He had little concern for children his age or anything else for that matter, but he always seem to have a smile on his face.

As he grew, his fascination remained. So much so, that it took precedence over such things as hunting, swimming, or running. While he watched, the boy would imitate these things, laughing, skipping, and jumping all the while. As he did this, his father, a great Manitou, watched with displeasure. The Manitou would scold his son and try to make him focus on the skill that he would need to become a great hunter and protector. The boy would focus for some time, but would soon return to his old playful ways. This so frustrated the Manitou that he had less and less to do with his second son and chose instead to focus his time on his first born. From this point on, the boy would be sometimes known as Pukawiss, meaning disowned or cutoff.

But what Pukawiss saw, others often took for granted. All around him, he saw the drama of the word unfold: birth and death, growth and decline, triumphs and setbacks; and acts of love, affections, cowardice, courage, and sacrifice by humankind and its neighbors on Earth. Pukawiss noticed that, in some aspects, many animals surpassed humans. For these reason, he began to mime what he saw for the amusement and entertainment of his companions: strutting a cock's strut, sliding nervously up to eat like a buzzard, fleeing for cover like a squirrel. These talents were so much in the likeness of the animal he imitated that they soon launched Pukawiss into a career as a dancer and an entertainer.

As he grew, his interests grew deeper, as did his skill and reputation. He was no longer only asked to perform in his own village, but would also be called to other engagements at other villages. Before he knew it, he was traveling more than he was at home. For this reason, home became wherever Pukawiss happened to be. It was not only a permanent home that Pukawiss had to forfeit, but he was also never in a place long enough to form lasting friendships or other close relationships. He was always a stranger among strangers, but welcome, an *abeewi-dae*. Pukawiss was a wanderer with only his clothing and bundle in which he carried all his worldly possessions. As much as he wanted to linger awhile in one village or another, he had to move on, drawn by his people, pressed on by some urge that he could not resist.

Pukawiss could have settled down at any time, as many invited him to stay. It was particularly the young girls that would yearn for him to stay because they wished him for a husband. His ever-present smile, imagination, and grace suggested a good nature and sunny disposition. Life with him for a husband would be a dream come true. Women would present Pukawiss with fine gift so as to entice him to stay. Things such as head dresses, vests, coats, moccasins, all beaded and quilled, were given to Pukawiss, but none were enough to convince him to settle into husbandry and fatherhood.

Pukawiss invented new performing methods that became traditions. When his brother, Cheeby-aub-oozoo, invented the drum (dewegun), the flute, and the rattle (shishigwen), Pukawiss invited him to drum while he danced and mimed with a rattle or some other object in his hand. This marked the first use of musical accompaniment in performance that became a tradition.

Pukawiss choreographed countless dances throughout his career. He and the dancers who took up the craft tried to enact human emotions in performances that were therapeutic. One of these dances is the Hoop Dance, which characterizes the layered troubles faced by humankind.

In the Hoop Dance, Pukawiss dramatized the trauma that people often go through, their disorientation, and finally, their recourse to a counselor for guidance. Instead of giving answers, directions, and encouragement to enable a person to get out of his or her predicament, the dancer who portrays the counselor presents the distressed person with wooden hoops made of willow. This act represents the perception that troubles cannot be transferred to or resolved by another and that the advice dispensed is actually a return of the troubles to the distressed person for sorting out. The hoop is also an emblem of the way things are, in that mischief breeds mischief that eventually returns to haunt and plague the inventor.

It is a spectacular dance that Pukawiss invented. Spectators, even then, were so taken in by the dress, imagery, grace, and agility of the dancer that they failed to see the real meaning of the performance and the Neshnabe understanding of the nature and character of personal difficulties and their resolution.

Pukawiss entertained everyone, but he did not please every person. Young men envied the dancer's talents, fine clothing, and charm with the ladies. They did not say or do anything to Pukawiss to harm him as jealous and envious people often do. Instead, they copied Pukawiss's fine dress and art. None of these men wanted to be outdone by a stranger who, they thought, was no better than they were. They could choreograph dances just as well as Pukawiss. Besides, he could not answer all calls to entertain.

Some, like Pukawiss's older brother Maudjee-kawiss, thought that he was no more than a slacker who did what he did to avoid work and responsibilities. Other disliked his performances due to seeing allusion of themselves in them.

Pukawiss usually meant to amuse and entertain, but he also intended to provoke ... especially those who took life and themselves too seriously and who could not take a joke. A frequent subject of these provocations was Nanabozho. It was this that led to Pukawiss's end. More than anyone else, probably because he was an older brother and it is an age-old custom for older brothers to pick on younger ones. Pukawiss played practical jokes on Nanabozho, nothing serious or malicious, but good practical jokes that caused no more than inconvenience and provoked laughter and embarrassment in most people. Nanabozho reacted to these pranks, however, with outrage, childish tantrums, and vows for revenge.

The last straw was the desecration of Nanabozho's beloved pigeons. Knowing that his brother was very fond of these white birds, Pukawiss painted the pigeons with pitch while Nanabozho was away from his camp on business.

Nanabozho didn't pass this trick off with a shrug or a smile, as some people might have done; no, he took it as an insult that had to be avenged before he could look another person in the eye. He dropped what he was doing and what he intended to do to devote time to setting hands on his brother.

Pukawiss, knowing that his brother would come after him, disguised himself as a snake and slithered into a crevice at the base of a mountain. When Nanabozho came along and lost his brother's trail at the base of the mountain, he suspected that he was hiding there in the mountain. Nanabozho called on the Manitous' Thunder and Lightning to destroy it. The Manitous obliged him and unleashed their fire bolts and hammered the mountain until it was reduced to a heap of smoking ash.

Nanabozho gloated as bolt after bolt of deafening thunder tore into the mountain and pulverized it, shaking the air. As soon as these forces had spent themselves and moved off, Nanabozho began to cry, overwhelmed by what he had done. As he dug and sifted the ash for his brother's remains in order to give Pukawiss a proper wake and burial, Nanabozho cried out against the Manitous of storms and destruction for killing his brother and demanded that they restore Pukawiss to life.

While Nanabozho waited for an answer from the Manitous and for his brother to rise out of the ashes, he heard derisive laughter coming from the woods nearby. His heart quickened, and he felt like crying out. It was unbelievable. Nanabozho lifted his head, scarcely daring to breathe, and listened to the sound with all the concentration that he could bear. A second peal of laughter. Nanabozho wanted to believe, but couldn't bring himself to do so. He was afraid. A third peal of laughter broke out, thin, taunting, very real. Nanabozho turned but saw nothing. The laughter came from behind. No matter where he looked, the laughter always came from behind.

Nanabozho's initial elation and joy soon turned to resentment, and he sprang to his feet, set on teaching his brother a lesson that Pukawiss would never forget for making a fool of him, leading him to believe that he had died, into making him feel guilty and crying like an old woman for nothing. Nanabozho ran off into the woods following the laughter that mocked him and lead him on and on.

Pukawiss was not dead, he had not been killed. From then on, Pukawiss lived out his duty to tantalize and provoke the pretentious. Nanabozho continues to pursue his brother, resting from time to time to look after his affairs and responsibilities. It is said that a rush of wind binding grass, tearing leaves from trees, driving water spouts to dance over waters, and swirling spumes of snow in the air is caused by Pukawiss and Nanabozho chasing each other.

Pukawiss is not only credited with the invention of dances and initiating the custom of wearing elegant garments during celebrations but with endowing birds and animals and all creatures with vivid colors and establishing festivals. Pukawiss lives. His spirit lives on in the bones, blood,

genes, and flesh of the Neshnabe. It is from Pukawiss that the people have inherited their love for drama, dance, festivals, and elegant attire, and their disposition for practical joking and dramatizing life.

THE STORY OF WINTER SNOW

*Adapted from Dorothy Moulding Brown, "Indian Winter Legends,"
Wisconsin Archeologist 22[4]:49-53 (1941)*

Once two Indian boys lived with their grandmother in a wigwam. One day the boys went hunting to get some meat for their grandmother. While they were gone, a stranger came and asked for them and waited for their return. When they came back late at night, they brought a large buck deer which they had killed. Their grandmother cooked some of the venison, and the stranger ate with them. When they were finished, the stranger asked the grandmother's permission to stay with them for the winter. She agreed. He was a shaman or medicine man, and whenever they went hunting he gave them hunting medicine and they were always very successful.

This man's name was Winter Snow. When spring came, he thanked the grandmother for her hospitality and went away. The young men wanted to go with him and followed him into the woods. One morning after this, the old woman heard a moaning sound outdoors and found that the snow was melting. This sound was made by her grandsons who had been transformed into snow when they followed their friend Winter Snow.

HOKSHILAH

As told by Ralph Bergeron Bazhaw

When the Great Spirit looked down on His creation, He saw that He had created the mountain lion who must work at night and the owl who must work at night and the two-legged one who must sleep at night but He had created no night.

So He took a giant buffalo robe and He spread it over us and He took a sharp stick and punched holes in the buffalo robe. Our brother the sun peeks through the holes in the buffalo robe, they are what we call the stars. And the way the Great Spirit made the holes in the buffalo robe they tell stories and one of those stories is about Hokshilah.

Now when Hokshilah was born there was something wrong with his leg end he could not run and play as the other boys and girls could. But Hokshilah grew up to be a warrior and a great warrior.

One day when the warriors were returning from a hunting party they found the women of the village weeping. The warriors asked the women what was wrong and the women told them that while they were gone a great bear came into the village and killed several children. So the warriors picked up fresh weapons and began to track the bear.

After several days the warriors could not find the bear and some warriors began to talk among themselves. They said that maybe they should go back to the village and wait for the bear and kill him there. But Hokshilah knew that if they did not track down the bear and kill it now that the bear could come back to the village again and kill more children.

So Hokshilah continued after the bear. For you see Hokshilah had a true warrior's heart -- he would live his life for his people, and he would give his life for his people. After several days Hokshilah found the bear where he was living. Hokshilah and the bear engaged in battle and during the battle both Hokshilah and the bear were both killed. And as their spirits rose to walk among the stars their blood flowed back to earth and changed the colors of the leaves of the trees.

Even to this day, if you look up into that part of the sky in the summer you will see Hokshilah and the bear facing each other. As the summer wanes Hokshilah gets closer and closer to the bear until the bear lies down and Hokshilah is standing over him and again their blood will flow to the earth and change the colors of the leaves of the trees.

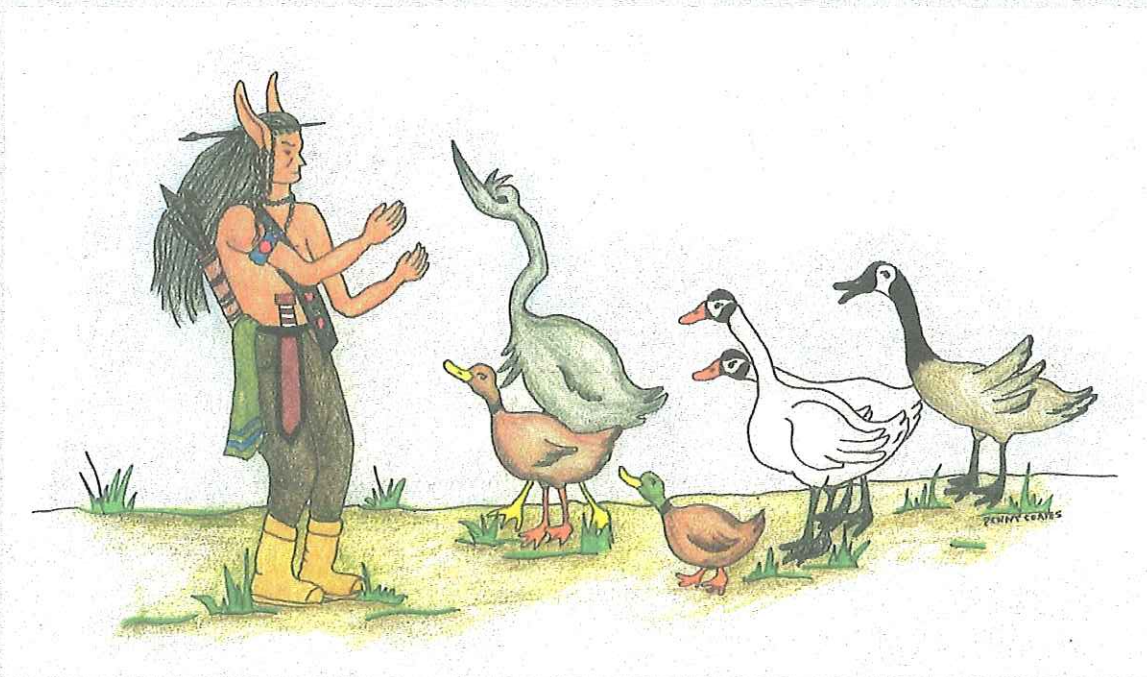
In our stories and in our songs and even in the written pages of history there are many stories of people who lived their lives for their people, who gave their lives for their people. Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, Martin Luther King and John F. Kennedy are only a few. But there is one story that was told before the beginning of time, and that is the story of Hokshilah.

The Shut Eye Dance

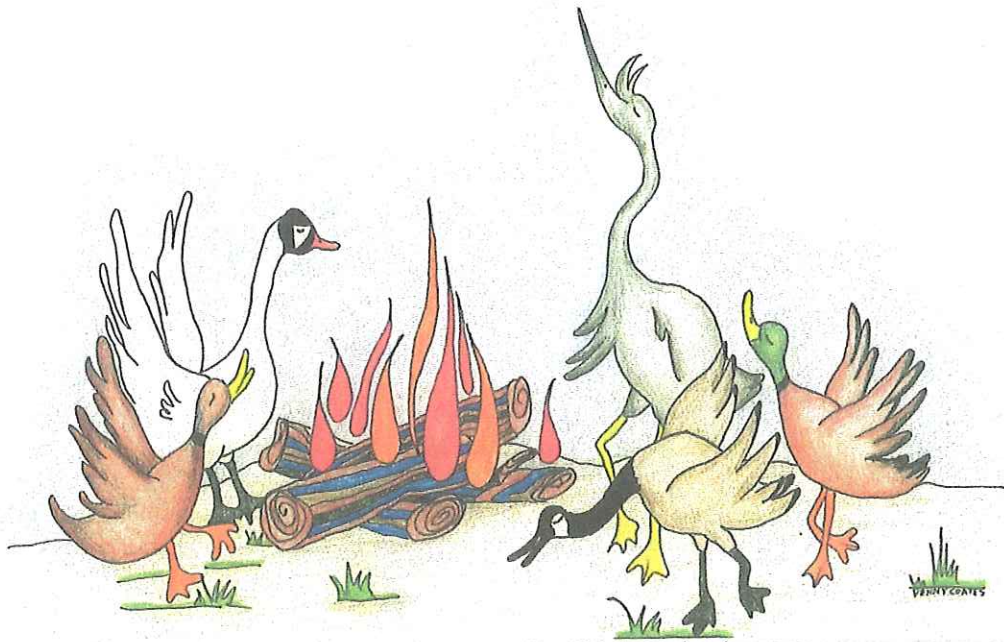


Illustrated by Penny Coates

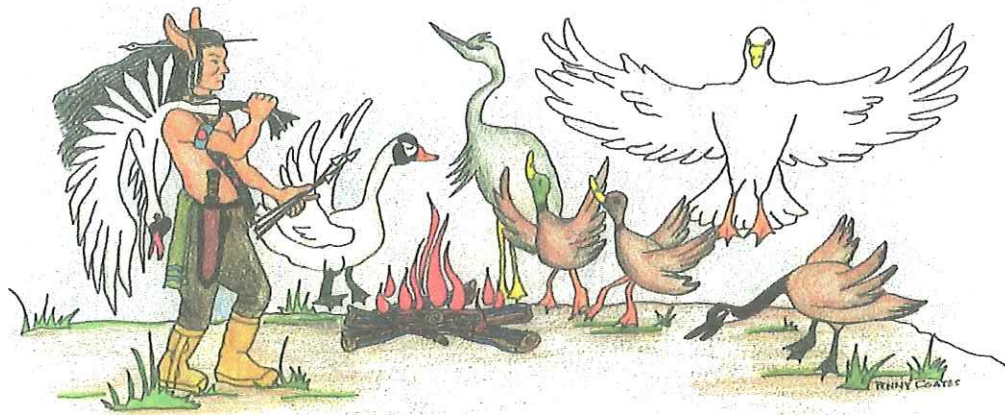
Wiske could understand the language of every animal.
One time he arranged a dance and invited the geese, swans, ducks and Cranes.



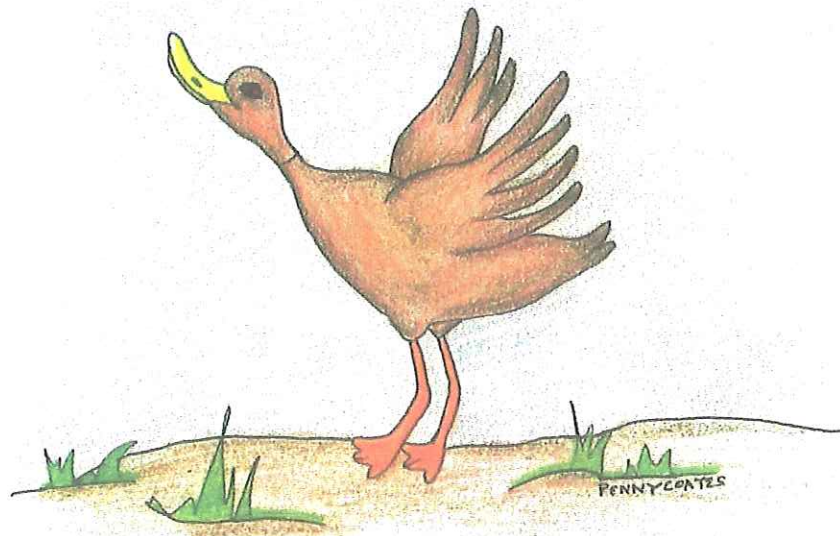
He told them that they were to dance with their eyes shut tightly
and only to open them at the intermissions.



As they danced by he caught the swans and wrung their necks.
When one shrieked aloud he would say,
“That’s right, my little brothers, whoop!”



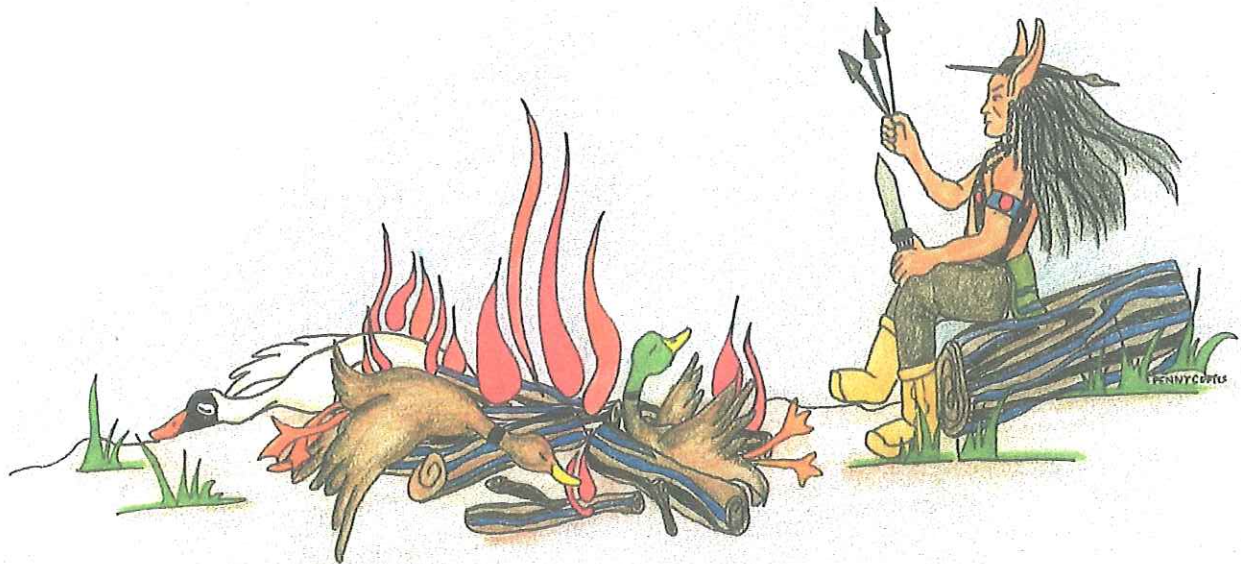
Si'mu, the old squaw duck, finally became suspicious and peeped.
She saw what was happening and cried,
"Wiske is killing us!"



All the ducks and swans fled. As a punishment
Wiske caused Si'mu's eyes to turn red.



Wiske buried the fowls in the ashes of his fire to cook.
He was very hungry as he sat there, waiting.



Presently, he heard two trees squeaking where they rubbed together.
It made him so nervous that he climbed up to burn the place
where they met with a firebrand.



In trying to do this,
His arm slipped in between them and he was stuck.



While he was prisoner,
Two Winnebago passing by in a canoe saw the smoke
and came over to investigate.



They found the swans all nicely roasted,
And sat down and ate them all.



Then they departed.
When they were nearly out of sight,
The trees loosened and Wiske came down.



Wiske found that there was nothing left of his feast he became very angry.
Shaking his fist at the Winnebago he cried,
“You will be called Winnebago or Stinkers all of your lives!”



THE WRONG ROAD LEADS TO A MIRACLE ON THE TRAIL OF DEATH

By Janet A. Pearl and Robert L. Pearl

It was a rainy late September night in 1993, the year of the big flood on the Mississippi River. The raging water had destroyed billions of dollars of property and crops throughout the Midwestern United States that summer. A commemorative caravan was retracing the Potawatomi Trail of Death on the original route taken 155 years before.

The group of vehicles turned down the wrong road as the occupants, who included descendants of the Potawatomi who were part of the original forced removal in 1838, were nearing the end of the Trail after journeying for a week from Indiana to Kansas. This caravan was in search of the Sugar Creek area near Osawatomie, Kansas. That's where, in 1838, the Potawatomi had been forced to settle at the end of their 600-mile walk. The tribal members were marched at gunpoint, with their leaders locked in a jail wagon, out of their homes and land to a place unknown to them. A number of deaths from sickness and exposure occurred along the way.

When the survivors arrived it was November and very cold. Promises of food and shelter at the end of the Trail proved empty. Oral history has it that the only shelter they found was shallow caves. The Potawatomi hung animal skins over the entrances to block the wind and snowy weather. Many more died during the decade they inhabited the Sugar Creek area until the group was removed again to eastern Kansas, near Topeka.

A missionary priest, Father Benjamin Petit, had come from St. Louis in 1838 to minister to the Potawatomi. He prayed with them along the way until he, like many of the Potawatomi, became ill and walked on at the age of 27. His diary of the Potawatomi daily travels greatly contributed to what we know of that dire time in Potawatomi history.

Some have declared Father Petit worthy of sainthood for his dedication to the spiritual well-being of the Potawatomi. However, miracles related to sainthood must be documented before that status is bestowed by the Catholic Church. According to some, the story we relay here demonstrates such a miracle indeed occurred.

Beginning in 1988, descendants of those who endured the Trail began retracing the route. Shirley Willard, a retired schoolteacher and local historian in Rochester, Indiana, organized the first modern caravan and interested persons decided to repeat the trek every five years. The 1993 caravan was just the second to follow the Trail. Shirley's husband, Bill, helped to map out the route that began near their home (the couple was instrumental in organizing community groups to place memorial markers along the route the Potawatomi travelled, and some of these markers have been funded by the Citizen Potawatomi government).

That rainy night in 1993, Bill Willard was leading the caravan as the dusk turned into inky darkness and the group approached the swollen Sugar Creek. The location is desolate and direction becomes muddled in that place. As the group of vehicles inched along the Trail, the terrain grew more muddy and waterlogged.

Among the travelers were Bill Wamego, a tribal elder; George Godfrey, a professor; Susan Campbell, a historical author; and members of the Pearl family, who descended from Equa-ke-sec, a young girl who walked the original Trail. That young girl, the Pearls' great-grandmother, survived the Trail and, once grown, married an Irishman, James Slavin, and settled with him near St. Marys, Kansas. That's where the Pearl siblings, including Jim, Bob and Sister Virginia, were born and raised. Another descendent, Tom Hamilton, was coaching the caravan along the route by CB radio.

As the caravan proceeded that evening along the increasingly-impassable road, a pickup truck came into view, engulfed by the rising water in the creek. There had been a flash flood and the vehicle was trapped. In the bed of the truck stood a man waving his arms.

Bill Willard stopped the caravan. Some of the men waded to the disabled vehicle to bring the stranger to safety. The slight man, shivering from the damp, was wrapped in a warm blanket and bundled into one of the RVs in the caravan. He was, as it turned out, Paxico Wabaunsee, 77 years old. He was frigid from four hours of exposure to the weather, afraid of snakes and did not know how to swim. As the water rose, he fired his gun four times in an effort to get someone's attention, but no one had heard him in the desolate area. He had resorted to huddling in the bed of his truck, terrified for his life, and had begun praying for a rescue party to appear. Miraculously, he saw the line of headlights coming and mistook the dark shapes for a group of boats approaching in the water.

When Bill Wamego went to meet the man, Bill Wamego's face reflected amazement. The survivor stared back, also stunned. "That's my cousin," Bill Wamego declared. "I haven't seen him in 30 years." The men joyfully embraced as they renewed their acquaintance.

Bill Wamego's cousin, known as "Packie," now in tow, the caravan obtained further CB radio instruction from Tom Hamilton as to the correct route, backtracked and found the right road to the Sugar Creek memorial park campsite. So what was Packie doing on the wrong road to the Trail of Death? A resident of Mayetta, Kansas, he had read a brief newspaper article about the Potawatomi caravan coming to Sugar Creek. His curiosity led him to set out for the Trail but he got off track, a move that nearly caused him his life. Many who witnessed his rescue said it was a miracle that the caravan likewise ended up on that same wrong road that night. One thing is clear: Packie's fervent prayers for help were answered in the face of nearly impossible odds. It's been more than two decades since the cousins' surprise reunion. Both men have since walked on to a greater place. But the story of the Miracle on the Trail continues to live on, and we hope that it will continue to be told. It is ageless proof of the tremendous power of a Potawatomi's faith in prayer.

Storytellers' Note: The historical commemorative caravan has scheduled its next trip along the Trail of Death in September 2018.

EARLY

As told by Laura Dvorak

He showed up one afternoon, gaunt, the hollowed cheeks grayish beneath his disheveled straight black hair. Mom, always quick with a handout for the transients, opened the back door to him. I watched her watching him and suspected we'd have another gardener within the hour.

His name was Early and he'd been around, just not in our neighborhood. I asked Mr. Black across the street if he recognized our new gardener. Mr. Black hissed, scaring off the tomcat entering his front yard, and replied he'd never seen the man. "Your mom sure has a soft spot," he added.

I watched Early as he shoveled the damp earth in our backyard. He would load the shovel heavy, then set it down and inspect the dirt. His long slender fingers were caked with grime and his jeans were spattered with mud. I moved in closer, curious as to what was so interesting about a pile of dirt. Early was rolling a ball of it between thumb and index finger. Then he glanced over his shoulder and noticed me – or at least let me know he noticed me. Early didn't miss anything. "Come on over," he invited, tossing the ball of dirt aside.

I squatted beside him, smelling tobacco and something spicy, unidentifiable. "See this?" he asked.

"What is it?"

"It's a grub. Grubs help the garden, but possums love to dig 'em up – that's why I'm finding holes here."

"What're you gonna do?" My mouth draws together in disgust at the fat white blob writhing on the ground.

"Nothing."

"Oh."

Early eases up slowly. I think he might be about 80; Mom says that's silly. "He's no more than fifty if he's a day," she laughs. I watch him bend his back, stretching, and I notice that Mom is looking out the kitchen window at us. I heard her telling Dad that our gardener is taking his sweet time. She thinks he's lazy. "Well, you hired him," Dad states with a snap of the sports section.

Early walks the perimeter of the garden, holding the shovel across his body. His legs are bowed and this reminds me of an Indian on my favorite show, Gunsmoke.

"Are you Indian?" I ask timidly.

"Potawatomi."

“Oh.” That didn’t sound like any of the names painted above the cabin doorways at summer camp.

Early stops. He is looking at Simca, my calico. Simca looks at Early. She hates strangers, but approaches Early and presses her side against his leg. Early smiles and reaches over to stroke the length of her back, gently, humming a tune – like purring. Simca’s eyes close, her tail straight to the skies.

Early moves away to shovel closer to the fence. “There is no rushing a fine garden,” he offers, looking toward the ground. “You must love the earth and respect the season. Always plant at the full moon.”

“Is it full moon?”

Early looks at me, surprised. “Don’t you know?” He looks back to the dirt. “Next week is the moon when leaves are green. It will be time to plant the corn your mother wants.”

I notice that “mother” has come to the clothesline, lugging a wicker basket piled with sheets. She is looking our way, frowning.

“Maybe we should shovel more of this dirt,” I suggest, hoping that mom will see Early hard at work.

He continues to study the dirt. Then he tells me that once the corn has matured, the kernels will reveal the character of the planter. Straight rows of corn and kernel-filled cobs show a thoughtful, truthful planter. Broken rows of kernels show a careless, disorderly planter. Cobs with scattered kernels and many spaces reveal that the planter will live long. “We should plant the corn together and see what it tells about us – would you like that?” Early’s question is soft as his dark eyes look briefly into mine, then away.

“Sure! I’d like that – but we’d better get to work,” I urge, again, glancing toward the clothesline.

Mom let Early go after the garden was planted. I watched him grow smaller as he walked down our street and away from our lives. In August, the corn was tall and the tassels swayed in the evening breezes. One night when I couldn’t sleep, I went into the garden and snapped an ear from the tallest stalk. I tugged back the silk-lined husk and in the light of the full moon when all things ripen, saw the kernels were straight, full and strong. Filled with wonder, I whispered, “Thanks, Early” and bit into the crisp, sweet kernels.

THE VISION QUEST

As told by Ralph Bergeron Bazhaw

Long, long ago boys and girls just a little older than you are now, about 12 or 13, would go on a "vision quest". They would go off by themselves for several days. No mom or dad or aunt or uncle would be with them, they would be alone. They would not take any food and would only take water with them. During this time they would fast and seek a vision.

This is a story about one young warrior who went up in the mountains on his "vision quest". It was a beautiful fall day when he started up the mountain. The air was crisp and the leaves had just started to turn in his valley home. He decided to seek his vision near a mountain stream and only took a blanket to keep warm during the cool nights. He had been on the mountain about three days, without having a vision, when an early storm began to dump a lot of heavy, wet snow on the mountain.

He knew his family would need him and he only had the one blanket to keep warm, so he headed down the mountain. As he did so, he heard a voice behind him (saying in a high pitched tone) "Help me!" The young warrior turned around and he didn't see anyone. So, he started down the mountain again. Again he heard the voice "Help me, help me!" He turned around again but there was no one there. The third time he started down the mountain he heard the voice say, "Help me. If you don't help me I'll die!" When he turned around this time, he looked down and there on the ground was a rattlesnake!

The young warrior said to the rattlesnake "I can't help you. You're a rattlesnake, you will bite me and I will die." The rattlesnake said "No, No, I promise you, if you help me I won't bite you. I promise." The young warrior was not sure but after a while he felt sorry for the rattlesnake. He picked the cold rattlesnake up and put him in his robe next his warm body. (During this last sentence, the storyteller should reach down and pick up an imaginary rattlesnake and put him in the storyteller's imaginary robe.)

The young warrior carried the rattlesnake down to the valley floor. The heat from his body warmed the rattlesnake and he became warmer and much more like his old self. When the young warrior reached the valley floor, he took the rattlesnake out of his robe and laid him on the valley floor. (Here, take the imaginary rattlesnake out of the imaginary robe and place him on the ground at the storyteller's feet.)

When he did, the rattlesnake coiled up and bit him! (Pause) The rattlesnake coiled up and bit him! As the young warrior lay dying, he said to the rattlesnake "You promised me, you promised me that if I helped you, you wouldn't bite me."

And the rattlesnake said to the warrior, "You knew what I was when you picked me up. (Pause) You knew what I was when you picked me up."

Boys and girls, I am here to tell you that drugs, alcohol and tobacco are rattlesnakes. They will bite you and you could die. So when someone offers you that weed or cigarette or drink, remember the rattlesnake story. You know what it is, don't pick it up!

There is another kind of rattlesnake out there. This is a person who will tell you that they have lost their kitty or their doggie and want you to come and help them. Don't go with them! If this happens to you, tell your mom or dad or a teacher or someone that you and your parents trust. But don't go with them.

THE DOUGLAS FIR

As told by Ralph Bergeron Bazhaw

In the Northwest part of our country grows the tree known as the Douglas fir. If you were to stand before a forest of these trees, you would be awed by their majesty and their beauty. They grow straight up to the sky 250 feet high. If you walked through a forest of these trees, it would seem that each tree is the same. Armed with what you know and what you see, you would say that this is good, this is the way it should be.

But somewhere deep in the forest, you would come across a little tree that perhaps as a seedling had some disease. It is twisted, it is gnarled, it is ugly. And there's a hole in the sky for the little tree to grow.

All across the forest floor there is nothing but needles except where the little tree grows. Because there is a hole in the sky where the little tree grows, the rain and the sunshine can come through. And the weeds and the grass and the flowers grow there too.

Let me look beyond what I know and what I see, and allow you to be who you are and nothing more. And in return, I ask that you allow me to be who I am and nothing less.

A STAR WOMAN STORY

Collected from a Potawatomi friend recounting this traditional story during our District #2 family meeting in Little Rock in the Spring of 2015

A long time ago in the far north woods a single family of Nishnabe lived. A man and his wife. The man was a good hunter and provided for his family and as time went by the couple had four sons. After a time the oldest son became restless and told his family that he was going out in the world to find a wife and make his own family. The other sons built bark houses and helped with the hunting and fishing. But after a while the second son told his family that he also would like to go out in the world and seek a wife for a family. Then as time went by the third son also grew up and asked for permission to leave and seek a wife and family. The fourth son stayed at home and as time went by his father became ill and the fourth son had to provide for the family. Fortunately he was a good hunter and fisherman. He provided for his family. But unfortunately the father slipped away to the land of the setting sun. The youngest son made a good place for his father's resting place.

While the youngest son was hunting, he found a strange thing. In the middle of the woods he found a round clearing. In the clearing was a path that went around in a circle but had no path in or out of the clearing. The young Neshnabe found this curious and made a note to visit the circle both in the day and in the night. He never saw anything until the fourth time he visited the circle at night.

Then the most amazing thing happened. As he sat in the woods near the circle a huge basket slowly descended from the heavens and out jumped seven star sisters. They danced around the basket in a circle for four hours and then jumped back into the basket and ascended into heaven. One of the star women caught the young Neshnabe's eye. She appeared to be about his own age or so he thought.

As time passed his mother became ill so his duties were heavier. However he did manage to see the star women dancing a second time, and the woman that he had found attractive was more beautiful than he remembered. He told his mother about his experience and she said maybe his future wife was among the star women in the basket. So the third time he saw the dancers he thought about how he might grab her and take her to his wigwam.

His dear sweet mother a few months later followed his father in the journey down the path of souls to the other side of the great water. Her fourth son prepared her body for the journey and buried her with the necessary items for the journey.

Afterwards he prepared the wigwam for the coming of his wife. And then he went to the circle to wait. But it was not until four months later that he saw the basket descend from the heavens.

He carefully crawled near the dancing star women and then grabbed the youngest one who screamed and fought him. The others jumped into the basket and watched the young Nishnabe and the star maiden as the basket rose into the sky.

The young Nishnabe carried the star maiden back to the wigwam and presented her with furs and fine food and played a flute in the prettiest songs he knew but she was distraught and lonely.

For a very long time the star maiden would not speak to him and she refused food. But he was kind to her and after a while they began to visit. She told him of her father in the sky and her sisters and the lovely place they lived.

In time they had a child, a boy, and the star maiden, now a star woman, became attached to the Nishnabe boy and to their son.

But after their son celebrated his fourth birthday, the star woman begged the Nishnabe to visit her father in heaven. So one night they all went to the dance circle and waited for the basket to come down. When it did, the star woman and the young son climbed into the basket and as it ascended into heaven they waved to the Nishnabe on the ground.

The fourth son continued to hunt and put away food for the winter but four years went by and the star woman and her son did not return.

One day in that fourth year the Nishnabe became ill and as time went by he became weak and was unable to eat.

Then one evening at the door to the wigwam the star woman and a young man of 8 looked into the home and saw the Nishnabe. The star woman and the boy carried the fourth son to the basket and put him in and crawled in themselves. The basket went into the cold winter night sky. Now, if you look up in the winter sky, you can see the seven sisters close together dancing the night away. The whole family went into the sky and lived with the star people.

ANOTHER SKY WOMAN STORY

Collected from a Potawatomi friend recounting this traditional story

Before there was anything Gitchi Manitou had a dream. Gitchi Manitou saw a large blue ball floating in the space. And around this ball there was a larger ball of light that made the blue ball glow in the darkness. As Gitchi Manitou's dream continued a small ball appeared near the blue ball and on this ball a Sky Woman lived and she watched over the blue ball and the animals that lived in the water on the blue ball.

One day the Sky Woman descended to the earth and saw that all was going well. A huge turtle rose to the surface to give the Sky Woman some place to stand. And as she rode around the earth many animals found earth to add to the place so the Sky Woman would have a place to walk. The earth that was formed grew and plants began to grow on the earth. Sky Woman saw that it was good. She rose back to the moon to watch over the earth. But Gitchi Manitou saw that she was lonely so a consort was sent to the moon to comfort Sky Woman.

After a time two sons were born of Sky Woman and when they were grown Sky Woman lowered them to the earth. The clans of animals rose from the oceans to live on the land and the sons of Sky Woman had children and the first peoples came about.

Much later when Nanabozho was born and the great flood came the original people were reduced in number to just a few because of the anger of the Manitous and their battle with men. But Nanabozho survived and with the help of the animals man was reborn and earth was reformed. The wonderful Muskrat was a savior of the earth and gave his life to reform the earth.

GRANDMOTHER AND THE LIBRARY

Shared by Suzanne Gretler

In a handwritten message to one of her sons who had requested a family history, my grandmother, Mary Frigon Whistler, wrote as she remembered: *“My information is neither voluminous nor first hand. However, history itself is based largely on word of mouth and conjecture. Our histories, while varied, carry us along the journey.”* This story about Grandmother says a lot about the times in which she lived and it still has relevance in today’s challenging times, for all of us need to be reminded of the importance of human dignity, integrity and acceptance.

Grandmother was born a Potawatomi, but was not allowed to live as one. Interrupting her childhood, she was sent from her home and family to Lawrence, Kansas to attend Haskell Institute. The purpose was the same as for so many youth: to learn the “proper” way of doing things, to learn the culture, language and religion of the white man, to no longer be a “savage”. She was taught library skills and, following this time, set off to live her life. By the time she had settled in Drumright, Oklahoma as a young wife with a love for books, she had learned that in order to live the life she wanted for herself and family she must deny who she truly was, to hide her proud Native American Heritage. Grandmother began work in the local book bindery, and organized ways to ensure that some of the books could be shared. The WPA around that time built a small library in Drumright.

In 1994, members of my family and I traveled to Shawnee for the Potawatomi Family Festival and took a trip to Drumright expressly to visit Grandmother’s library. Family on this trip included my mother, Philonise Anne (Whistler) Williams, and her brother, my Uncle Bob Whistler. In the car as we traveled from Shawnee to Drumright, brother and sister reminisced about some of the shelves that their father, my grandfather, built and how the books Grandmother bound that bear her handwritten inscription on the binding and signature were still in the library. They also shared that Grandmother had the skill of being able to simultaneously write with both hands.

During that trip my mother and Uncle Bob recounted the following story. Grandmother Whistler became the Drumright, Oklahoma librarian, much to her delight, and was fully accepted in the city as a white middle class wife and mother. Grandmother was fully aware of the unposted, unspoken and nonetheless established rule that “Dirty Indians” and “Blacks” were not allowed in the library, and that their hands were never to touch the books. The story goes that after dark at an appointed time Grandmother, with courage and conviction, secretly lent books to the local Native Americans and blacks. Grandmother together with our mother would open the back door late at night allowing “Indian” and black individuals to enter. These grateful people quietly borrowed books and returned them the same way, on their honor. Our mother remembers that not one of the books was ever “lost” or returned damaged.

I feel this brave, kind, selfless and generous act that took so much human compassion on Grandmother’s part sets an example for us all to follow. As we consider current issues of

exclusion, intolerance and prejudice, let us remember the difference that one person can make to right wrongs, through understanding and compassion for others.

PONDESE

Shared by Justin Neely, Director, CPN Language Department

An old man was sitting in his lodge by the side of a frozen stream. His appearance was very worn and frayed, for it was the close of winter and his fire was almost out. His locks were white with age and he trembled in every joint. He sat in solitude as the days passed, the only sound was of newly falling snow outside.

One day, as his fire was dying, a beautiful young woman approached. Her cheeks were red, her eyes sparkled with animation, and a smile played across her lips. Her steps were quick and light and she carried a bouquet of wildflowers in her hand. On her forehead was a wreath of sweet grass.

“Granddaughter,” said the old man, *“I am happy to see you. Come in and tell me of your adventures and what strange lands you have been to see. I will tell you of my prowess and exploits, and what I can perform. You can do the same and we can pass the time together.”*

He then drew from his sack a carved pipe. Filling it, he handed it to his guest. When the ceremony was concluded, they began to speak.

“I blow my breath,” the old man said, *“and the streams stand still. The water becomes stiff and hard as stone.”*

“I breathe,” said the young maiden, *“and flowers spring up all over the plains.”*

“I shake my braids,” retorted the old man, *“and snow blankets the land. The leaves fall at my command and my breath blows them away. The birds fly away from the water to distant lands. The animals hide from my breath and the very ground becomes hard as flint.”*

“I shake my ringlets,” responded the young woman, *“and warm showers of soft rain fall upon the Earth. The plants lift their heads from the ground like the eyes of children glistening with delight. The birds return with my voice and the warmth of my breath unlocks the stream. Music fills the groves wherever I walk, and all Nature rejoices.”*

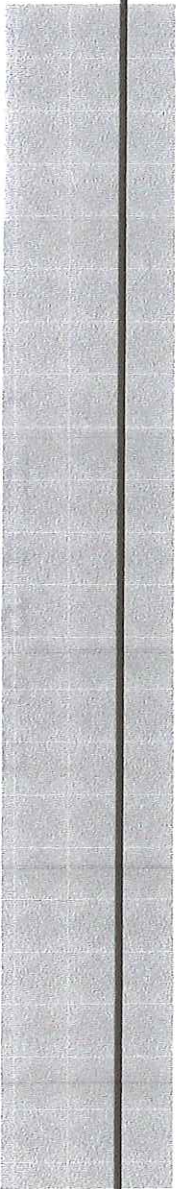
As they spoke, the sun began to rise and warmth came over the land. The tongue of the old man became silent as the robin and bluebird began to sing on top of the lodge. The stream began to murmur by the door. The fragrance of blooming herbs and flowers came softly on the vernal breeze.

As day broke, the character of the host was fully revealed to the young maiden. When she looked upon him, he had the icy visage of Ponde. Streams began to flow from his eyes, and as the sun climbed higher into the sky, he shrunk until he eventually melted away. Nothing remained of his lodge but the Trailing Arbutus, a small white flower with a pink border.

PONDESE

Illustrated by Penny Coates





- “Granddaughter,” said the old man, “I am happy to see you. Come in tell me of your adventures, and what strange lands you have been to see. I will tell you of my prowess and exploits, and what I can perform. You can do the same and we can pass time together.”





Yeast Comics

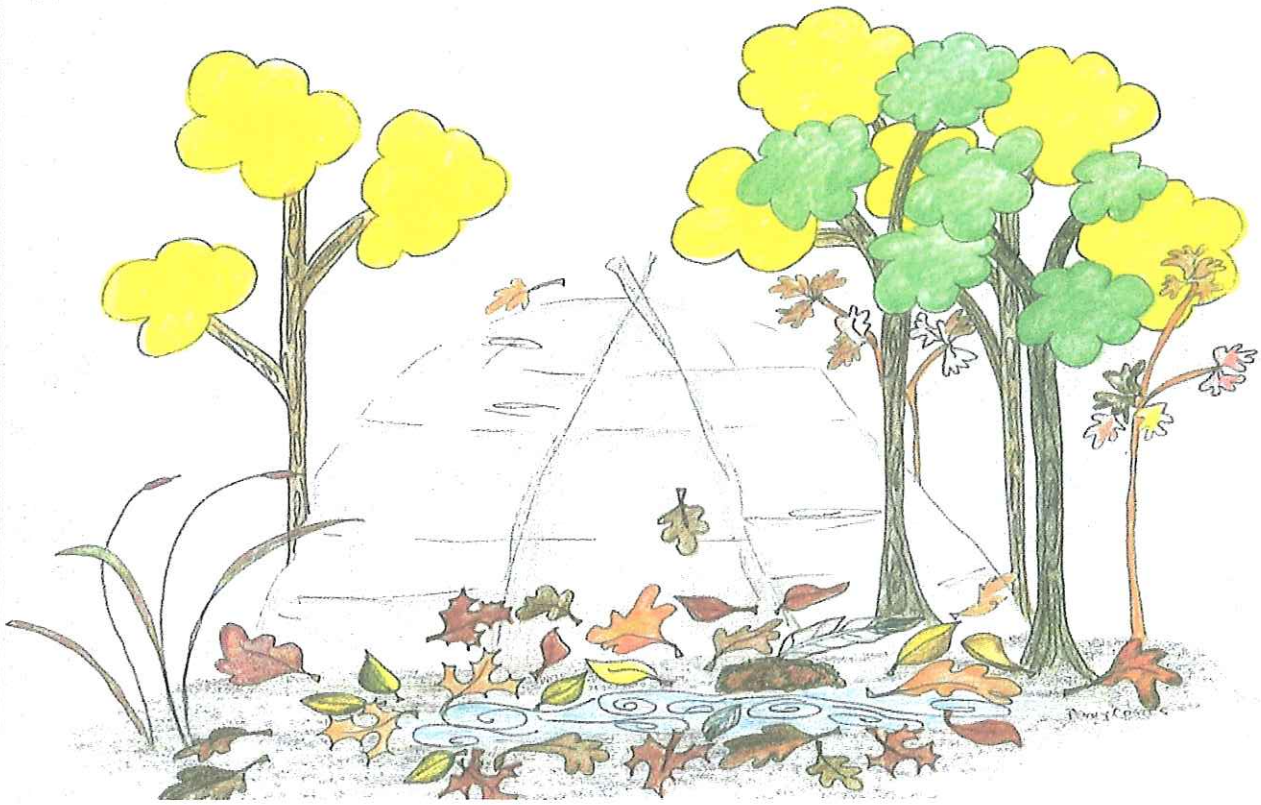






Wendy Gurnik









IW

The End