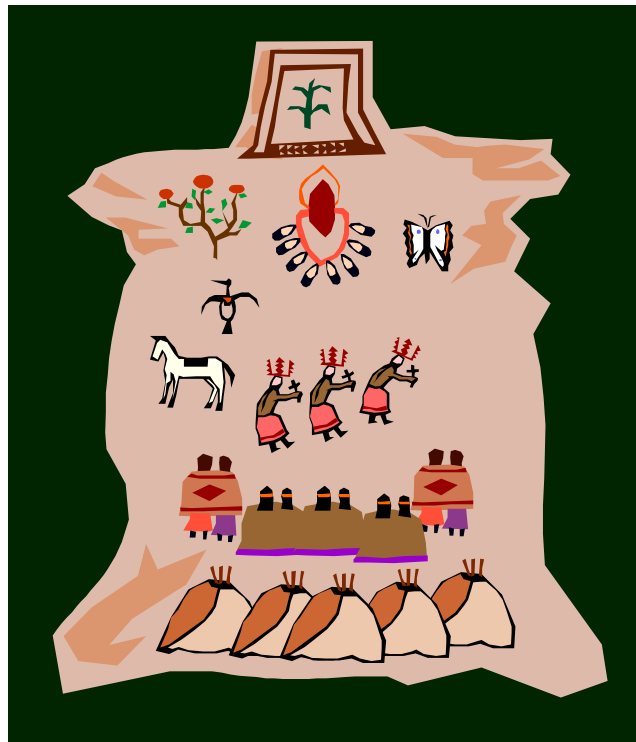


Native American Legends



Compiles by Billie A Williams

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CORN MOTHER (PENOBSCOT)
kloskurbek-the all maker

From a drop of dew on a leaf warmed by the sun, First Mother was created from the green living plant, from moisture, and from warmth. “I am love,” said the maiden. “I am a strength giver, I am the nourisher, I am the provider of men and animals. They all love me.”

Kloskurbek thanked The Great Mystery above for sending the maiden. Great Nephew married her and she conceived and thus became the First Mother. When hunting killed off all the animals, and nearly starved all her children, she told her husband he needed to kill her and have her sons drag her body across a garden patch until her flesh covered the ground. Then, to gather and burn her bones in that garden patch. In seven moons nourishment would come forth from that ground.

The first to grow from that garden patch was corn given from First Mother’s flesh “so that the people might live and flourish.” And they partook of First Mother’s flesh and found it sweet beyond words. They followed her instructions and did not eat all, but saved some to replant. So, in this way her spirit was renewed every seven months, generation after generation.

In the spot where they had burned First Mother’s bones, another broad-leafed fragrant plant grew. It was First Mother’s breath, and they heard her spirit talking: “Burn this up and smoke it. It is sacred. It will clear your minds, help your prayers, and gladden your heart.”

First mother called the first plant Skarmunal or Corn, and the second plant Utarmur-wayeh, or tobacco.

”Remember,” she told the people, “and take good care of First Mother’s flesh because it is her goodness become substance. Take good care of her breath, because it is her love turned into smoke...she had given her life so that you might live.”





WHITE BUFFALO WOMAN
(*Brule Sioux*)

Oceti-Shakowin – the seven sacred council fires of the Lakota Oyate, the nation.
Ptesan-wi, White Buffalo Woman

Two young hunters were out hunting getting very discouraged because there was no game left to hunt. Suddenly, there appeared in the distance, a beautiful Indian woman wearing a white buffalo skin. She was so attractive they were both spellbound by her. One reached out to touch her in a lustful way and a bolt of lightning struck him down. He was burned beyond recognition (by another account he was devoured by snakes) .

She told the other young man to go back to his tribe and tell them that she was coming and that they were to build a 24-pole medicine lodge for her. The center of the tipi was to be made an altar of red earth with a buffalo skull and a three stick rack for a holy thing she was bringing. The holy thing she brought was a bundle that contained Chanunpa-The Sacred Pipe. She gave the chief directions for the handling and use of the pipe.

It was to be grasped by the stem with the right hand and the bowl with the left and this is done still today. The chief was to dip sweet grass (or an eagle wing) in water and offer it to the white buffalo woman. Now, water is sprinkled on the one to be purified using this same ceremony.

To all the people she said, “The pipe is alive. It is a red being showing you a red life and a red road. This is the first ceremony for which you will use the pipe.

Chan-shaha, red willow bark tobacco is what she filled the Sacred Pipe with. Then she walked around the lodge in the direction of the sun 4 times, representing the circle without end, the sacred loop, the road of life. The White Buffalo Woman used dry buffalo chip to light the pipe, to represent Peta-owhankishni, the fire with out end, the flame to be passed from generation to generation. Smoke rising from the Sacred Pipe was tunkashila’ breath, the living breath of Great Grand Father Mystery.

She said the Buffalo represents the universe and the four directions because he stand on four legs, for the four ages of creation. The pipe bowl represents the buffalo.

Every year the buffalo loses on hair and every one of the four ages he loses a leg. The sacred hoop will end when all the hair and legs of great buffalo are gone. Water will return to cover the earth.

The wooden pipe stem presents all that grows on the earth. 12 feathers hang from the stem taken from the spotted eagle, a very sacred bird, Great Spirit's messenger, and wisest of all flying ones.

Seven circles on the pipe bowl represent the seven sacred Lakota Nation Campfires.

Women are from mother earth, great a work as what men do. The pipe binds man and woman in a circle of love. White Buffalo Woman told them of the marriage ceremony with the pipe. She gave woman Corn Wasna (Pemmican) wild turnip, and taught them how to make a hearth fire and how to cook corn and meat by dropping a hot rock from the hearth into a pouch of water and meat or vegetable.

To the children she said that what their parents did for them and that there place in the circle of life was very important as they were the seed that would carry on the people.

The day a human dies is always a sacred day. The day when the soul is released to the Great Spirit is another. Four women will become sacred on such a day. They will cut the sacred tree, the Can-wakan-for the sun dance.

Lakota is the purist among the tribes. They had been chosen to care for the pipe for all the Indian people in this turtle continent.

Buffalo woman promised to return as she left. She walked away and stopped and rolled over four times. One time she turned to a black buffalo, the second time a brown buffalo, the third time a red one and the fourth time a white female buffalo calf. The most sacred thing you can ever encounter.

When she vanished buffalo came in great herds. People had meat for food, skins for clothes and tipis and bones for their tools.

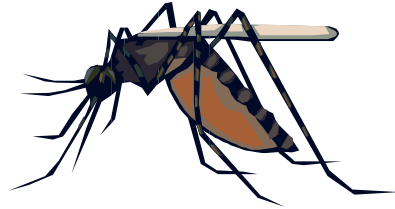


GRANDMOTHER SPIDER STEALS THE SUN
(Cherokee)

The animal kingdom was in despair as it was always dark. The sun hid away and would not give them any sunlight. One by one the animals and insects tried to steal part of the sun to bring to their world so that things would warm and grow. Possum tried to hid a piece of the sun in his bushy tail to steal it. As it turned out the sunlight was so hot it burned the fur right off his tail. He was lucky to survive, but that is why he now has a bald, hairless tail.

Buzzard tried by putting a piece of the sun on top of his head. The scorching sun burned all the feathers off the top of his head. When you see him today, he still has no feathers on his head.

Grandmother spider was determined to get some of the sun for their world. She made a walled pot of clay. She spun a web to the other side of the world. She was so small no one saw her coming. She snatched a piece of the sun and put it in the clay pot she had made. Scurrying home on one strand of her web she succeeded in bringing light to her world. She had succeeded in bringing sun light and fire to the Cherokee nation and had taught them how to make clay pottery.



HOW MOSQUITOES CAME TO BE
(Tlingit)

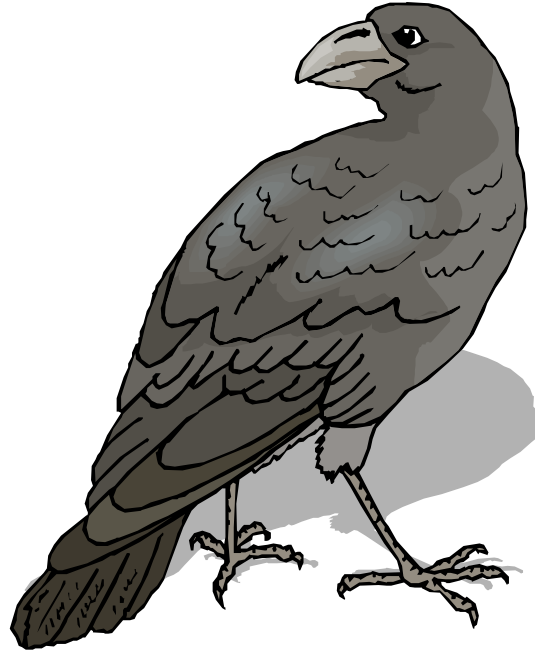
There was a giant who loved to eat people. The people became worried that soon one of them would be left. They gathered around and talked about what they should do. One man said he knew how to kill the monster. They all questioned him and he told them to watch and be very, very quiet.

The man laid down out in the street and pretended to be dead. The Giant Monster picked him up and threw him over his shoulder the man laid limp allowing the monster to carry him home. When the Giant Monster got home he realized he needed fire for the fireplace so he placed the man on the floor by the hearth and went back out to get some firewood so that he could cook the man.

While the man was gone his son came home. He was not as big as the Giant Monster was so the man was able to over power him and held a knife to his throat and asked him "Where is your father's heart? Tell me or I'll slit your throat."

The son not wanting to have his throat slit told the man. "My father's heart is in his left heel." He warned the son to be very quiet when his father returned home. The son was very scared and he did as he was told.

When the Giant Monster entered the door of his home the man leapt out and stabbed his left heel. This made the Giant fall to the floor dying; he vowed he would eat humans forever. The man pulls him into the hearth fire and burns him up in the fire place. When he goes to spread the ashes to the wind, clouds of ashes turn to mosquitoes. The man could hear the Giant's rumbling laughter. "Yes, I'll eat you people until the end of time." The man felt a sting and mosquitoes started swarming all over him sucking his blood.



HOW THE CROW CAME TO BE BLACK
(Brule Sioux)

In ancient times all crows were white. People didn't have horses, or firearms or weapons of metal. They depended on the buffalo hung for sustenance. Thus, hunting buffalo was steeped in uncertainty and danger with nothing but a stone and wood weapon to bring the huge beast down.

The crows made things even more difficult for the hunters by circling high above the buffalo herd and warning them of the approaching hunters. "Caw, caw, caw, cousins, hunters are coming. They are creeping up through that gully over there. Watch out, Caw, caw, caw."

The buffalo heard and would stampede leaving the people to starve.

The people held a council to figure out what to do. They decided the largest crow was the leader of the flock. One wise Chief suggested that they capture this crow and teach him a lesson and then the others would know not to warn the buffalo, also. They had to do something before all the Brule Sioux tribe vanished from starvation.

A plan, they needed a plan. They all thought and thought. Finally one Chief came up with a plan. He went into his tipi and got a large buffalo skin with the head and horns still attached. It was a glorious site. He choose one of the young braves. "Here," he said giving the young man the skin. Put this on and sneak into the middle of the buffalo herd. They will not notice you since you will look and smell just like them. Then, when the crow comes you can capture him." Everyone thought that was a great idea.

Sure enough, the big shaggy beasts paid him no attention. Then when the hunters left their camp for their daily hunt, the crows came flying above the herd as they usually did to warn them. "Caw, caw, caw, cousins, the hunters are coming to kill you. Watch out for their arrows. Caw, caw, caw."

And as usually all the buffalo stampeded away. All except the young hunter in his buffalo skin disguise. Under the shaggy skin he waited pretending to be grazing, ignoring the stampeding herd.

Then, the big white crow leader came gliding down. Her perched on the hunters shoulder and flapping his wings said: “Caw, caw, caw, brother are you deaf? The hunters are close by, just over the hill. Save yourself!”

But the young hunter reached out from under the buffalo skin and grabbed the crow. He tied the big birds feet with a raw hide thong and fastened the other end to a huge stone. No matter how the crow struggled he couldn’t escape.

Again the people sat in council. “What shall we do with this big bad crow, which has made us go hungry again and again?”

“I’ll burn him up!” shouted one angry hunter. With that, he yanked the crow from the young hunter’s hands. Before anyone could react, he flung the crow, still tied to the stone, into the fire. “This will teach you,” he said.

The leather thong that held the stone to the crows feet burned through almost at once. The big crow flew out of the fire. His feathers were badly singed and some were charred black as the midnight sky. Though he was still big, he was no longer white.

“Caw, caw, caw,” he cried flying away as fast as he could. “I’ll never do that again; I’ll stop warning the buffalo, and so will the entire crow nation. I promise, Caw, caw, caw. “

The crow escaped. But ever since, all crows have been black.



WHY THE OWL HAS BIG EYES
(Iroquois)

Raweno, the Every Thing Maker was busy creating all the animals. He was working on rabbit who wanted some very specific features. Raweno listened. He wanted to have all his creatures made up the way they wanted to be.

“I want nice long legs, and long ears like the deer, and very sharp claws and fangs like a panther,” said rabbit.

Raweno was working on rabbits hind legs, making them long the way rabbit wanted them. Owl was still waiting for his turn to be shaped and was sitting in a near by tree. “Whoo hoo, I want a nice long neck like Swan’s and beautiful red feathers like Cardinal. And...”

“Hush,” Raweno said “It is not your turn yet. I need to concentrate on rabbit.”

Owl did not listen and he kept after Raweno telling him what he wanted the list grew longer and longer as Raweno’s patience grew shorter and shorter. Finally, he had all he could take. In one fell swoop he turned grabbed Owl by the nap of the neck and smashed his head down into his shoulders giving him a short stubby neck. He smacked him in both eyes and made them very, very large, and then he pulled at his ear feathers until they stretched out making owl have very long ears indeed. He picked up some mud from a puddle on the ground and rubbed it into owl’s feathers. “You will not have beautiful red feathers like the Cardinal in this lifetime,” he said.

He plopped owl back on the branch. “There, I am done with you. From this day forth you will only be awake at night. You will always have a short neck that you can turn totally around but never long and graceful like Swan’s. With your long ears you will be able to listen very, very well, and I suggest that you do from now on.”

“Whoo hoo,” the owl cried he had learned his lesson too late. He flew away extremely unhappy, but he knew better than to hound Raweno any more with his nagging and complaining.

Raweno searched for rabbit, but the thunderous roar of his anger had scared the poor rabbit so he had taken off into the tall grasses content to forever have long hind legs, because that is what Raweno was working on when Owl angered him so that he had to deal with him before he could continue. The rabbits ears that Raweno had made long at

the beginning twitched in the tall grass listening for danger. He never did get his claws and sharp panther teeth, because he was afraid to go back near Raweno lest he anger him and get something he didn't want.





OWLS IN AMERICAN INDIAN CULTURE

Among the various Native American Tribes there are many different beliefs regarding the owl. Here are some of those that I was able to find.

Apache: Dreaming of an Owl signified an approaching death.

Cherokee: Eastern Screech-owls valued by the shamans as consultants thinking was that they could bring on sickness as a punishment.

Cree: Believed the Boreal Owl whistles were summons from the spirits. If a person answered with a similar whistle and did not hear a response, then he would soon die.

Dakota Hidatsa: The Burrowing Owl was a protective spirit for brave warriors.

Hopis: The Burrowing Owl as a god of the dead. The guardian of fires and tender of all underground things, including seed germination. Their name for the Burrowing Owl is Ko'Ko it means "Watcher of the Dark". They also believed that the Great Horned Owl helped their peaches grow.

Inuit: Short-eared Owl was once a young girl who was magically transformed into an Owl with a long beak. But the Owl became frightened and flew into the side of a house, flattening its face and beak. They also named the Boreal Owl "the blind one," because of its tameness during daylight. Inuit children make pets of Boreal Owls.

Kwagulth: Believed that owls represented both a deceased person and their newly-released soul.

Lenape: Believed that if they dreamt of an Owl it would become their guardian.

Menominee: Believed that day and night were created after a talking contest between a Saw-whet Owl (Totoba) and a rabbit (Wabus). The rabbit won and selected daylight, but allowed night time as a benefit to the vanquished Owl.

Montagnais: Of Quebec: believed that the Saw-whet Owl was once the largest Owl in the world and was very proud of its voice. After the Owl attempted to imitate the roar of a waterfall, the Great Spirit humiliated the Saw-whet Owl by turning it into a tiny Owl with a song that sounds like dripping water.

Mojave: Believed one would become an Owl after death, this being an interim stage before becoming a water beetle, and ultimately pure air.

Navajo: Legend says the Creator, Nayenezgani, told the Owl after creating it "...in days to come, men will listen to your voice to know what will be their future.

Newuks: believed that after death, the brave and virtuous became Great Horned Owls. The wicked, however, were doomed to become Barn Owls.

Sierras: Believed the Great Horned Owl captured the souls of the dead and carried them to the underworld.

Tlingit: warriors had great faith in the Owl; they would rush into battle hooting like Owls to give themselves confidence, and to strike fear into their enemies.

Zuni: Legend says how the Burrowing Owl got its speckled plumage: the Owls spilled white foam on themselves during a ceremonial dance because they were laughing at a coyote that was trying to join the dance. Zuni mothers place an Owl feather next to a baby to help it sleep.



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