

## The Talking Stick

*A retelling of a Sioux legend.*

This story was given to the native people many winters ago. When it was time for all of the young mothers in the village to go out to gather fruit and berries, the old grandmothers, whose legs could no longer walk quickly, were left to care for the young children of the village. The young mothers honored the grandmothers by giving them this great responsibility.

It is believed that young children have many dreams and visions to collect before they are grown. With the grandmothers close by, all the children took naps in the warmth of a darkened lodge before Sun had traveled his full path each day. On one of these days while the young children slept, Crow and Magpie, two noisy winged ones, were having a terrible argument outside the lodge of the sleeping children.

"Caaaw-caaaw," screamed Crow. "Kaaack-Kack," yelled Magpie.

They were both speaking at once and they could not hear each other's point of view on the subject of which tree belonged to which bird.

One of the grandmothers went to quiet the voices outside so they would not wake the children. She tried to scare the birds away. When she could not get the attention of the screaming Crow or yelling Magpie, she called on Eagle for help. Eagle, the great winged one, was a sacred bird for both the native people and all the other animals of the earth. He was also full of much wisdom and everyone looked to him to help them with their problems.

"Oh, brother Eagle, can you chase off these two noisy ones so our children can dream?" asked the grandmother.

With a mighty flap of his wings, Eagle sailed towards the noisy pair. He gave a call of warning to the Crow and Magpie as he came close, but they were so busy fighting they did not even hear him. When Eagle saw this he yelled louder and came closer, and that is when it happened.

"Caaaw-caaaw, Caaaw-caaaw," Crow screamed as he flapped his wings in the air so hard he nearly fell off his perch. "Kaaack-Kack," yelled Magpie as his wings too flapped up a storm.

Suddenly they both realized that they had flapped their wings so hard without looking at what they were doing, they hit one of Eagle's wings. What is worse, one of the sacred feathers from Eagle fell out and landed on a small branch, suspended above Mother Earth. It was a great offense to touch Eagle, much less cause one of his feathers to come off. Magpie spoke to Eagle.

"Oh, brother Eagle, we did not hear you so near. I am truly sorry for the injury I have caused you."

Now, Crow was surprised to hear such an honorable thing come from the mouth of this rude neighbor. He spoke to Eagle with dignity.

"I have many times been a naughty bird but, brother Eagle, I think this may be the worst I have done in many moons. I am very sorry you have lost a sacred feather."

Crow and Magpie both went to retrieve Eagle's feather and their eyes met and with no words at all they both knew that this mistake would not have happened if they had not been fighting. Magpie took the feather in his beak and spoke.

"I am ashamed, brother Eagle, that my loud talk and harsh words were more important to me than solving our problem."

Crow took the feather from Magpie and said, "We have disturbed the two-legged children and torn from your wing a sacred feather and now we return it to you with a request for your forgiveness."

Eagle had watched all this with wise eyes and an open heart. He knew the lesson of listening had been learned by his little brothers and he saw that the grandmother looked on with learning eyes also.

So he said to Crow and Magpie, "Give my feather and the branch it rest on to the grandmother. Grandmother, connect to my sacred feather to the branch. Dress the branch with beads and leather and fur to make it even more beautiful. Keep it in your lodge and teach others to create this fine looking stick."

Eagle said, "We will call this sacred item a Talking Stick. Tell all the people that when they come together at any gathering where ears might be shut, to bring out the Talking Stick and let only the holder speak. This will be done in an honorable manner letting everyone have his say. Pass the stick until all have spoken. Then a vote can be taken and the side who gathers the most votes will make the final decision," said Eagle.

Grandmother gathered up the branch and the feather. She was very honored to have learned this lesson and every grandmother from that day on has told this story and helped the young ones to make Talking Sticks.