

SIHA TOOSKIN KNOWS

The Sacred Eagle Feather



Charlene Bearhead Wilson Bearhead Chloe Bluebird Mustooch

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By Charlene Bearhead and Wilson Bearhead
Illustrated by Chloe Bluebird Mustooch

HIGHWATER
PRESS 

© 2020, Charlene Bearhead and Wilson Bearhead (text)

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I dedicate Siha Tooskin Knows the Sacred Eagle Feather to my grandchildren – Brett, Peyton, Dreyson, Willow, River, Rain, Phoenix, and the ones yet to be born. The Creator, the feathers of the eagle, and the love of your family will protect you all the days of your lives. You are never alone.

—CHARLENE BEARHEAD

We dedicate the Siha Tooskin Knows series to the storytellers who taught us. To those who guided us and shared their knowledge so that we might pass along what we have learned from them to teach children. Their stories are a gentle way of guiding us all along the journey of life.

In that way we tell these stories for our children and grandchildren, and for all children. May they guide you in the way that we have been guided as these stories become part of your story.

—CHARLENE BEARHEAD AND WILSON BEARHEAD



*Watch for this little plant!
It will grow as you read, and if you need a break,
it marks a good spot for a rest.*



When Paul Wahasaypa woke up in the cozy spare bedroom at Mugoshin and Mitoshin’s house the sun was shining brightly through the little square window above his bed. He always woke up earlier when he was visiting his grandparents. He loved how their home was not close to any other houses.

One of his favourite things about being out in the country was having the trees all around him. It was so different from his home in the city. Paul liked to “get up with the birds” as Mugoshin always said. Even though he would wake up early, Paul



would always linger in bed with the star blanket pulled up under his chin. He loved the feeling he would get as he lay there listening to the sounds of the birds and the crickets and taking in the smell of the mint tea brewing and the bannock baking.

This morning was no different. As soon as the smell of the bannock got the best of him, he

threw back the blankets and jumped out of bed to get dressed.

When Paul got to the kitchen Mugoshin was there making breakfast and setting the dishes out on the table. No matter how early Paul got up he found that Mugoshin had always been up long enough to boil the mint tea, get the bannock in the oven, and wash the dishes. It came as no surprise that she was ready to scramble his eggs when he got up on this day.

Mugoshin looked up from the table and smiled at her sleepy grandson as he entered the kitchen. “Good morning, mitowjin. Did you have a good sleep?”

“Yeah, I did,” Paul answered as he pushed aside some wisps of hair that had come loose from his braid while he was sleeping.

“That’s good,” Mugoshin responded as she turned back to her work. “I bet you’re hungry. Pour yourself some juice while I cook you some eggs. Mitoshin will be back from his walk soon and

ready to leave right away.” Of course, Mitoshin had already been up, eaten his breakfast, and started his day. Paul always wondered why people said that over the years you get old and tired because his grandparents were always awake and working in the morning before people younger than them.

“Don’t you ever sleep in, Mugoshin?” Paul asked as he watched his grandmother washing the dishes and putting the rest of the eggs back in the fridge. “You must be tired because you are always doing something and I never see you sleep.”

Mugoshin laughed at her grandson’s confusion. “If you want to stay well like Mitoshin and me you need to get up with the sun, mitowjin. The Creator gives us the daytime to take care of our homes, gather our food, and take care of all of the things necessary for living a good life. We get up with the sun and give thanks to the Ade Waka, Ena Makoochay, the plant people, the four-legged people, and the winged people before we start our



own work for the day. They all give of themselves so that we can live.”

“If you remember that when you are choosing your food you will also live well. Our traditional foods are medicines for our bodies. We have always eaten the fish, moose meat, deer, elk, prairie chickens, and the other animals from this area. We eat the strawberries, raspberries, saskatoons, and blueberries that grow here. Ena Makoochay provides the people of the land with all that we need to survive and be healthy.”

“It’s when we eat too much processed food and fast food that we get sick. Those are not foods from our natural environment. When our people eat too much of that kind of food they get diabetes and other illnesses. That is what makes people tired and low in energy. So you might want to slow down on the bannock, Siha Tooskin,” Mugoshin added as she raised her eyebrows. “I know it’s delicious but it can be too much of a good thing.”

Paul pulled his hand back—he had just been reaching for another piece of bannock when his grandmother’s words intercepted him. Paul reflected on Mugoshin’s words of wisdom. He knew from experience that she was right about the food. Sometimes after Paul had eaten too much junk food at a birthday party or a movie, he would feel like he was going to be sick and he just wanted to lie down and sleep.

This morning he had enjoyed a good breakfast and he was excited. He didn’t know where he was going to go with Mitoshin but it didn’t matter. Whenever Paul got to spend time with Mitoshin he always ended up learning learn something awesome.

Just as Paul was finishing up his last bite of bannock with a bowl of Mugoshin’s warmed-up blueberries, the door opened and Mitoshin walked into the kitchen. “You finally awake, old man?” he asked Paul in a teasing tone. “I know you old guys need your rest so I let you sleep while

Glossary

Ade Waka	Spirit Father or Creator
Ena Makoochay	Mother Earth
Mitoshin	Grandfather
Mitowjin	My grandchild
Mugoshin	Grandmother
Wahasaypa	Bear head

A note on use of the Nakota language in this book series from Wilson Bearhead:

The Nakota dialect used in this series is the Nakota language as taught to Wilson by his grandmother Annie Bearhead and used in Wabamun Lake First Nation. Wilson and Charlene have chosen to spell the Nakota words in this series phonetically as Nakota was never a written language. Any form of written Nakota language that currently exists has been developed in conjunction with linguists who use a Eurocentric construct.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Charlene Bearhead is an educator and Indigenous education advocate. She was the first Education Lead for the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation and the Education Coordinator for the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. She is a mother and a grandmother who began writing stories to teach her own children as she raised them. Charlene lives near Edmonton, Alberta with her husband Wilson.

Wilson Bearhead, a Nakota Elder and Wabamun Lake First Nation community member in central Alberta (Treaty 6 territory), is the recent recipient of the Canadian Teachers' Federation Indigenous Elder Award. Wilson's grandmother Annie was a powerful, positive influence in his young life, teaching him all of the lessons that gave him the strength, knowledge, and skills to overcome difficult times and embrace the gifts of life.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Chloe Bluebird Mustooch is from the Alexis Nakoda Sioux Nation of central Alberta, and is a recent graduate of the Emily Carr University of Art & Design. She is a seamstress, beadworker, illustrator, painter, and sculptor. She was raised on the reservation, and was immersed in hunting, gathering, and traditional rituals, and has also lived in Santa Fe, New Mexico, an area rich in art and urbanity.

For as long as Paul could remember there were eagle feathers around him...but how had they come to be in all of those places in his life?

Paul Wahasaypa—Siha Tooskin—already knows that the eagle is important because of the way that his family respects and cares for eagle feathers. Now he's old enough for the teachings of where the feathers come from and why they are so sacred. Walk with Paul and Mitoshin (his grandfather) so you too will understand the teaching of the sacred eagle feather.

SIHA TOOSKIN KNOWS

Siha Tooskin Knows the Gifts of His People
Siha Tooskin Knows the Sacred Eagle Feather
Siha Tooskin Knows the Strength of His Hair
Siha Tooskin Knows the Catcher of Dreams
Siha Tooskin Knows the Nature of Life
Siha Tooskin Knows the Best Medicine
Siha Tooskin Knows the Offering of Tobacco
Siha Tooskin Knows the Love of the Dance

The Siha Tooskin Knows series uses vivid narratives and dazzling illustrations in contemporary settings to share stories about an 11-year-old Nakota boy.

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