



Coyote's Food Medicines







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First Edition

Coyote's Food Medicines

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Elders of Northern Secwepemc

supported by

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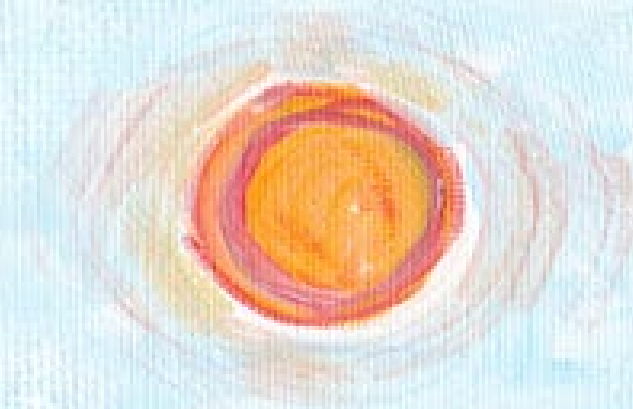


Introduction

Storytelling has always been a traditional way in Indigenous communities to share knowledge, wisdom and humour. Now we have new tools to share old ways.

This story about Coyote and his food medicines was developed after Secwepemc'ulcw Elders met in July

2016 to share their thoughts on their community's use of medicines. It was during this conversation, that Elder Jean William gave her impression, "In the past, our Elders didn't take lots of medication, mostly just aspirin. But now cupboards look like pharmacy shelves." From this conversation, the 'Coyote's Food Medicines' story emerged.



As we reflect on the story, the meanings become clear based on our own lived experiences.

Indigenous stories often include a mix of natural and spiritual beings, including animal figures. This story reflects some of the cultural teachers/animals of the Secwepemc people. Many Indigenous stories include a Trickster character, who can be both humorous and heroic, helping to teach through its mix of cunning, foolishness and ambition. In BC, the Trickster takes on many forms for many Nations, from Coyote to Raven to Mink, and others.

What follows is a multi-layered teaching story created with the guiding words of the Secwepemc Elders on how to maintain life's wellness and balance.

Coyote

*was sitting
by the river
one day.*

*His thoughts
were on his
Children.*

He has taught them all he knows about the land and the medicines and foods they can use from the land. They eat the grass to settle their stomachs, drink the water when needed, and more importantly, eat wholesome and healthy foods. Food is medicine and medicine is food.

He is so pleased with the way he uses these medicines and foods

that he starts to think that they could use more specific medicines from his friends to help his children.

He thinks that such food medicines will give his family the same powerful legs as Frog, sharp eyesight as Eagle and resourcefulness and intelligence of Beaver. They would be better hunters and so would thrive better on this land.

So Coyote sets off to speak to the other animals about the food medicines they use.

Coyote goes to the pond first

as there are many animal friends there and they are wise to the many food medicines in that area. Coyote has to travel many miles to get to the pond since Coyote lives in the farthest reaches of the grasslands.



He finds Frog

sitting on a log and he asks:

“Frog, you are a wise friend and every year you have many children that grow to have their own children. Can you share your wisdom of how you pass on the wellness of spirit and your food medicines to all your children and children’s children?”

Frog is a very quiet and shy friend,

he is flattered that Coyote has come all this way to ask him about his ways of being and food medicines.

Frog feels important and thinks to himself about what he can share with Coyote. After a small time, Frog says,

“For my family, we use the roots of the reeds to help with our leg aches and pains. Our legs are very important for us to jump away from Eagle that tries to catch us. We are born to die so we must keep our legs strong and useful. So we nibble on the new shoots of the reeds in the pond. But Coyote...”

Coyote left to find Eagle to ask about her food medicines. He did not wait to hear all that Frog had to say.

Coyote remembers that Eagle is a strong and proud animal

and that her food medicines must reflect that way of being. He is anxious to hear what she has to share. He asks her:

“Eagle, you are a strong and mighty friend and every year have many children that grow to have their own children. Can you share your wisdom of how you have such great eyesight to hunt the smallest animals from the height of the clouds?”



Eagle saw Coyote coming.

From miles away, she heard whispers on the Wind that Coyote was gathering medicines from the other animals to keep his family healthy and maintain wellness.





Eagle knows many truths about this world

**and her way of teaching is to be
the example of wellness.**

She says to Coyote,

“ Brother, my food medicines are strong and powerful, to share them with you, it comes with great responsibility and understanding. As Eagles, we don’t take medicines often and so when we need food medicines, it is because we really need some healing.

I teach my children that it is easier to do small healthy things every day instead of trying to find our medicines to fix everything. I tell my children to ask themselves what is really wrong...”



Coyote only wanted to hear about the food medicines,

he did not want to hear about the other things that Eagle was teaching her children. With Frog's food medicines, he felt that Eagle's food medicines would help his children even more to be better hunters. But clearly, Eagle was in a teaching mood and not a sharing mood. Coyote was impatient and said,



Eagle knew that Coyote was impatient

but she was unwilling to share such sacred information with him without letting him know of how other lifeforces are needed to keep and maintain wellness. She looked at him and then flew off. When he was ready, she would share her knowledge with him but not until he figured things out better.

“Eagle, I know that you are strong and mighty, but I want to know your food medicines, not everything that you do. The sun is getting very low in the sky and I want to see Beaver before he goes to bed in his house of wood in the pond, can you please tell me what I need to know?”

Disappointed not to have gathered Eagle's medicines, Coyote took off to find Beaver.

At the edge of the pond, Coyote called to Beaver and asked her the same question,

“Beaver, you are a resourceful and intelligent friend and every year have many children that grow to have their own children. Can you share your wisdom of how you pass on the wellness of spirit to all your children and children's children?”

Word already spread among the friends of the pond about Coyote's quest to gather other animals' food medicines. Because Beaver can go on land and water, she knows of many medicines. Her food medicines must be powerful and Coyote is eager to hear of her medicines. While chewing on the bark of a branch, Beaver replies,





“Coyote, I have heard from my Brothers and Sisters that you are looking for food medicines.”

I eat the bark from healthy branches to keep me healthy. But I want you to think of this: some of my food medicines are not eaten to make me feel better but are things that I do to help me stay healthy. Building my house, eating the right bark, staying close with my family – all are part of my ways of being healthy.”

Still not in the mood for listening and eager to put together his food medicines into pouches for his family, Coyote walks away without saying goodnight to Beaver.

He begins to put together his food medicine pouches of bark and reeds from the pond.

He has seen Eagle catch and eat small animals so guessing this must be a source of good medicines for Eagle, he places the dried bones of a rabbit in each of the food medicine pouches.

In the morning inside their den, he gives each of his children a food medicine pouch and says,





“Children, I have been all over our Territory looking for good medicines.

In these pouches, you will find food medicines that will give your legs the strength of Frog, eyesight of Eagle and wisdom of Beaver. Use these food medicines to be agile, alert and cunning hunters. Everyone will marvel at our hunting skills. Watch me.”

Coyote opens his pouch and eats part of the reed root, crunches on the rabbit bone and munches on the bark.

Without thinking, he runs out of the den and smells the tracks of Mole.

With his head down and feeling the power of his legs, keenness of his eyesight and mind, he is quick to find Mole buried not too deep underground.

“ See my children – I have quickly found food and I am ...”

Before he can finish his sentence, Coyote is pounced upon by Cougar.



Cougar was watching Coyote follow Mole without looking around at any dangers surrounding him. Coyote forgot to be cautious and thought that the strong medicines of Frog, Eagle and Beaver would be enough to allow him to be a strong and cunning hunter.

Under the great paw of Cougar, Coyote hears the Wind whisper to him,

“Coyote, you misunderstand the purpose of medicines. Food medicines are powerful, they are gifts from the Creator and need to be respected.

Food medicines for Frog are for these pond dwellers, food medicines for Eagle are for these strong birds and food medicines for Beaver are for these four-legged home builders. Coyote medicines and ways of wellbeing have been taught by your Ancestors. You have forgotten the teachings of your Elders and now you are under the paw of Cougar.”





**Eagle is watching
all of this from
her favourite tree.**

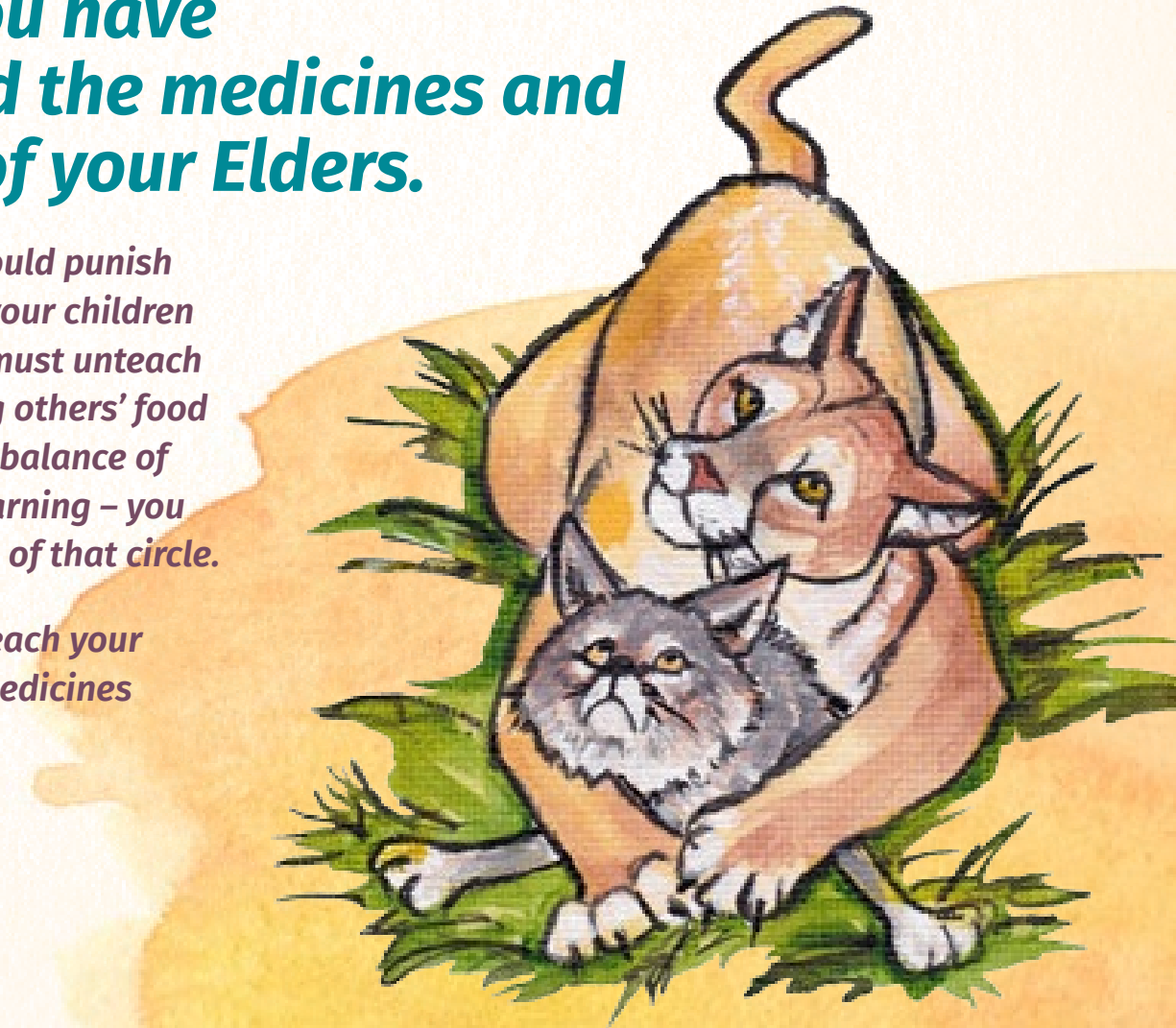
She lifts from the branch and lands on the ground near Coyote and Cougar. Eagle knows that Coyote is now ready to listen and learn. She says,

“ Brother Coyote, all eyes are on you and now is the time do to the right thing.

**Coyote, you have
disrespected the medicines and
wisdom of your Elders.**

Cougar is right and should punish you for it. But Coyote, your children are watching and you must unteach them this error in using others' food medicines. We live in a balance of knowing, doing and learning – you cannot cheat any parts of that circle.

Now, go forward and teach your children Coyote food medicines and ways of being.”





Cougar, although not happy about it, understands Eagle's words and lets Coyote go. Coyote, while relieved to have been spared, walks away with his tail and ears low.

He didn't realize he was disrespecting his Ancestors until his friends showed him.

He has learned about how to respect medicines and now he must teach his children the same.

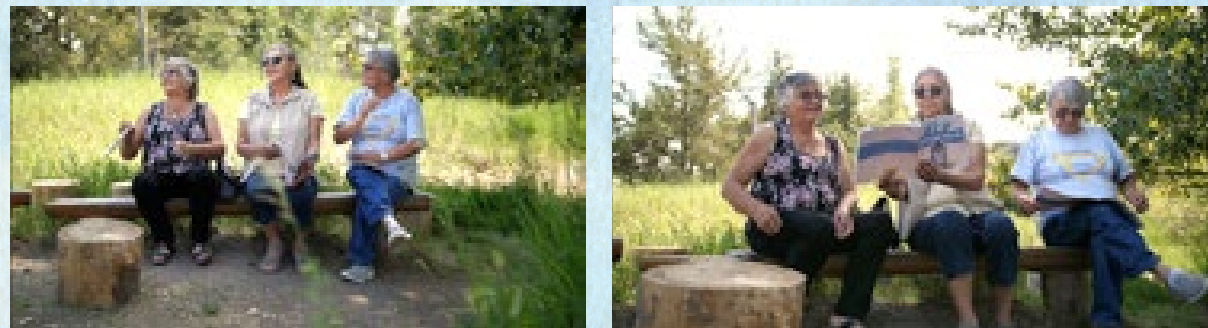


Acknowledgements

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Elders of Northern Secwepemc: Clara Camille, Jean William, Cecelia de Rose



About the artist

Georgia Lesley is a Williams Lake resident artist and illustrator who has been drawing and painting since childhood. She moved to the Cariboo to be closer to her grandchildren, from Lytton B.C. in the Nlakapamux territory, where she had lived for 19 years. Nine of those years were on the Siska reserve in the Fraser Canyon. She has illustrated several health publications for Lytton First Nations, Nlakapamux Child and Family Services and Interior Health.

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