

He Who Was The Corn (An Ojibwe Story)

Zhowmin was an orphan, adopted and raised by his grandmother, Zhaw-b'noh-qua. When Zhowmin was seven years old and ready to learn to hunt and fish, he went to his uncles for instruction. From his uncles he learned how to be resourceful, how to be a good provider, and how to be a warrior.

From his grandmother, he learned the principles of life. Every night she told Zhowmin stories. Sometimes she told him about acts of courage, generosity, strength, resourcefulness, patience, endurance, and perseverance; sometimes she related tales of the origin, purpose and nature of things; other times she explained the laws that governed men's lives and conduct. No matter how many times he heard the stories, Zhowmin never tired of them and he was determined to live by the guidance he received from his grandmother.

By the time he reached manhood, Zhowmin's grandmother was very old. Just as she had looked after him, he now cared for her. Even though he was now a grown man, he still listened to his grandmother's stories. One night, after she had spoken of the "Four Hills of Life," she said, "I shall be going on a long journey soon." Zhowmin listened but was puzzled by her reference to a journey. She continued, "After I leave, a stranger will come to you. Do what he says."

Before the spring, his grandmother died. Zhowmin and the people of the village buried her among the pines four days after her death with her body facing the west--Man's Last Destiny.

Not long after, a stranger arrived in the village and in a surly and petulant manner, demanded to know if there were any good men in the village. The village elders consulted one another, sent for Zhowmin, and presented him to the stranger. Zhowmin took the stranger to his lodge, for they were of the same totem and he was bound to look after him as a brother. They ate and they smoked, and only then did Zhowmin ask the stranger the purpose of his visit.

The stranger replied, "I have been sent to find a good man, but in all my years of questing, I have not yet found one among all the peoples I have visited. I understand from your reputation that you may be a good man. I hope for your sake and the sake of your people that you truly are a good man.

Zhowmin replied, "Who are you? Who sent you?"

I'm Mandamin (food of wonder).I was sent by Kitche Manitou (God/The Creator). My purpose is to find a good man and test his worth. I must therefore test your strength to learn whether you

and your people are worthy. And the most fitting way to test your inner strength is through battle. Zhoumin, you must fight me to prove your merit. If you win, you live; if you lose, you die."

Zhoumin scoffed, "I do not have to prove myself to you."

Mandamin appeared disappointed. "If you do not wish to fight me, I will take your refusal as cowardice. I must report to Kitche Manitou that I have not found a single good person among the Anishnabeg."

That his personal courage and worth were doubted mattered little to Zhoumin, but the overall merit of the Anishnabeg (Ojibwe) was questioned angered him. Then Zhoumin remembered his grandmother's words, "After I leave, a stranger will come to you. Do what he says." Partly in anger and partly out of obedience, Zhoumin consented, "I am not afraid. I will fight."

"Good," Mandamin said. "Tonight we'll fight." They went into the forest together, selected a clearing for their battle, and stripped to the waist. First they circled one another, looking for weaknesses. Then they grappled. Equal in determination and strength they fought on equal terms, wrestling, punching, pounding, and twisting in order to gain advantage. One moment Zhoumin would knock Mandamin to the ground and the next, Mandamin would hurl Zhoumin to the earth. So the battle went all night until both warriors fell exhausted to the soil. Zhoumin and Mandamin, bleeding and bruised, returned to the lodge to rest.

When they woke, it was evening. Hungry, they made a meal and ate as if there were no enmity between them. After a smoke, they went back to the forest clearing to resume their battle. Again they fought and fought, uprooting small trees and crushing the grass. But despite their efforts, neither of them could overcome the other. Finally, weariness forced them to return to the lodge for rest.

Weak from loss of blood, they woke late the next day, ate and then rested until midnight. Slowly, they made their way back to the battleground.

They fought again, as hard as their remaining strength enabled them. During the struggle, Zhoumin knocked Mandamin to the ground and before the stranger could rise, Zhoumin struck him with his war club. As Mandamin slumped down, Zhoumin plunged his knife into Mandamin's back. Mandamin moved no more.

Zhoumin was immediately remorseful. He wept beside the body of the stranger. Then he sang a song for him:

I do not fear death
My time has come
I will walk the Path of Soul
Back to whence I came.

In sorrow, Zhoumin picked up the body of Mandamin and buried him beside his grandmother. Immediately afterwards he went to the medicine man and related the events of the previous three days.

The medicine man only said, "It is good that you listened to your grandmother. Look after Mandamin's grave like you would your grandmother's"

Zhoumin did as the medicine man instructed. Each day he went to the graves, brought offerings, and gave prayers of thanks and sorrow. One evening in late spring, Zhoumin noticed a strange plant growing in the very center of Mandamin's grave. Never having seen such a plant before, he examined the plant closely, and then ran to the medicine man to report the growth of the strange plant.

In the morning, the medicine man returned to the graves with Zhoumin and inspected the plant, but he was unable to identify the plant. He could only advise Zhoumin to look after the plant and the graves.

As the summer passed the plant continued to grow and by August, the plant surpassed the height of a man. It was slender and crowned by a tuft of hair like a tassel. Once more the medicine man came to see the plant. He plucked open the leaves to decide if the plant were good or evil. He stripped open the wrappings until yellow kernels were exposed. He took a kernel and placed it in his mouth.

"It is sweet. It is good," he said, handing a kernel to Zhoumin.

The medicine man said that the plant was "mandamin, Food of Wonder. You have done a great service for your people. Be glad. You have not killed Mandamin; you have given him life in a new form. By his death, he has given life to the Anishnabeg. You have been rewarded for your obedience and have demonstrated the worth of the Anishnabeg."

"Mandamin" is the Ojibway word for corn taken from "manda," which is wonder, and "meen," which is seed or berry.

Infinite Shades of Red

(The core of this article originated from "Heart of the Thunderbird" - Thunderbird Society - Rewritten by Steve "Stone Bear" Bartha for the WRIC 2003 powwow book. What is described here happened not only in Missouri, but literally throughout every state east of the Mississippi River. After reading this, perhaps you will understand why some of us no longer have the stereotypical features associated with "Indians", and why we now celebrate our "Infinite Shades of Red".)

At many of the powwows that take place throughout this country and, of course, in other countries as well, the question inevitably gets asked, "Where are the "real" Indians?"

In Missouri, many people have Indian (Cherokee, Osage, Delaware, etc.) ancestors, but there are not a lot of full-bloods here. Many ancestors of Missourians were people who escaped during the United States government's attempts to relocate them onto reservations situated within the "Indian territories" that came to be known as Oklahoma. Many Missouri "natives" have relatives in Oklahoma, and may not even realize it. Because there were laws on the books as late as 1976 that prohibited Indians from living in Missouri and from owning property in this state, almost all Native peoples passed themselves off as white if they could, or married white women or men, so the farms and lands where they lived could be in the name of a white person. If they were discovered to be Indian, their property was confiscated and they were sent packing to the reservations. These days, in this state and in many eastern states, Native peoples have long intermarried with those of European decent to give us the "infinite shades of red" you see here today. While marrying for love did not always guarantee that a tribe would remain "pure" for all the generations to come, intermarrying in early Missouri as well as other states meant a Native person might stay alive and live free.

The spirituality of Native peoples has always been important to them, and also caused much strife between them and the government of this country. Those that may have smaller amounts of Native blood than a full-blood, still honor this spirituality today, as well as the heritage and culture of their ancestors, as much as a full-blood does. Even though they may disagree in principle, or think we "sold out" to the Europeans, it still remains that the choices our ancestors made kept most of us alive, free, and off the reservations. While it has been done in secret in Missouri all these decades, today we are truly free to celebrate our heritage and culture, and to practice our spirituality without the constant fear of governmental interference. We dance to honor our ancestors and our culture, and we dance to pray to and honor the Creator. It is our way, whether we were born into this culture, raised in it, or reconnected to it later in life. It is now okay to say "we are proud of who we are", regardless of the percentage of Indian blood we possess.

So now, we are not just one shade, but...

..."Infinite Shades of Red."

(Heart of the Thunderbird 2002) (ReWritten by Steve Bartha - 2003) "Cherokee Pathways"

Mother Corn (A Lenape Story)

Long ago, the Corn Spirit, whom we call Kahesana Xaskwim, Mother Corn, left the Earth. She was angry because some young men had said that they did not believe she existed, and that the people could never lose their corn seed.

So it was that all the corn seeds took flight as if they had wings like little bugs. Everyone's corn was disappearing like this, and soon almost none was to be found anywhere. One man was determined that his wife's seed corn would never get away, so he put it in a deer-skin bag and kept it under his head while he slept; but it too flew away in the form of bugs when the bag was opened.

Now, the corn being gone, people were quarreling and treating each other badly due to a lack of food and all the worries about the coming winter. Finally the winter came and a deep snow fell which covered even the trees. When the Chiefs saw this they said, "The Creator has sent this to punish us," and they cried and grieved for their people so, that the Creator had pity on them and sent a south wind, which melted the snow away.

One day an old man came from the south who said, "The Creator has sent me to help you through your troubles from the snow. Now my grandchildren, I will give you this thing," presenting them with *sisawin*, an oyster, "to put on top of your pipe and to give sustenance to your little children. Strike the ice with your pipe and you will be given plenty to eat." So, they fastened the oyster to their pipe and went and struck the ice with it. Every time they did this, an oyster would appear on the pipe. They made a bag to put them in and soon had filled it with oysters and carried them to their village, where they emptied them into a special house, hanging them up to dry. It wasn't long before they had enough to supply the village for some time.

In the morning the old man took a young boy by the hand and told him, "Come let us go into the middle of the sea and find the Corn Woman. I have come from the Spirit world, to instruct and assist your people." Then away they both went to the sea. After traveling some time on the ice, they came to a hole and the old man took the child by the hand and went down into it. When they got through there was not water, but they saw land all around. The land appeared to be a corn field, but no corn remained.

Off in the distance they saw a house. The old man said, "That must be the home of the Corn Woman. We shall visit her, but first we shall eat." So they took some oysters out of the old man's pouch and roasted them over a fire. After a while, the oysters opened up as they cooked, and a woman came from the house to their fire. The woman asked the old man if he would give her some of their food, as she was so very hungry and it smelled so good and sweet. So he gave her some of the oysters, saying, "Are you the Corn Woman who is called Kahesana Xaskwim, Mother Corn, in the land up above?" "Yes I am Mother Corn, old man. Why do you ask?" said she. The old man said, "I have come to ask you for some seed corn, to bring it back upon the Earth, for the people are hungry and suffering. I gave some people a medicine to get oysters, but a person can get tired of oysters if that's all there is to eat!"

Then the old man said, "Now that we have eaten, we will offer tobacco in thanks to the Creator for this gift of food. Also, we would like to sing and dance for you, Corn Woman!" So, the old man sang and

the young boy danced, and Mother Corn was so well pleased with the oysters and the singing and the dancing that her sorrow disappeared, as if a great weight had been lifted from her heart.

"But why should I let the corn be brought back to the Earth among those who are not thankful for my gift of corn and who take me for granted?" asked the Corn Woman. The little boy pleaded with her, crying, "The people of my village would be very thankful if you would give us some corn to take back to them. Many of the people on the Earth are starving, many of them small children such as myself." Mother Corn could not resist the pain of so small a child and her heart went out to him.

In the meantime, the old man made her some earrings out of the oyster shells. Corn Woman was touched by this gift. She put them in her ears, and they looked so lovely, she was happy and she cried. But it was not tears which flowed from her eyes when she cried. It was corn seed! Corn Woman said, "From this I will give you each a handful of seed corn to take back with you, and I will teach you special songs and dances. When I hear these songs being sung and see the dances being danced, it will make me very happy. I will know that you are very thankful and I will give you an abundance of corn and crops so that the people won't hunger." The old man and the boy each received a handful of corn seed, gave Corn Woman much thanks and back they went to the land above.

When they came out of the hole in the ice, the old man took the child by the hand and traveled on very fast, as the ice and snow were fast melting away. When they got to the village, the old man said, "Be thankful and glad that we have returned. The corn that has been so long lost is now returned to you. It appeared to me as a woman and she said that you will all be well. She gave us these two handfuls of seed corn which I now give to you." When the people heard this they were overjoyed! From those two handfuls of seed corn came all of the corn which we have now.

The next day some people digging in the snow found a great many wild potatoes, and the woods abounded in deer and game. The Spirit woman had spoken true! The people were very happy in finding such an unexpected abundance of food, and said, "We will now make an offering to our Mother Corn who has given these gifts to us!" So they offered her tobacco. They sang the songs and danced the dances she had taught the old man and the boy. The women went and planted the seed corn, and the corn that they harvested was four times as large as usual!

After the corn ceremony in honor of Mother Corn, the old man told the people that it was their duty to hold such ceremonies in thanks for the many gifts given to them by the Creator. He told them that the hard times they had just experienced were a punishment for the wrongs they did to each other, and for their lack of faith and thankfulness, and that from this experience he hoped they would learn to be humble, to realize the dependence that they had on all things for their very existence. It is not wise to take the corn and such gifts for granted.

So, we should always thank Mother Corn for a bountiful harvest, and pray that we have one just as good next year, and that we will all enjoy good health. Mother Corn, the Corn Woman, since that time long ago, has been held to be very close and dear to our Lënape people.

*Taken from "The Grandfathers Speak", by Hitakonanu'laxk
Interlink Books, New York, 1994*

The Corn Maiden and Lucky Hunter - A Cherokee Story

Related by Cedric Sunray

When Wtsiielohino had been populated for some time, all the animals became restless. The different councils of animals pondered the situation. The Deer Tribe came to the conclusion that there was something missing from creations, so it called on the Creator and asked her to complete the circle, and she agreed to what they had asked of her.

One day while the Deer Tribe was patrolling their land, they came across a creature they had never seen before. He stood on his hind legs and had long hair growing from his head. He was the First Man, or Lucky Hunter. The deer hid in order to watch his actions.

When the First Man was put on Mother Earth, he was instructed on how to live by the Creator. She taught him how to use all the parts of the deer in order to eat, make clothing, and fasten his bow with extracted sinew. She told him to always offer tobacco so the spirit of his deer cousins would remain happy. The Creator also showed him how to build a shelter where he could stay safe and warm. He then was left to go out on his own.

Days, weeks and months passed with the Deer Tribe watching the Lucky Hunter intently. They became confused by the way he carried himself. He walked around aimlessly. Even worse, he shot too many deer with his bow and arrows until their population became very scarce. He also forgot to leave tobacco when hunting. He slept every night out on the cold or muddy earth. He never attempted to build a shelter as the Creator had instructed him to do. His walk was clumsy and awkward and he constantly muttered to himself.

He was not leading a balanced life; he truly was a fool.

The Deer Tribe, sensing the problem this new being was causing, called upon the Creator to correct this unfortunate situation.

Things remained the same until one afternoon when the Lucky Hunter laid down on his back for an afternoon snooze. As he lay there resting in the warm sun, a giant selu (corn) stalk grew out of his heart extending high into the sky. The stalk grew higher and higher. As the Lucky Hunter pondered what had happened, he noticed a beautiful woman appearing from the top of the stalk. She was the First Woman or Corn Maiden.

The Lucky Hunter reached high into the sky and helped her down from the top of this fine creation. He instantly fell in love, and she told the First Man that they would now go to build their home.

Before leaving, the First Woman took two pieces of corn, so that she would always remember where she came from.

When she found a place where they would build their home, she planted the corn. They began working on their home. Soon it was completed and they seemed very content. For two years they watched the corn come and go. How they loved to watch the beautiful corn.

Looking out the window one morning, the Corn Maiden and the Lucky Hunter spotted Gana (the Sacred Turkey) nibbling on the selu. They had never known that corn was meant to be eaten.

Their diet became complete once the couple started to eat the corn. The Deer Tribe increased in numbers as the First Woman taught the First Man how to live a true life.

He began to give thanks and walk in a steady way. You see, the woman is the most important of creation, she brought balance to the world.

Years went by and life remained peaceful for them. Suddenly, one afternoon as the Lucky Hunter was chopping wood in the yard, Corn Maiden became very angry. She dashed from the house and ran towards the mountains.

The First Man, in a state of confusion, chased after her, but to no avail. She ran much faster than him. For every mountain he crossed, she would cross three. Finally realizing that he would never catch her, he fell to his knees and asked the Creator to help him. The Creator promised him that she would try her best.

The Corn Maiden ran and ran. Thorn bushes started to appear on her path, but she continued to run without noticing the pain they caused.

Other bushes sprung onto the path of many beautiful colors and fragrant smells. Gooseberries, blueberries, and huckleberries. The First Woman paid them no attention. As she ran she simply crushed them under her feet.

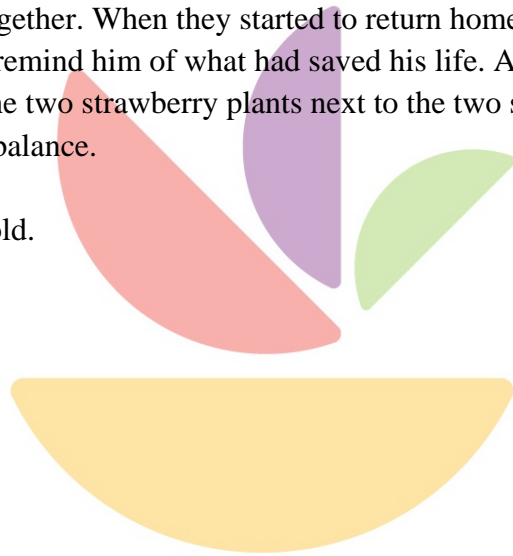
Then bushes filled with heart shaped berries appeared on the path. The smell and sight of these berries caused her to stop. She decided that she would pick some of the berries.

As she gathered, the Lucky Hunter continued running until he caught up to her. As she noticed him coming, a smile came over her face.

She had tested his love and respect.

They gathered berries together. When they started to return home, he took two of the strawberry plants to remind him of what had saved his life. After reaching their home, he planted the two strawberry plants next to the two stalks of selu. The world continued in balance.

And this is what I was told.



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The First Strawberries

Retold by Barbara Shining Woman Warren

In the beginning of the world, ga-lv-la-di-e-hi created First Man and First Woman. Together they built a lodge at the edge of a dense forest. They were very happy together; but like all humans do at times, they began to argue. Finally First Woman became so angry she said she was leaving and never coming back. At that moment First Man really didn't care. First Woman started walking eastward down the path through the forest. She never looked back.

As the day grew later, First Man began to worry. At last he started down the same path in search of his wife. The Sun looked down on First Man and took pity on him. The Sun asked First Man if he was still angry with First Woman. First Man said he was not angry any more. The Sun asked if he would like to have First Woman back. First Man readily agreed he did.

The Sun found First Woman still walking down the path toward the East. So to entice her to stop, the Sun caused to grow beneath her feet lovely blueberries. The blueberries were large and ripe. First Woman paid no attention but kept walking down the path toward the East.

Further down the path the Sun caused to grow some luscious blackberries. The berries were very black and plump. First Woman looked neither left nor right but kept walking down the path toward the East.

At last the Sun caused to grow a plant that had never grown on the earth before. The plant covered the ground in front of First Woman. Suddenly she became aware of a fragrance she had never known. Stopping she looked down at her feet. Growing in the path was a plant with shiny green leaves, lovely white flowers with the largest, most luscious red berries she had ever seen. First Woman stopped to pick one. Hmmm...she had never tasted anything quite like it! It was so sweet! As First Woman ate the berry, the anger she felt began to fade away. She thought again of her husband and how they had parted in anger. She missed him and wanted to return home.

First Woman began to gather some of the berries. When she had all she could carry, she turned toward the West and started back down the path. Soon she met First Man. Together they shared the berries, and then hand in hand, they walked back to their lodge.

The Cherokee word for strawberry is ani. The rich bottomlands of the old Cherokee country were noted for their abundance of strawberries and other wild fruits. Even today, strawberries are often kept in Cherokee homes. They remind us not to argue and are a symbol of good luck.

The Legend of the Corn Husk Doll - Oneida

Many people believe that the Corn Husk Doll became well known after the Western Nations such as Navajo, Hopi, Pueblos were taught to be farmers and were given corn to raise on the lands provided for them.

Not true. For as long as anyone can remember, the Nations along the East coast have been planting corn. Like all Nations, nothing was wasted after the crops were harvested. The cornstalks themselves were used for poles to support crops the next growing season. Shorter stalks were used as walking sticks or kindling for fires. The cobs were crafted into pipes or soaked in fat for fire starters. The Husks however were often used for making dolls!

There is a legend among the Oneida about why the Corn Husk Doll has no face.

"So, long ago when the Creator created everything on this earth, He created it with certain duties and responsibilities. The men were responsible for hunting and fishing and providing shelter for the families, and the women were responsible for working in the gardens and cooking the food and taking care of the children.

When the parents were out doing their responsibilities, the children were being left alone and getting into trouble. The boys might shoot their arrows into the woods and they'd go to find them and get lost. And, the girls were getting into trouble, or they might get too close to the fire and get burned. The parents were having a hard time doing their tasks and taking care of the children, so they went to the Creator and they asked the Creator for help - to make something to take care of the children.

So the Creator made the cornhusk doll, and it was one of the most beautiful creations ever made. The doll had a beautiful face and had the power to walk and talk. Cornhusk doll's responsibility was to take care of the children, so the parents could get their work done.

The Corn Husk doll did a really good job of taking care of the children and taught them many things. Corn Husk doll taught the little boys to hunt and the little girls to cook. Corn Husk doll loved the babies and told them many stories.

One day, a rain storm came to the village. Grandfather Thunder came and he shook his head and rain drops would fall from his hair. Lightning would come from his eyes. Thunder would roar through his mouth. Corn Husk doll gathered all the children into the long house and told them stories. When Grandfather Thunder decided to move to another village, Corn Husk doll took the children outside to play.

Corn Husk doll found a pool of water and when she looked in the pool, she saw her reflection. Corn Husk doll saw she was very beautiful and became vain about her good looks.

From that day on instead of watching the children, Corn Husk doll would only look at her reflection in the water. She gathered flowers to put in her hair and Corn Husk doll sewed seashells on her dress to make herself look more beautiful.

Corn Husk doll was spending so much time looking at her reflection that she was not watching the children. The children were getting into trouble and getting hurt. The parents were upset and told the Creator that the Corn Husk doll was not doing her job. The Creator called Corn Husk doll and scolded her for not watching the children. As a punishment, he sent the Owl to take away her face and her power to walk and talk.

From then on, the Oneida make corn husk dolls without faces to remind us that we must not be vain and we have a duties and responsibilities that must be done.



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The Sugar Maple

Long ago, *Axsìnaminshi*, the Sugar Maple, was suffering from an intense itching caused by grubs and beetles burrowing beneath his bark. Though he had many arms and fingers, he could not scratch himself. The itching became unbearable, and all that he could do was to writhe in discomfort and torment. He could do nothing by himself to relieve his suffering!

Finally, unable to bear the itching any longer, he called out to the squirrels, porcupines, and beavers to help him, but they were concerned only with their own affairs and they did not offer any help. All they did was to offer their sympathy.

Next, Sugar Maple called to the birds. They too, felt sorry for him, but could do nothing.

Then, Papa'xès, Woodpecker, came along, and he said he could help. So, he brought his cousins, Ulikwàn, Flicker; and Titàs, the Downy Woodpecker. All of them worked very hard and finally were able to pick up every pest from Sugar Maple's bark, and his itching stopped! What a relief! *Axsìnaminshi* thanked Woodpecker and his cousins most happily, and they thanked Sugar Maple for the good meal of grubs and beetles.

Years later, Papa'xès was in distress. Not knowing what to do, he at last came to *Axsìnaminshi*, who he hadn't seen in a long time, and he related a sad story to him. Due to a long period without rain, Papa'xès was dying of thirst, and he asked Sugar Maple if he might help.

Sugar Maple, remembering the help he had received from Woodpecker, told him, "Go to my trunk and drill some holes and they will fill up with sap."

Woodpecker flew down and pecked away at the trunk, making many holes. The holes filled up with sap, and Woodpecker drank and joyfully slaked his thirst. Woodpeckers have been drinking from trees ever since.

It was from the Woodpecker, that our Lënape'wàk (Lenape people) learned that trees give sap and can be tapped.

*Taken from "The Grandfathers Speak", by Hìtakonanu'laxk
Interlink Books, New York, 1994*