

# Editorial



## THOSE STORIES AND LEGENDS:

I have always been fascinated with the Native American stories and myths and legends that have been handed down from generation to generation. Each Native culture has its own wealth of stories that their ancestors handed down to their children, and grandchildren. Who knows just how ancient many of these stories are?

The Cherokees have preserved many legends that come down to us from ancient times. Some pertain to normal animals, others pertain to monstrous creatures that can make the hair stand up on the tops of our heads!

Some legends tell of tiny often invisible people that looked like the Cherokee but were only knee high and had their own villages under ground in the hills and mountains. These "spirit people" were of different races and temperaments. One such race was called the Nuñnehí also simply

known as the Little People. They were known to be lovers of music and drumming and dancing. The Cherokees would sometimes hear their drumming at night, but when they went up to the top of a bald mountain where the drumming sounds had been coming they would find nothing but instead would begin to hear drumming coming from another mountain across the way.

These Little People have been seen by a few privileged people and there are some among the Cherokees who believe in their existence even today and some claim to have seen them. The Nuñnehí are mischievous and sometimes play tricks on mortal humans, but they are also kind to children and have helped lost Cherokee children find their way home from the deep forest.

There is one legend about a "Slant Eyed Giant". He was called Tsulkalu. He married a young Cherokee maiden but her mother was so frightened by his appearance that he eventually took his young bride and their child and returned to his lodge located deep inside a mountain.

There is the story of Uktena, the huge serpent that had the ulunsuti magical crystal on its forehead. Only Aganawitsí the Shawnee medicine

man was able to finally kill Uktena and obtain the magic crystal which brought him good luck for the rest of his life.

The giant hawks known as the Talnuwahs were fearful creatures that would carry away large animals and even human beings to feed to their young in the next high up in a cave on the side of a cliff. It took a powerful medicine man to finally get rid of these two menacing monsters.

Then there was the giant leach that sent up a water spout from a deep part of the river in which it lived and caused travelers to fall into the water and never be seen again.

There are Cherokee legends that explain why animals look the way they do or act the way they do. These stories usually have a moral lesson to be learned by the youth. Thus there are stories that tell us why the Possum's tail is bare, how the deer got his horns, why the Mole lives underground, the origin of the Groundhog dance, how the Turkey got his beard, how the Kingfisher got his beak, how the Cardinal got his red color; and many others.

It was during the "cold moons" when there was often snow on the ground in the mountains and the cold winds blew up the valleys that the Cherokee people gathered inside their round and snug

Winter Hot Houses and the elders told these stories that they had heard from their elders.

These stories are worthy of being re-told and re-read even today in this modern fast moving age. The stories give us insights as to how our ancestors lived and thought. We can learn much from stories of Rabbit, of things we should NOT do!

Many Cherokee stories and legends are related in the classic book by James Mooney entitled *HISTORY, MYTHS, AND SACRED FORMULAS OF THE CHEROKEES*.

Nothing captures our attention like the telling and hearing of a good story. Some people among us have special talents as "Story Tellers". These legends add a charm and mystery to our Native culture that never seems to grow old in spite of the technology and materialism of today's society.

Those old stories and legends. I recommend them!

**Rick Runningbear**

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