



Father of Indian Corn

Long ago, a poor Ojibwe man lived with his wife and children in a remote part of present-day Wisconsin. Because he was such a poor hunter, he was not very expert in providing food and supplies for his family.

His children were too young to give him much help, but he was a good man with kind and contented disposition. He was always thankful to the Chief of the Sky Spirits for everything he received.

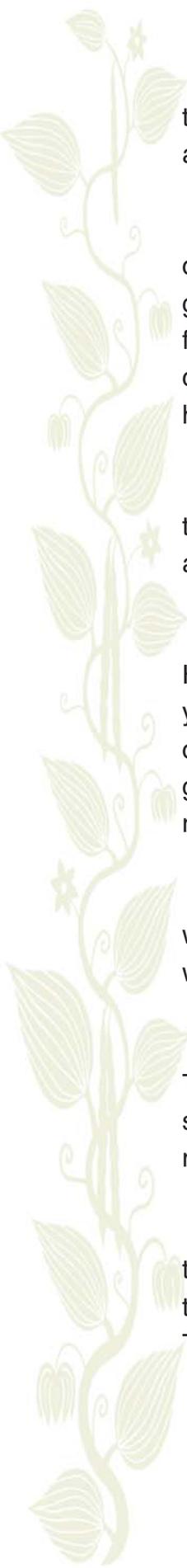
His good nature was inherited by his eldest son. Eldest son had been obedient since early childhood. He seemed thoughtful of others, mild in manner, and always a joy to his family and to his tribe. Eldest son had just reached the age when he wanted to pursue his Vision Quest. Each young Ojibwe boy looked forward to this time of finding his secret spirit through a Vision Quest. This guide would help him for the rest of his life, and each boy sought to learn his spirit name and what special talent would be given to him.

At the first indication of spring, tradition told the eldest son to build a hut somewhere in an isolated place. There he would not be disturbed during his Vision Quest. He prepared himself and went immediately to begin his seven day fast.

For the first few days, he amused himself walking in the woods and over hills. He examined flowers, trees and other plants. This kind of physical effort in the outdoors prepared him for a sound night's sleep. His observations of the day filled his mind with pleasant ideas and dreams.

More and more he desired to know how the trees, plants, flowers and berries grew. Seemingly they grew wild without much help from humans. He wondered why some kinds of plants were good to eat and others contained poisonous juices. These thoughts came back to him many times as he retreated to his lodge at night. He secretly wished for a dream that would reveal what he could do to benefit his family and tribe.

"I believe the Chief of the Sky Spirits guides all things and it is him I owe all



things,” he thought to himself. “I wonder if Chief Sky Spirit can make it easier for all Indians to acquire enough food without hunting animals every day to eat.”

“I must find a way in my dreams,” he decided. He stayed on his bed the third day of fasting because he felt weak and faint. Sometimes he thought that he was going to die. He dreamed and saw a strong, handsome young man coming down from the sky, advancing toward him. He was richly dressed in green and yellow colors. He wore a plume of waving feathers on his head and every movement he made was graceful.

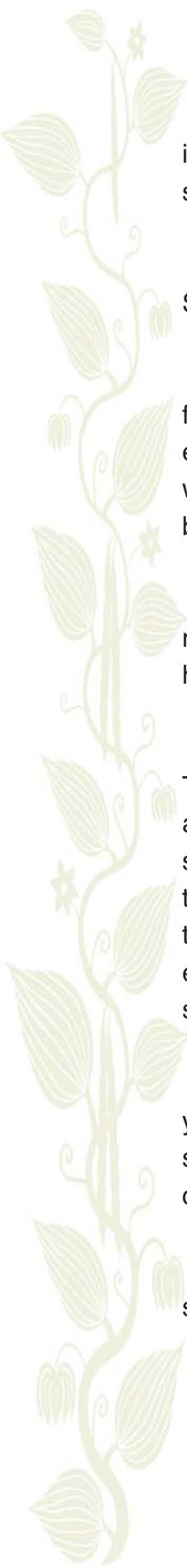
“I have been sent to you,” said the sky visitor. “The Sky Chief who made all things in the sky and on the earth intends for me to be your guardian spirit guide and I have come to test you.”

“Sky Chief has observed all that you have done to prepare yourself to quest. He understands the kind and worthy secret wish of your heart. He knows that you desire a way to benefit your family and your tribe. He is pleased that you do not seek strength to make war. I have come to show you how to obtain your greatest wish. First, your spirit name shall be Wunzh.” (This name means to name someone.)

The stranger then told Wunzh to arise and wrestle with him. This was the only way for him to achieve his sacred wish. As weak as he was from fasting, Wunzh wondered how he could ever wrestle with the stranger.

He rose to the challenge, determined in his heart to die in the effort if he must. The two wrestled. After some time, when Wunzh felt totally exhausted, the sky stranger said, “It is enough time for today. I will come tomorrow to test you some more.”

The next day, at the same time, the stranger appeared. Again, the two wrestled. While Wunzh felt weaker than the day before, he set his heart and mind to the task. His courage seemed to increase, as his physical strength decreased. The stranger stopped just before Wunzh dropped to the ground.



“Tomorrow will be your last chance. I urge you to be strong, my friend, as this is the only way for you to achieve your heart’s desire and sacred wish,” said the sky visitor.

Wunzh took to his bed with his last ounce of energy. He prayed to the Sky Chief for wisdom and enough strength to endure to the end of his quest.

The third time they wrestled, Wunzh was so weak that his arms and legs felt like rubber. But his inner determination drove him forward with the kind of endurance necessary to win. The same length of time passed as in the first two wrestling bouts. Suddenly, the stranger stopped and declared himself conquered by Wunzh.

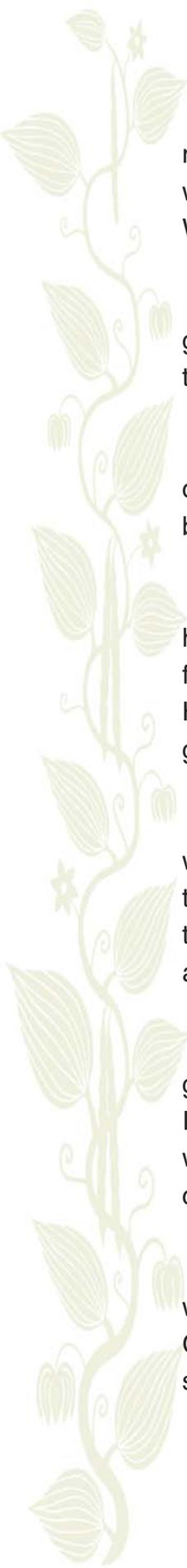
Then the sky visitor entered Wunzh’s lodge for the first time. He sat down next to Wunzh and instructed him in the way he should now proceed to achieve his secret wish.

“Great Sky Chief has granted your desire. You have wrestled manfully. Tomorrow will be your seventh day of fasting. Your father will come to see you and bring you food. As it is the last day of your fast, you will be able to succeed,” said the stranger. “Now I will tell you what you must do to achieve you final victory. Tomorrow we will wrestle once more. When you have prevailed over me for the last time, then throw me down and remove my clothes. You must clean the earth of roots and weeds and make the ground soft. Then bury me in that very spot, covering me with the yellow and green clothes and then the earth.”

On the seventh morning, Wunzh’s father came with food. “My son, how do you feel? You have gone without food long enough. It has been seven days since you have eaten food. You must not sacrifice your life. The Great Spirit does not require that of you.”

“My father, thank you for coming and for the food. Let me stay alone until the sun goes down. I have my own special reasons.”

“Very well. I shall wait for you at home until the hour of the setting sun.”



The sky stranger returned at the same hour as before. The final wrestling match began. Wunzh had not eaten the food that his father had brought, but he was already feeling a new inner power that somehow had been given to him. Was it spirit power from his guardian spirit?

Wunzh grabbed his opponent with supernatural strength and threw him to the ground. Wunzh removed the beautiful clothes as instructed. Then he discovered that his friend was dead.

He remembered the instructions in every detail and buried his Guardian Spirit on the very spot where he had fallen. Wunzh followed every direction minutely, believing his friend would come to life again.

Wunzh returned to his father's lodge at sundown. He ate sparingly of the meal his mother prepared for him. Never for a moment could he forget the grave of his friend. Throughout the spring and into the summer he visited the grave regularly. He carefully kept the ground soft and pliable. He noticed that the more care he gave to the plants, the faster the green plumes grew.

Wunzh concealed his activity from his father. Days and weeks passed. Summer was drawing to a close. Then one day, Wunzh invited his father to follow him to the site of his quest. He showed his father the graceful-looking plants growing there. They were topped with yellow silken hair and waving green plumes. Gold and green clusters of fruit adorned each side of the stalks.

"Father, these plants are from my dream friend," explained Wunzh. "He is my guardian spirit, a friend to all mankind, named Man-daa-min, meaning corn for all Indians. This is the answer to my quest, my secret heart's wish. No longer will we need to hunt animals every day for our food. As long as we take care of our corn gift, the earth will give us food for our living."

Wunzh pulled off the first ear of corn and gave it to his father. Wunzh talked with his father, giving him all of the instructions he had received from his Guardian Spirit. He showed his father how the corn husks could be pulled off the stalks and how the first seeds must be saved for future plantings. He explained



how the ears of corn should be held before the fire only long enough to turn the outer leaves brown, so the kernels inside would stay sweet and juicy.

This is how Wunzh became known as the Father of Indian Corn by the Ojibwe people.