



Little Deer's Responsibility

Back when the world was at a young age, man and animals could speak to each other. At first they lived in peace and harmony. The humans hunted the animals only when they needed food or skins for clothing. Then man discovered the bow and arrow. With this new weapon, he could kill many animals quickly and with great ease. Men started to kill animals for sport regardless of whether they needed them for either food or clothing. Soon it seemed as if man would hunt all the animals to extinction. So the animals gathered at a great council meeting.

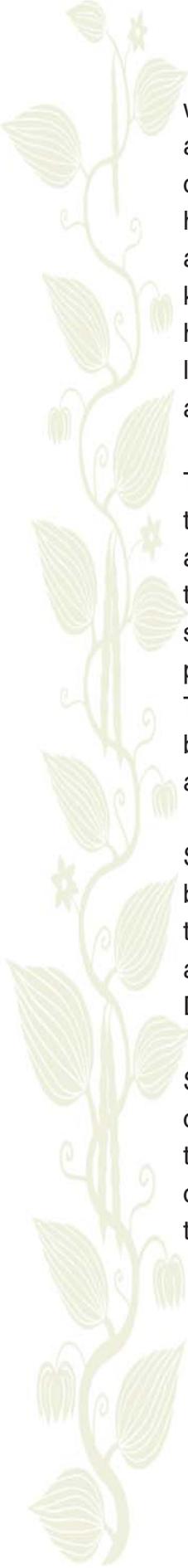
First the bears came together and talked about what man was doing. They decided the animals would have to fight back. "How can we do that?" said one of the bear warriors. "Man will shoot us with his arrows before we can come close enough to kill him."

"That is true," said the chief of the bears. "We must learn how to use the same weapons men use."

So the bears made very strong bows and arrows. But whenever they tried to use the bow, their long claws got in the way. "I will cut off my claws," said one of the bear warriors. He did so and was able to shoot the bow and arrow with great ease and accuracy. His aim was so good that he hit the mark every time he shot.

"That is very good," said the old bear chief. "Now, climb a tree and see if you can spot man anywhere near." The bear warrior tried to climb the tree, but he could not without his claws. The old bear chief shook his head sadly and said, "This is not good. This will not work. Without our claws, we cannot climb trees. Without our claws, we will be unable to hunt or dig for food. We must give up this idea of using the same weapons that man uses." So the bears gave up on the idea of fighting back using human weapons.

One by one, each of the animal groups met. One by one, they could not come up with a plan to fight back. Finally, the last group to meet was the deer. Little Deer was their leader. When the entire group met, he spoke. Little Deer said, "I see what we must do. We cannot stop man from hunting animals. That is the way it



was meant to be. Although the men are not doing things correctly, the animals are not doing things in the right way either. If men do not respect us and hunt us only when there is a real need, they may kill us all. I shall go now and tell the hunters what they must do. Whenever they wish to kill an animal, they must prepare a ceremony. They must ask me for permission to kill one of us. Then, after they kill the animal, they must show respect to its spirit and ask for a pardon. If the hunters do not do this, I shall track them down. With my magic, I will make their limbs crippled. Then they will no longer be able to walk or shoot a bow and arrow as they please.”

Then Little Deer did as he promised. He went out that night and whispered into the ears of the hunters, telling them what they must do to get permission to kill an animal. The next morning, when the hunters woke up, some of the hunters thought they had been dreaming of Little Deer speaking to them. They were not sure that the dream was true. Others though, realized that Little Deer had gifted powers and spoke the truth to them. They tried to do as Little Deer requested. They hunted animals only when they needed food and clothing. They remembered to prepare in a ceremonial way, to ask for permission before killing an animal, and to ask for a pardon when an animal was killed.

Some of the hunters, though, paid no attention to the rules that Little Deer laid before them. They continued to kill animals for no reason. But Little Deer came to them and using his powers, crippled them with rheumatism. Before too long, all of the hunters began to treat the animals with respect and followed Little Deer’s teachings.

So it is that the animals have survived to this day because of what Little Deer did to teach the people how to have respect for the animals. To this day, even though the animals and people can no longer speak to each other as in the old days, the Native People still show great respect and give thanks to the animals they must hunt for survival.