

ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATOR

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Formerly residents of Inchelium on the Colville Reservation, this mother/son team now resides in the Greater Seattle area where Lynn is a writer and Patrick attends high school. He is an enrolled member of the Colville Confederated Tribes.

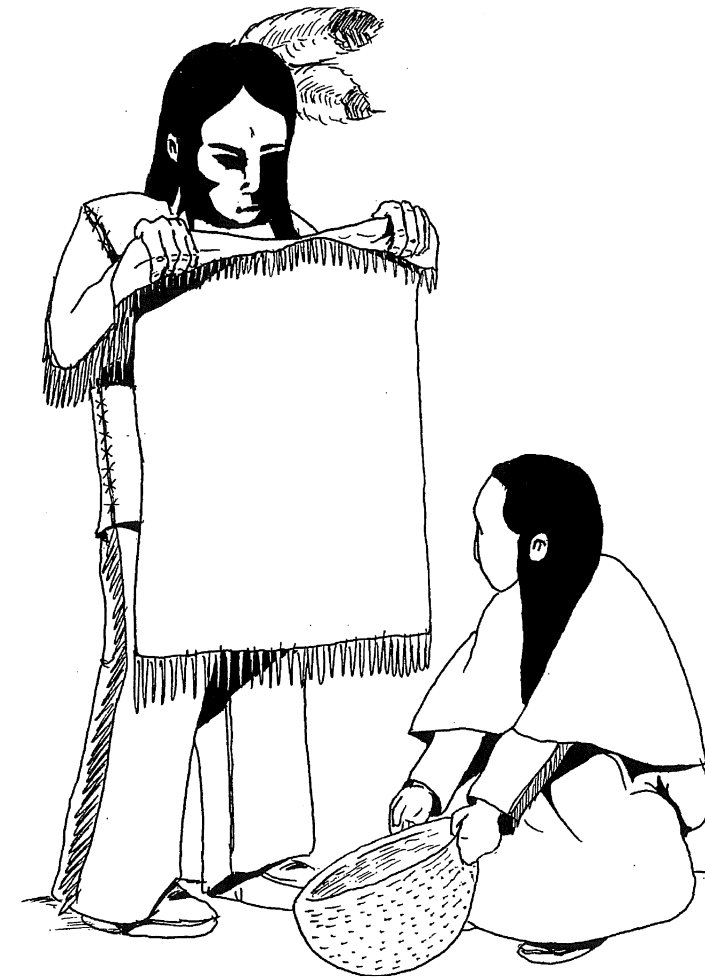


The Great Winter Dance

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The Winter Dance went on for several days and several nights. Through the power of the special wood made into the sacred pole and drums many feats of healing and magic were performed. As a newly initiated singer, the man was required to give gifts to the people. On the last night of the dance, the gifts were distributed to all of those in attendance.

The young Lake man lived to be an old man possessed of great spiritual power and was often sought out in times of sickness and trouble.



Lake Tribe's Song of Today

A Preface

This story was inspired by tales told by (author-illustrator) Patrick's great-grandfather, Eneas Seymour, and great, great-auntie, Christine Quintasket (Mourning Dove), who was the first Native American woman author in the country. We give special thanks to Auntie Debbie Finley-Justus for her invaluable help as cultural consultant on this story. Patrick and his family are members of the Salish, Lake Tribe now part of the Colville Confederated Tribes of Northeastern Washington.

Other dances were also held during the year, such as the Spring Root Festival and Salmon Feast. Songs sung during the Root Festival were tributes to Mother Earth to honor and thank her for providing the people with food. Salmon Feast songs told the salmon that they were honored. The songs sent the first salmon back downstream to tell his brothers it was alright to swim upriver and give of their flesh so that the people might survive another winter. Yet, the powers of the spirit animals were the strongest during the Winter Dance.

Today the Lake and Colville people find and express their songs in many ways. Singing and drumming can be found at many gatherings and celebrations such as weddings, funerals, Pow Wows and Stick Games.

Stick Games bring together families or tribes who align themselves against other bands on opposing teams. One side hides a set of bones, one a striped bone, the other a plain bone. The other side guesses which hand holds the plain bone. Every wrong guess loses a stick. There are 11 sticks, and the team that obtains all of the sticks wins the game.

The team hiding the bones sings and drums to gain power and encouragement as well as to confuse the team that is guessing. Since words cannot be heard above the drums, the person guessing uses hand signals to show where he thinks the bones are hidden.

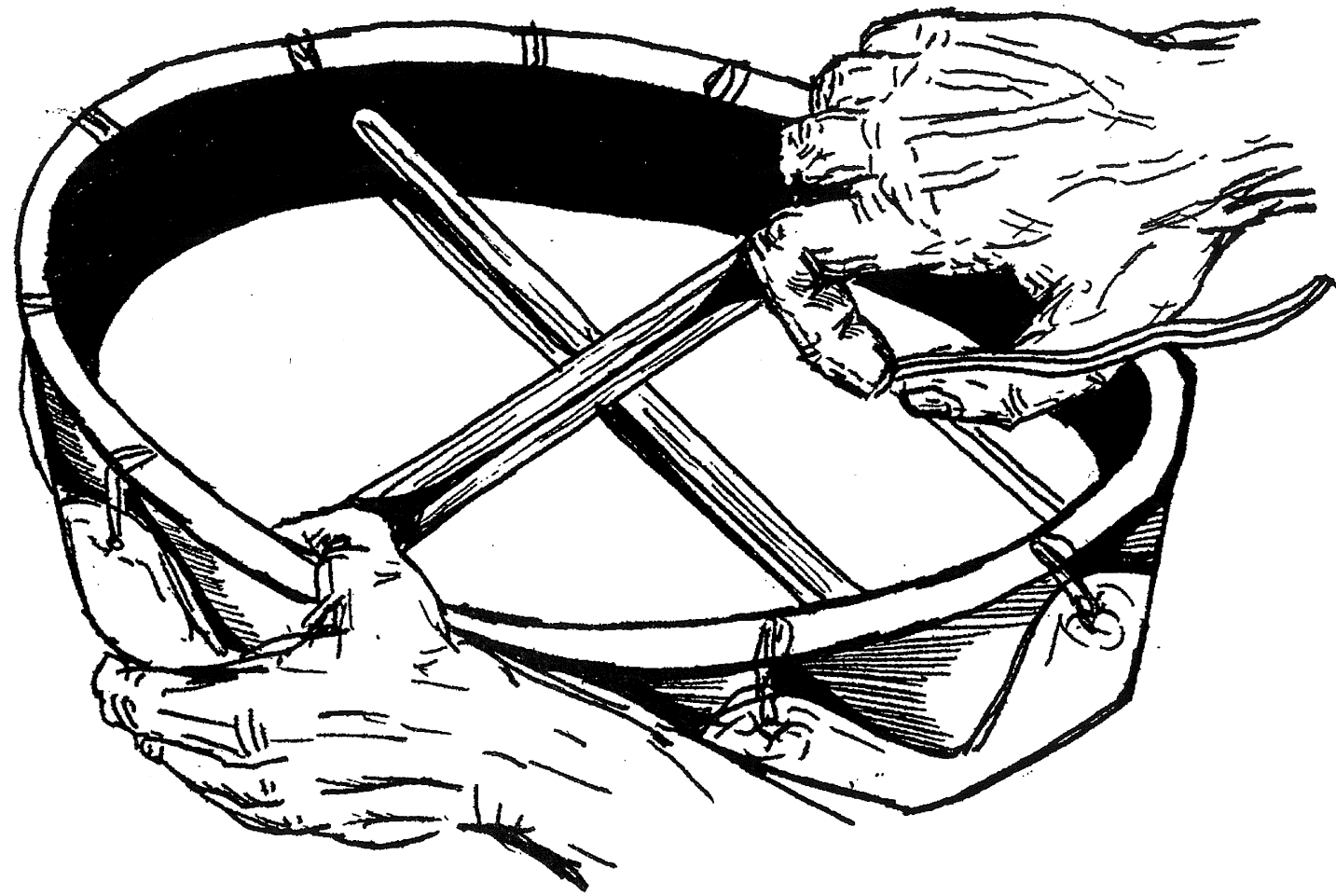
Every Pow Wow begins with an opening ceremony called a “Grand Entry” during which an Eagle Staff flag and the U.S. flag are brought in by veterans who hold a place of great honor in the Indian Community. While the flag is being carried in, special flag songs are sung. The flag pole, like the winter dance pole, represents the earth’s axis put into place by the Great Creator. The dancing and drumming honor the earth mother whose heartbeat is symbolized by the beat of the drum.

Pow Wow dancers honor the drum by passing eagle feather fans over it. Dancers leave gifts for the drummers when they are moved by their playing. If a dancer honors the drums the creator is better able to hear their prayers. When the day’s dancing is finished, the flag is retired in song.

Carriers of sacred items have traditional songs to sing when caring for and bearing that item. Special carriers are entrusted to bear pipes, flags, and eagle whistles.



Once all was ready and the pole had been set up, the man went to it, grabbed hold of it, and began his singing while the others softly drummed and sang along. The people in the room kept their voices low so that the lead singer could be heard above the rest of the singers. When the lead singer shook the pole and took a few steps around the center of the room, the others knew it was a sign for them to begin their dancing. The dancing began slowly at first and grew in intensity. Dancers often imitated animals. Men danced like animals which would help them become powerful hunters. Women sang and danced while asking for powers that would help them with their tasks like berry picking or weaving.



The largest pole was set into place for the winter dance and the smaller pieces were cut and shaped into hoops to make drums for the ceremony. Deer hide which had been cleaned, scraped and soaked was stretched over the hoops, sewn into place with sinew, and dried. Rawhide thongs provided a handle for the drummer to hold his drum while playing it.

Each item is always brought forth in song by its carrier, who has a life-long commitment to care for the sacred item.

For thousands of years there have been songs for healing, prayer, honor and spiritual guidance—songs to be sung at public gatherings and songs which no one but the owner ever hears. Although banned by law until 1978, the Winter Dance Ceremonies, Salmon and Root Feasts continue to be held to this day. According to Aunt Debbie, “the winter dance ceremonies have lost nothing over the years—you dance all night and rest during the day—there is healing, singing, feasting, and finally, the giveaway for which people gather items all year long.” Even in this 21st Century the song of the Lake people continues to be heard.



Down, down, farther and farther went the boy until it was so dark he could no longer see his outstretched arms before him. Holding his breath as long as he could, the boy thought his lungs might burst. Still, he heard nothing, saw nothing. Swimming as fast as his arms and legs would take him to the top of the water, he surfaced. Ashamed, he told his father who waited there, that he had not heard or seen anything in the lake.

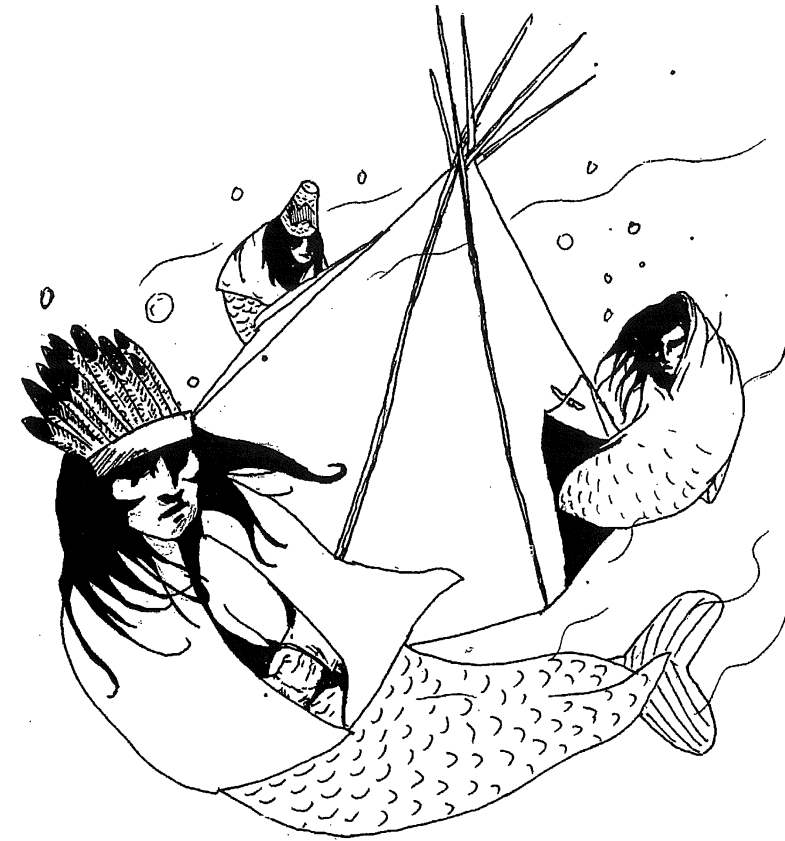
His father took him to another part of the lake and the boy dove as deep as he could into the murky depths. There were no sounds or sights for the young swimmer this time either. Again and again the boy dove into the cold water until he was exhausted.



It took two men to carry each pole, careful of its magic. When they entered their canoes they found that they did not have to paddle. The paddlers held branches from the trees into the air and the canoes slid effortlessly through the water to the camp. None of the canoes stopped until they were beached on the shore of the encampment.



Then, one of two small boys with the group was drawn to a thicket of brush from which he heard a strange song. There he found a group of unusual trees twisting together like a rope and swaying wildly from side to side. One boy yelled for the men to come, that he had found the magic trees. The two boys grabbed onto the trees and tried to hold them still, but they were flung about and barely held on until the men arrived. Once there, the men used up all of their strength and dulled every one of their knives and axes before they were able to cut the trees.

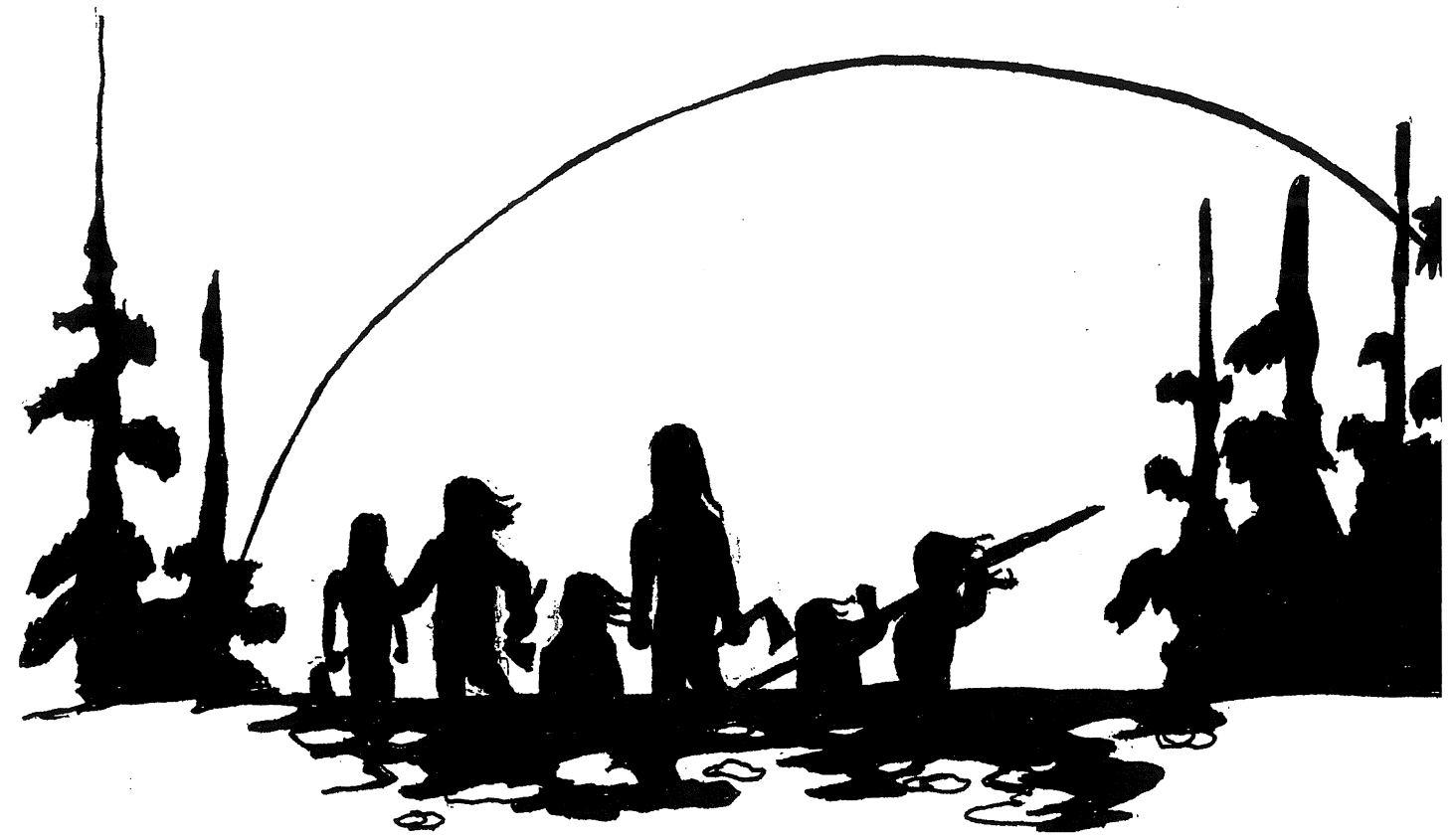


Finally, his father took him to a place where a large rock jutted out into the lake. Down he dove--down, down, down. In the distance the boy heard a strange sound. As it became louder, he recognized it as singing. When he finally reached the lake's silty bottom, he found a tepee full of people singing to him. He was approached by the chief of the people who told the boy that the people were fish. The fish people were giving the boy his song, and from then on they would be his guardian spirits. Whenever he sang his song he would catch many fish in his nets. Through the power of his song he would become a great fisherman.

After that the boy went out to seek other spirit guides who would give him more special power songs. He knew that the more songs he had, the more powers he would possess and this would give him a higher place in the tribe.

Youthful members of the Lake Tribe were sent to special places like lakes or mountain tops to seek their songs. Very young children spent several days and nights alone in the wild with no food or water waiting for their guardian spirit in the person of an animal to give them their song.

If the boy was able to hear the song of a cougar, bear or eagle, he would have great powers as a hunter. The song of a chickadee, beaver or mountain goat could protect a singer from harm and sometimes award great healing or magical powers to the person who received its song. The boy knew that he must not reveal the names of the animals who had given him his songs or he could lose the power of the songs.



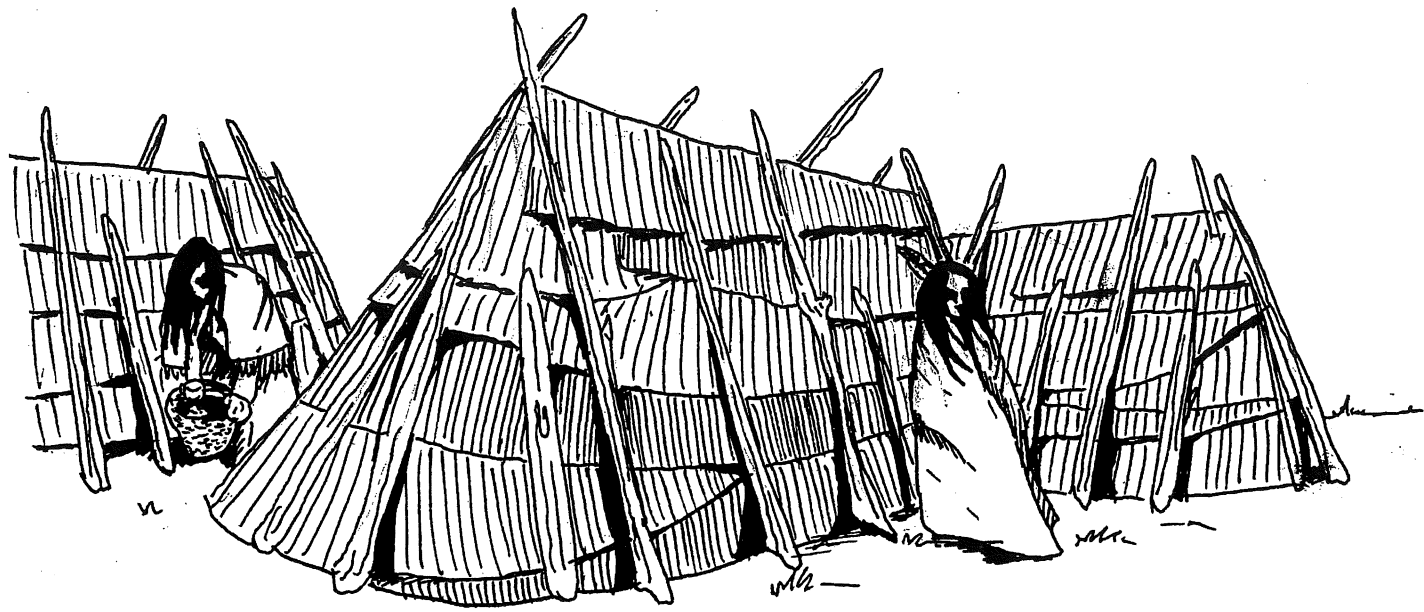
At the gathering, the young man who had called it together was told by his spirit guide to send runners out into the woods to find magic trees from which the sacred pole and special drums for the ceremony would be made.

The man chose six men and boys to go in search of the trees. He did not know where they grew, but the hunters would know the trees by their unusual twisting and swaying motion when they saw them. The men set out down river in their canoes and then traveled on foot far into the forests. They hunted for hours with no luck.



Runners carried the invitation to the winter dance up the rivers and creeks, and into the hills and valleys of the Columbia Plateau. When the runners returned they brought with them people on horseback as well as canoes full of people bringing gifts, food, robes, mats, poles and firewood. For days they came until the river bank was one unbroken row of canoes, and there were tepees as far as the eye could see.





When the boy returned to the village, he resumed his training for manhood. He knew his songs would stay quiet during childhood and return to him again as an adult. When the songs came to the adult, they could be used to call their guardian spirits who would lift up the singer, giving them courage and warning them of dangers, and in some cases provide special powers for healing.

As the boy grew and his song became strong, people from all around began to hear of his powers. When he was old enough and had gained the respect of the tribe, it was time to express his song in public. One day the young man sent out an invitation for a great winter dance gathering at which he would share his song.



Since the guardian spirit animal became closest to its human partner in the winter, this was when it was best to sing one's spirit song in public at a winter dance. The winter dance was held in a big room with a pole set up in the middle. That pole was a sacred object which represented the pole or axis upon which the earth rotated. The earth's original pole had been put into place at the beginning of time by the Great Creator.

Drums were an important part of the ceremony. The heart beat of Mother Earth was represented by drumming. Through dancing and drumming the people honored her.