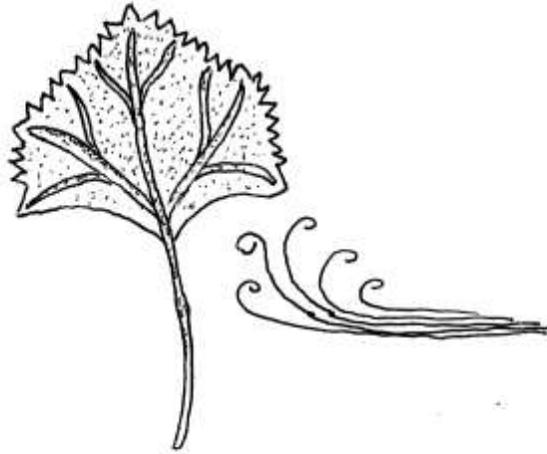


From
Growing Up
A Story for Children of Any Age

The Earth Warrior
As told to Thomas R. Cuba

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The Wind and the Leaves



The Earth Warrior had only recently been given his quest by the Great Spirit, and as he walked down his path, he wondered about the true meaning of his quest. How was he to help the people to see in the old way? How was he to even get their attention?

His head told him that this was not possible. There were too many people of too many tribes. There were so many that were blind and had “granite in their eyes.”

As his thoughts told him that he could not possibly do this thing, his heart was telling him to simply accept the great task without question. For if the Great Spirit had given him the task, would he not also give him the vision to see the path ahead of him? Would not the Great Spirit also help him to hear when he was called?

His heart told him that the Great Spirit would not show him these answers all at once, but only as they were needed. His heart told him to walk on into the mist even though he could only see the very next step along the way. With each step taken, a new step would appear, and he would not become lost as long as he stayed on the path of his quest.

This struggle between his head and his heart tired him. Looking down the path, he saw that he was coming upon a nice shady spot and decided to sit for a rest of his feet. Beside the path there was a large oak tree. Beneath it the prairie grasses had been cropped short by the antelope. The short grass made a soft place for him.

As he sat, the wind began to stir cooling his face. The soft breezes began to puff and swirl, and soon, the leaves of the oak began to move with the wind and strain at their twigs. The older ones began to loosen themselves from the branches of the oak. With a snap, these leaves jumped from the twigs into the wind.

In the air they danced a wild dance. Swooping like the nighthawk, they plummeted and then rose again on the wind. They shimmered in the morning light and fluttered, spinning down to earth as the breeze relaxed. When the wind returned, they would jump back into the air for another dance.

The Earth Warrior smiled as he watched the scene. It was thankfulness that filled his heart. He thanked the Great Spirit for giving him this little bit of entertainment while he was resting his feet. He laughed as the leaves jumped and bounced and drifted off into the prairie.

He marveled at the magic of the Great Spirit that the leaves contained, for a year ago they were nothing more than dirt and the castings of worms. Then their spirits were drawn up into the roots of the great tree and into the new shoots at the tips of the spring growth.

The buds opened in the spring air, and tiny leaves popped from the bark. As the summer passed, they fed the tree with the nourishment in the sunshine they caught.

When their duty had been done, and they had given all they had to the tree, they turned all colors of brown, red, and orange. Now he watched as they danced their final dance and settled to the earth. It would not be long before they were to be eaten by another earthworm.

Perhaps by the next spring, they would once again be tiny leaves stretching from the bark to catch the sun.

As he watched, he drifted off into a light sleep. His sleep was pleasant and unfettered when he realized that he was no longer alone. Standing before him in his dream was his old friend, the Spirit of the Owl.

The Owl spoke to the Earth Warrior, "I see that you have enjoyed the dancing of the leaves. Did you take no lesson from this dance? Remember that in every day, in every encounter, there is a lesson. It is only by learning these lessons that you can proceed down the red road of the Great Spirit."

At once, the Earth Warrior awoke and was startled to see two young people walking towards him along the path. As they approached, he could hear them having an intense discussion over their choices in life. Although he knew not their names, he could see their spirits with his heart. They were the Wolf and the Jay.

They noticed the Earth Warrior sitting in his shade and approached him respectfully, for he was their elder. The young Jay spoke first, "It is clear that you are elder to us and very wise in the way of the earth. We are young, and while our spirits are close as brothers, we now disagree on our

future. We seek your counsel in this matter.”

The Earth Warrior smiled at such respect and forthrightness from such a young one and nodded his assent. But it was then the young Wolf who broke into his story with such vigor and conviction that the Earth Warrior knew his mind was strongly set.

“When I grow up, I shall be the greatest of warriors. I owe this to my father and my father’s father, for warriors have always come from the sons of my oldest ancestors. The warrior is an honorable and much-needed profession.

“It is the warrior that brings in the food to feed the family. It is only the great warrior, like I shall be, who brings in enough game so that many families may share. I will hunt buffalo every season and bring home meat and skins for all to share. When there are no buffalo, I shall bring home deer and elk.

“Even the rabbits and squirrels shall know my name. It shall be an honor to be hunted by me. I shall be so great a warrior.

“It is the warrior who protects the people from the renegade creatures of the forest. I shall protect my mother and my sister and all the people of the tribe from the marauding cougar or bear that dares to enter our camp.”

The Earth Warrior could see that the young Wolf had the conviction and determination brought about by a clear vision of his path and was about to address the youngster when he was caught up short by more of the story.

“I will be the greatest warrior that has ever lived in my village, in my tribe, and, perhaps, even in my whole people. I will be strong and protect all the people of my village from evil warriors of neighboring tribes.

“I will train every day to become strong and wise in the ways of the woods. I shall run ten hills each day. I shall shoot my bow a hundred times each day until I hit a hundred marks for each hundred shots. I shall practice with my knife and my club so that I shall be the quickest and most dangerous warrior of all time.”

Just when the Earth Warrior was about to temper this bragging, the young Wolf stopped and quietly but very earnestly said, “But I shall always remember what my dreams have told me. It is in true strength that we find gentleness, and only in true gentleness that there is strength. And so I shall be a kind and helpful warrior as long as there is no one to fight.”

The Earth Warrior considered all that the young Wolf had said and saw little wrong which the wisdom of age would not correct in its own time.

Just as he was about to ask them what the argument was about, the young Jay broke the silence.

“I do not wish to be a warrior. I will not fight the fight my young warrior-friend seeks. I will not hunt the buffalo. I will be a great chief.

“I will earn the love and respect of my tribe and my people through the wisdom of my advice. Once they see how strong is my judgment, they will plead with me to become their chief. I will lead my people to safety and success. We shall always move camp ahead of the winter storms. We shall always be near the buffalo and the sweet water. Our horses shall always be healthy and well-cared . Our medicine will be strong and good.

“I know that to do this, I must study the ways of the woods. I must make many sweats to see the visions of the future of my tribe. I must sacrifice personal desires and give every minute of the day to meditation and conversation with the elders and the spirits so that I may learn my wisdom from all of theirs taken together.

“I also know not be proud of this wisdom, for it is truly not mine but a collection of the wisdom of my ancestors and my spirit guides. I know that to be proud of my wisdom is false and is no better a fate than eating the poison of the nightshade.

“It is only the wisdom of my ancestors that will let me lead the many warriors of my tribe to camp by the buffalos’ grazing grounds. It is this wisdom that will allow me to set my warriors on the enemies of my tribe such that we lose no spirits but take many from those that would harm us or steal our horses.

“I will be the greatest chief our people have ever had.”

Suddenly, both the young travelers were completely quiet and looking to the Earth Warrior for an answer. Still a bit uncertain, he asked exactly what it was that was creating the difficulty.

“Each of you has seen your path clearly. Each of your spirits is content with your place. Each path is along the red road of the Great Spirit. Just what is the disagreement about?”

They looked at him in disbelief. “Which is the greater hope?” they asked in unison. “Is it better to be a great warrior or a great chief?”

It was then that he understood the admonition of the Owl to always learn from every experience, for it was in his own relaxed appreciation of the Great Spirit’s wisdom that he found the answer for these young ones.

“Come sit with me under this great old tree, and you shall find your answers.” he spoke. As the young ones sat, he began his tale.

Not long ago, as I was walking down a path much like this one, I happened to meet the Spirit of the Wind. At first he was only a gentle breeze on my face, but soon his presence grew strong, and in a burst of dust he appeared to me.

“Earth Warrior,” he spoke. “I am troubled. I have realized that for all my power, I am as nothing. I am but a ghost pretending to be the Wind.”

When I asked what he meant by this lack of purpose, the Wind continued.

“I am nothing. When I move the wind, it is an act of no substance. When the wind moves, no one can see unless I have the help of my friends. When I blow through the treetops, it is the trees that sing. When I blow along the plains, it is the tall grass that waves to the people of the land. When I blow through the mountains, it is the snow that performs the white sky dance.

“When I blow on your face, it is coolness that you feel. When I blow over the waters, it is the waves that place fear in the hearts of men in boats. Even when I blow the great twirling winds of destruction and make the tornado, it is the dust and debris that is seen and feared. I can do nothing on my own accord. I am but a shadow.” Having said this, the Wind grew quiet.

Just as I was about to make an answer to the Spirit of the Wind, we were interrupted by a slowly falling leaf. It fell ever so gently down to the ground between myself and the Wind. It was odd and therefore caused us pause because it floated straight down. It did not spin. It did not flutter. It only fell. As it settled to the path, from it sprang the Spirit of the Leaves.

“Now, in case you don’t know, it is this Spirit that guides all the leaves of the trees as they begin their journey to the earth each harvest time. She gives them color and makes certain to paint each of the leaves just a little bit differently. She brings joy to the trees and teaches us the lessons of completeness in doing so. But those lessons are for another time.”

“Oh, Earth Warrior,” the Spirit of the Leaves bursts out. “I have lost my feet, and you must help me find them. Did you see how it was that I came to the earth just now? I could not dance. I could not twirl. I could not praise the Great Circle and celebrate the completion of the journey of the leaves. It seems that someone has stolen the wind.”

Suddenly the Spirit of the Leaves realized that she was not alone with the Earth Warrior. She turned to the Wind and spoke.

“Great Spirit of the Wind, why is it that you stand here idle when the world needs you? The oceans have become flat. There is no surf. The grasses stand tall and still. They seem unfriendly to the travelers. The peoples of the earth are sweltering in the heat of the sun. But worst of all, all of my leaves are falling to the ground like rocks.

“These gentle small leaves that have worked so hard all summer and have now completed this work are ready to dance a wonderful dance as they leap from the treetops to the earth. You would not deny them such a small pleasure. Would you?” she pleaded.

As the two spirits stared into each other’s thoughts, I spoke to them.

“It seems as though the Spirit of the Leaves has a need of your services. If you did not bring the

cool breezes of the harvest time, how will she know it is time to paint the leaves? Without your breezes and gusts, what will the leaves dance upon?

“And it also appears that the Wind has need of the Leaves. Without the leaves and the dust and the snow, the wind cannot bring joy to the people of the plains. Without someone to dance with, the Wind is just something to get in our eyes. So while the leaves may wish to dance their best dance, they cannot even break from the twig without the Wind guiding them, choosing their time, and flinging them to the sky.”

Looking at the two young travelers, the Earth Warrior continued.

“And so it is with all of our spirits. Each of us must accept that we cannot be both the wind and the leaves. We must choose. Will we be the great warrior and hunter that provides for the people or will we be the great chief guiding the people?”

“We must not think less of our friends for having a different path than ours. Like the wind needs the leaves, a chief with no warriors is no chief at all. Whom would he lead? Like the leaves need the wind, a warrior with no chief does not know when to fight or when to hunt. If both wished to be chief, could this be? If both friends desired to be the best warrior, could this be?”

Each of us must ask if we will be the wind or the leaves. We must never forget that without the other, we are as nothing. We must follow our chosen path with our entire mind, body, and spirit acting as one. We must not let our pride get in the way of our respect for our friends and the choices that our friends ~~they~~ have made.”

As the two young ones departed, Earth Warrior realized that the leaves from the oak had also given him the answer to his own struggle. The leaves did not worry over their fate when they leapt from the twigs of the great tree. They only knew it was their time to jump. And so it was the “granite in his own eyes” that had caused him his struggle. By trying to look far down the path and see what the future might hold, he was not able to see the path at his feet.

It was then that the Earth Warrior knew it was much easier and wiser to see the right thing to do right now than it was to see the future. He knew that to be guided by his sense of right and wrong was to be guided down the center of the red road.

He would follow this quest that was given to him by the Great Spirit even when it seemed to be impossible. All that he really needed was enough sight to see his next step along the path.

He knew that to see his path clearly, he must see it with his heart and not with his eyes.