

SIHA TOOSKIN KNOWS

The Gifts of His People



Charlene Bearhead

Wilson Bearhead

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By Charlene Bearhead and Wilson Bearhead

Illustrated by Chloe Bluebird Mustooch



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I dedicate Siha Tooskin Knows the Gifts of His People to my dad, Bud Wiseman, who loved learning in a way that inspired all of his children and grandchildren. We are all better people because he touched our lives.

—CHARLENE BEARHEAD

We dedicate the Siha Tooskin Knows series to the storytellers who taught us. To those who guided us and shared their knowledge so that we might pass along what we have learned from them to teach children. Their stories are a gentle way of guiding us all along the journey of life.

In that way we tell these stories for our children and grandchildren, and for all children. May they guide you in the way that we have been guided as these stories become part of your story.

—CHARLENE BEARHEAD AND WILSON BEARHEAD



*Watch for this little plant!
It will grow as you read, and if you need a break,
it marks a good spot for a rest.*



Today Paul Wahasaypa didn't burst through the doors of the school and dash across the playground like he usually did when school finished at 3:30. Today Paul's head seemed to be floating in the clouds, even though his feet were still taking him on the same path that he took every day when he left school.

Paul's dad was waiting outside the school like he always did on the days that he got off work early. He watched his son walking thoughtfully down the sidewalk. He knew that Paul must have something really important on his mind. His son didn't even notice him standing there!

“Siha Tooskin,” called Ade as his son walked right past him on the sidewalk, “I walk all this way to pick you up from school and you forget to take me home with you?”

Paul looked up at Ade and laughed. “I was just testing you to see if you were watching for me,” he said. He was actually laughing at himself because he really had not even noticed his dad standing there. Usually Paul’s mom picked him up at school, but it was also a treat to walk home together whenever Paul and his dad got the chance.

“So what problems of the world are you so busy thinking about, Michish?” Ade was genuinely curious. “Climate change, fair trade, how they get the marshmallow inside those chocolate cookies that you like?”

“No problems, Ade. I’m just thinking about what I’ll take to school tomorrow. Today in health class we talked about where different foods come from. You know how potatoes are from the Irish

people and kiwi fruit is from New Zealand... anyway, tomorrow we are supposed to bring a healthy snack that comes from our culture, but I don't know what to take. Usually people ask me if Mom can make bannock when we have to bring food from our culture. Do you think bannock is healthy, dad?"

"Well actually, Michish," Ade replied, "bannock isn't really a food that came from our people. Even though some Nations had their own forms of bread before European contact, we adopted bannock from early Scottish settlers when they came to this land. Yes, we love it and it has become part of our culture, but too much bannock has also contributed to diabetes in our people—probably because it is not one of our traditional foods."

Ade continued, "Now that potato you said was from the Irish, that is something you could take as an example of our cultural food. The white potato is a food that was domesticated by

First Nations people long, long ago—in Peru, I believe.”

Paul looked at his dad with a wide-eyed stare that then turned to a puzzled look. “What is domesticated?”

“It means that people took plants that grew naturally on the land and moved them to a place where they would cultivate and control the environment that the plants grew in. Essentially, that’s what farmers do with their crops and gardens,” his dad explained. “First Nations people





in many different parts of Ena Makoochay domesticated many different foods. Lots of foods that people don't even think about as native to this land come from us...green beans, tomatoes, avocados, squash, artichokes, and pumpkins. Turkey, too!"

Ade smiled. "Those are all foods that grew naturally on the land in different areas before anyone ever thought to domesticate them. That is the way with many things, Siha Tooskin. Our people invented and discovered many things long before the Europeans came here."



“You see that apartment building you pass every day on the way to school and back? People call this modern living but it’s not. The Anasazi people of what is now called New Mexico built huge apartment cities from stone, clay, and pine trees thousands of years ago. Even though people consider that ‘ancient times,’ the Anasazi didn’t have the problems that people have now with heating and air conditioning in apartments.

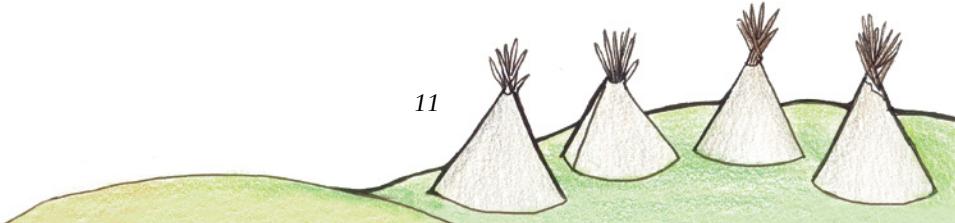
Their apartment buildings had thick clay walls that kept people warm in the winter and cool in the summer. Sometimes the cities were even built right onto cliff walls. The Anasazi built cities for hundreds of people, and sometimes the apartment cities were 5 storeys high. How do you like that for modern living?”

“That’s even higher than this apartment!” Paul was totally amazed. “I knew that our people used to

live in big tipi villages and moved around a lot, but I didn't know that some First Nations lived in cities."

"You know about the tipi villages because that is how our people lived on the plains. We hunted buffalo and moved around to provide food for our families and take care of the land. That was our way of life. There are many non-Indigenous people who think only of tipis when they think about the original homes of First Nations. There were hundreds of different Nations and different tribes on Ena Makoochay before the Europeans came. Their ways of life were different than ours so their homes were different than ours."

Ade explained, "Our people moved to follow the buffalo so we needed homes that we could take with us. The Anasazi did not move so their permanent cliff homes were perfect for them. Some First Peoples on the west coast lived in big wooden dwellings called longhouses. Today most people live in one place in homes that are made



Glossary

Ade	Dad
Ena	Mom
Ena Makoochay	Mother Earth
Michish	Old Man
Mitoshin	Grandfather
Siha Tooskin	Little Foot (siha is foot; tooskin is little)
Wayasaypa	Bear head

A note on use of the Nakota language in this book series from Wilson Bearhead:

The Nakota dialect used in this series is the Nakota language as taught to Wilson by his grandmother Annie Bearhead and used in Wabamun Lake First Nation. Wilson and Charlene have chosen to spell the Nakota words in this series phonetically as Nakota was never a written language. Any form of written Nakota language that currently exists has been developed in conjunction with linguists who use a Eurocentric construct.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Charlene Bearhead is an educator and Indigenous education advocate. She was the first Education Lead for the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation and the Education Coordinator for the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. She is a mother and a grandmother who began writing stories to teach her own children as she raised them. Charlene lives near Edmonton, Alberta with her husband Wilson.

Wilson Bearhead, a Nakota Elder and Wabamun Lake First Nation community member in central Alberta (Treaty 6 territory), is the recent recipient of the Canadian Teachers' Federation Indigenous Elder Award. Wilson's grandmother Annie was a powerful, positive influence in his young life, teaching him all of the lessons that gave him the strength, knowledge, and skills to overcome difficult times and embrace the gifts of life.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Chloe Bluebird Mustooch is from the Alexis Nakoda Sioux Nation of central Alberta, and is a recent graduate of the Emily Carr University of Art & Design. She is a seamstress, beadworker, illustrator, painter, and sculptor. She was raised on the reservation, and was immersed in hunting, gathering, and traditional rituals, and has also lived in Santa Fe, New Mexico, an area rich in art and urbanity.

Transportation, housing, agriculture, communications...there are so many modern conveniences. But are they really modern? Where did they really come from?

Paul Wahasaypa—Siha Tooskin—will learn about their origins and more on his walk home from school with Ade (his father). There's so much to learn about the earliest forms of technology, travel, medicine, and food from right here on Turtle Island. Come along with Paul and Ade to hear all about the gifts of his people.

SIHA TOOSKIN KNOWS

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- Siha Tooskin Knows the Strength of His Hair*
- Siha Tooskin Knows the Catcher of Dreams*
- Siha Tooskin Knows the Nature of Life*
- Siha Tooskin Knows the Best Medicine*
- Siha Tooskin Knows the Offering of Tobacco*
- Siha Tooskin Knows the Love of the Dance*

The Siha Tooskin Knows series uses vivid narratives and dazzling illustrations in contemporary settings to share stories about an 11-year-old Nakota boy.

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