
SIHA TOOSKIN KNOWS

The Strength of His Hair



Charlene Bearhead

Wilson Bearhead

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The Strength of His Hair

By Charlene Bearhead and Wilson Bearhead
Illustrated by Chloe Bluebird Mustooch

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Canada Council Conseil des arts
for the Arts du Canada

We acknowledge the support of the Canada Council for the Arts. /
Nous remercions le Conseil des arts du Canada de son soutien.

HighWater Press gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the Province of Manitoba through the Department of Sport, Culture and Heritage and the Manitoba Book Publishing Tax Credit, and the Government of Canada through the Canada Book Fund (CBF), for our publishing activities.

HighWater Press is an imprint of Portage & Main Press.
Printed and bound in Canada by Friesens
Design by Relish New Brand Experience
Cover Art by Chloe Bluebird Mustooch

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Title: Siha Tooskin knows the strength of his hair / by Charlene Bearhead and Wilson Bearhead ; illustrated by Chloe Bluebird Mustooch.

Other titles: Strength of his hair

Names: Bearhead, Charlene, 1963- author. | Bearhead, Wilson, 1958- author. | Mustooch, Chloe Bluebird, 1991- illustrator.

Identifiers: Canadiana (print) 20190058641 | Canadiana (ebook) 20190058676
| ISBN 9781553798378 (softcover) | ISBN 9781553798392 (PDF) | ISBN
9781553798385 (iPad fixed layout)

Classification: LCC PS8603.E245 S63 2020 | DDC jC813/.6—dc23

23 22 21 20

1 2 3 4 5

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www.highwaterpress.com

Winnipeg, Manitoba

Treaty 1 Territory and homeland of the Métis Nation

I dedicate Siha Tooskin Knows the Strength of His Hair to my oldest son, Storm, the inspiration for the character Siha Tooskin. Your strength and gifts are within you: gifted to you by the Creator. Embrace them and pass them on to your precious children.

—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.*



Paul Wahasaypa's Mitoshin watched with amusement as his grandson carried firewood across the yard. Paul would carefully pick up one piece of wood at a time, inspect it to make sure it was fit for the wood pile, then carry each piece from the chopping block to the storage bin beside the house. As he arrived at the bin Paul would place each piece of wood with great care, as if he were creating a great work of art.

"Siha Tooskin," Mitoshin called out to his grandson with a gentle smile. "Why do you move so slow? You didn't move that slow when we were getting ready to go fishing yesterday."



Paul looked at Mitoshin but he didn't smile back. He only nodded his head to show that he had heard Mitoshin and then kept walking. He moved a little more quickly, but not exactly at the speed of light.

“We have to work faster today,” said Mitoshin. “It's almost time to take you home.” Paul knew

that he had to get back home now that spring break was over. He had to start at his new school the next morning.

“Your mom will not be happy with me if I get you back too late for your first day of school,” Mitoshin teased. “She might make me go in with you to explain to your teacher why you are so late. I am way too old to go back to school, Siha Tooskin.”

Paul nodded. Once again, he did not smile. He just kept hauling the wood to the bin. “Aren’t you happy to go home to see your mom and dad, Siha Tooskin?” Mitoshin asked, as he began to stack up wood in his own arms to help his grandson. “I thought you would be excited to start at your new school and to make new friends. That must be more exciting than carrying firewood around the yard with an old man.”

“I liked my old school,” answered Paul. “I wish my mom and dad didn’t have to move to the new house. I know my mom wants a bigger

house because a new baby is on the way,” Paul said with an understanding tone. “I could have shared my room with the baby. That would be better than moving to a new school. I’d even share my room with Danny, even though he always gets into my stuff.”

Then Paul turned to Mitoshin and his eyes brightened as though a light bulb had actually turned on inside his head. “Maybe I could just stay with you and Mugoshin.”

Now Mitoshin knew something was wrong, because as much as Paul loved to visit he was always ready to go home to see his parents and little brother Danny again after a week or two.

Mitoshin placed his load of wood in the bin and sat down on a large section of white poplar nearby. “Pull up a stump, Siha Tooskin. You must be tired from all of those heavy loads of wood that you carried,” he teased. He motioned to his grandson and pointed at another wood block on the ground beside him. Then Mitoshin’s face

changed and he took a more serious tone. “I would be happy to have you here with me, Mitowjin, but not if you are trying to hide from something at home.”

“What is bothering you, Siha Tooskin? You know us old men can always talk to each other when something is heavy on our hearts or our minds,” he coaxed with his knowing smile.

Paul sat with his head down for a minute as he considered Mitoshin’s words. After a few minutes he raised his eyes and admitted, “I already met one of the boys on my new street before I came here, Mitoshin. When we were moving our stuff into the house the other day I saw a boy playing ball hockey in front of his garage. He was by himself shooting the ball into a net in his driveway, so when I rode my bike past his house I waved at him, then stopped to see if he wanted someone else to play ball hockey with. He looked like he was about my age and I thought maybe he would be in my class at my new school.”



Then Paul looked down at the ground between his shoes. “The boy just made a face at me and said he didn’t like girls. I told him I’m a boy and my name is Paul, so he would know that he could still play with me even if he only hangs out with boys. He just laughed at me and said I look like a girl with my braids.”

Paul looked up sadly at his grandfather. “I don’t want to go to school with people like that, Mitoshin.”



Mitoshin nodded to show that he understood his grandson's feelings but he was not upset like Paul was. "Siha Tooskin..." Mitoshin was speaking in his usual gentle and caring tone. As strong as Mitoshin could be, Paul was always so grateful for the kindness that his voice carried whenever Paul needed it most. "You should pity this boy. You should not hide from him or hate him."

Paul was surprised at his grandfather's suggestion. "You think I should pity him when he made fun of me and hurt my feelings!"

"He does these things because he doesn't know any better, Siha Tooskin," Mitoshin explained. "This boy does not understand how to respect other people. You should pity him and even pray for him. Pray that the people who love him will learn more so that they can teach him to respect himself and others. That is what we have taught you to do, Siha Tooskin."

Glossary

Ade	Mom
Ena	Dad
Mitoshin	Grandfather
Mugoshin	Grandmother
Siha Tooskin	Little Foot (siha is foot; tooskin is little)
Wahasaypa	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.

Where can you find strength when someone disrespects you? And what does having strength really mean?

Paul Wahasaypa—Siha Tooskin—has learned from Ena (his mom) and Ade (his dad) to maintain a strong mind, heart, and spirit. Though starting at a new school can be hard, especially when the kids there have never experienced the values and culture of the Nakota people. Join Paul as Mitoshin (his grandfather) helps remind him how strength of character can be found in the strength of his hair.

SIHA TOOSKIN KNOWS

Siha Tooskin Knows the Gifts of His People
Siha Tooskin Knows the Sacred Eagle Feather
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.

\$11.95

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