

SIHA TOOSKIN KNOWS

# The Nature of Life



Charlene Bearhead

Wilson Bearhead

Chloe Bluebird Mustooh



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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 Nature of Life to the late Ena Gladys Kyme. Her love of the natural world, ceremony, family, and her community inspired us all to do better, to be better people, and to walk with humility on Ena Makoochay.*

—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.*



**T**oday was a day that Paul Wahasaypa had been looking forward to for some time. He wasn't going to ride the roller coaster at the fair. He wasn't going skydiving. He wasn't even going to a powwow with Uncle Lenard. This was the first time in months that Paul was going to have a chance to go for a walk in the woods with his mom.

Some people would say that was totally uncool for an 11-year-old boy, but Paul figured that those people were fools. He knew how much knowledge and wisdom his mom had and he never lost sight of the importance of family.

Paul's mom had decided it was time to take all three of her children to spend time together with their grandparents. Ena had been really busy with baby Laura for the first few months since she was born. Paul didn't mind because he was so happy to have a baby sister, although he did miss all the good talks and learning from Ena. Paul knew, just as Ade and Mitoshin knew, that the women owned half of the teachings. If Paul wanted to grow to be a wise man he needed to learn all that he could from all of his Elders. Plus, Ena was just fun to hang out with sometimes. The part that made today especially awesome was that Ena had brought all three of her children out to spend a few weeks with Mugoshin and Mitoshin for summer holidays. Paul knew that Ena was just as happy to spend time with him while Mugoshin spent some time with her new granddaughter.

Today Danny had gone to town with Mitoshin to pick up oil for the lawn mower and to get



some supplies that Mugoshin needed, so this was perfect. Laura was with Mugoshin and Danny was with Mitoshin, so Paul and Ena could go for that walk along the river, which was something they both loved to do in the summertime.

Paul walked around the back yard for a bit while he waited for Ena to come out. He was really happy to be out of the city. He loved the sound of the wind in the leaves. He could hear the screech of a hawk in the distance. The air smelled clean and the sun felt good on his face. Paul knew it took Ena a lot longer to get ready now that she had three children to look after, but he didn't mind at all. He loved having a baby sister. It was different for him now than it had been when Danny was born. Paul remembered being jealous of Danny and wanting the same amount of attention he had enjoyed before Danny came along. It was almost unbelievable to think that Danny was already old enough to go to town with Mitoshin to help him



pick up oil for the lawn mower. As Paul thought back he suddenly realized that he himself was going to be a man soon. In that case he had better stop wandering around listening to the wind and the birds and carry some of that firewood from the pile by the chopping block over to the bin at the front door. That way Ena would see just how long he had been waiting for her. Yes, he would make this look good.

Paul was on his third load of firewood when he heard the door open. Ena came out with her runners still in her hand. She closed the door gently and looked towards Paul before sitting down on the step to put her shoes on. Paul made a point of swiping his forehead with the back of his hand as if wiping sweat away because of all his hard work. “That should hold Mugoshin for a while,” he said casually as he walked over towards Ena. She looked up at Paul with a smile. “I just got baby girl to sleep,” she whispered. “I don’t want to wake her up before we even get started.” Paul was rather amused. He knew that Mugoshin wouldn’t mind at all because she loved snuggling the babies.

“Come on,” Ena said to Paul as she walked down the stairs and headed in the direction of the woods. “I’ll take you on the walk that Mitoshin used to take me on when I was your age.” Usually when one of his parents said “when I was your age,” that meant it was time to teach him something new.

Paul didn't want to spoil it for Ena by reminding her that he had been on this walk before with her and with Mitoshin. Who knew, maybe the "when I was your age" part meant that there was something new for Paul to learn. Now that would be cool. Paul set the last load of wood down in the bin and hurried to catch up to Ena.



Ena looked happy as they began to make their way down the trail towards the river. "I love it out here, Michish," she told her son with a smile. "No matter how old I get this walk always reminds me of the teachings I got from Mitoshin when I was a girl. These are teachings that still help me in my life every day. The stories and the teachings are what make us who we are. I want you and Danny and Laura to know these things too. You're the oldest so you have a responsibility to help to guide your brother

and your sister. One day you will be a father, an uncle, and even a grandfather. That seems like a long way off, but it will come sooner than you think. These teachings will keep you strong and grounded as you grow up and travel that road.”

Soon Paul and Ena happened upon a clump of tall white birch trees. Ena stopped walking and looked up towards the treetops. “Look at these beautiful trees, Michish. They are so straight and tall. When I was your age I remember that they seemed to reach all the way to the sky.” Paul knew what Ena meant. Now that he was older he was almost as tall as Ena, but when he was a little boy the trees had seemed to actually touch the clouds.

“Mitoshin told me that the trees are like the arms of Ena Makoochay reaching towards the Creator, Waka.” Ena raised her arms to show Paul what she meant about the trees. “He told me that when I see the trees they will remind me to always reach out to Waka for guidance and help to live my life in a good way.”



“Do your arms get tired from reaching out to the Creator all the time, Ena?” Paul asked. “I think I’m pretty strong but sometimes Mitoshin can pray for a loonnnggg time. I don’t say anything but sometimes my arms get really tired. I don’t want him to think I’m a baby, so I just keep holding on and praying harder.”

“No, Michish,” Ena laughed. “When I say ‘reach out to Waka’ I mean with your prayers and with your thoughts. Sometimes we lift our hands to the Creator when we are doing a prayer together, but you can talk to Waka in your mind and your heart anytime, anywhere.”

“Hmmm,” Paul acknowledged with a nod. He was deep in thought about what Ena had just shared with him about the trees and their teachings. It occurred to Paul that the trees must be Ena Makoochay’s arms. “Wow,” Paul thought to himself, “Ena Makoochay sure has a lot of arms. I guess that makes sense because she is everyone’s

# Glossary

Ade	Dad
Black Robe	Some First Nations people used this term for priests
Ena	Mom
Ena Makoochay	Mother Earth
Michish	My son
Mitoshin	Grandfather
Mitowjin	My grandchild
Mugoshin	Grandmother
Siha Tooskin	Little Foot
Waka	Creator or God
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.

# Rocks, grass, trees, birds—what can they possibly teach human beings?

Paul Wahasaypa knows that Ena Makoochay (Mother Earth) gives us many things. On this compelling nature journey with Ena (his mom), we learn how strength, generosity, kindness, and humility are all shown to us by grandfather rocks, towering trees, four-legged ones, and winged ones, reminding us of the part we have to play in this amazing creation. Join Paul and Ena as they experience the beautiful nature of life.

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## SIHA TOOSKIN KNOWS

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*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.

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