

SIHA TOOSKIN KNOWS

The Love of the Dance



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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 Love of the Dance to my little Grass dancer, my son Colt. May the Creator guide your steps in this beautiful dance we call life.

—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.*



“**D**on’t worry,” Paul Wahasaypa assured his friend Jeff as he pressed the down button to open the truck window. “You don’t have to know exactly where the powwow grounds are when you are going to a powwow. You just need to listen for the sound of the drums.”

Paul leaned closer to the open passenger window and tilted his head a little, as though that would help him hear better. “Can you hear it?” he asked as he turned to look over his shoulder at Jeff, who was sitting in the back seat.

Jeff nodded in agreement. “It’s over there,” he said as he pointed over Paul’s shoulder towards the sound of the beating drums.

Uncle Lenard smiled to himself as he turned the truck to head down the road that he knew would lead to a field full of tents, campers, and vehicles. He was amused by his nephew's scouting ability. He was happy to see how excited the boys were about going to the powwow. Uncle Lenard and Paul always enjoyed travelling to powwows together but this one was special. It was Jeff's very first powwow.

Jeff and Paul had become friends right from the start when Paul arrived at his new school after spring break. The two boys were in the same class. They were partners on their science fair project and played baseball together after school. Now that they were on their summer break Paul wanted to share some of his culture with Jeff.

Jeff had seen pictures of Paul in his regalia when he visited his friend's house. Their teacher Ms. Baxter had even read their class a book about the powwow. But Jeff really wanted to see a powwow for himself. He was thrilled when Paul's

Uncle Lenard invited him to spend the weekend camping with them at the powwow. Jeff's parents agreed that this would be an amazing opportunity for their son and now he was actually here.

As soon as Uncle Lenard parked the truck Paul jumped out and flipped his seat forward so that Jeff could jump out too. Uncle Lenard walked around the truck to open the tailgate and Paul was right there to help. Jeff stood watching the flurry of activity all around him. His ears were filled with the clank, clank, clank of bells and the rattle of deer hooves as dancers walked around their camps getting ready.

Jeff heard the thunder of drums, the buzz of people talking, and the sound of children laughing. And over all of the sounds the voice of the powwow announcer echoed through loudspeakers. “Drummers...drum roll call in 45 minutes. Dancers...get ready...just 45 minutes to drum roll call and Grand Entry will start right at 7:30.”



“Mi-tooshka,” called Uncle Lenard. “I’ve pulled the gear out of the truck here. You guys can put up the tent and unpack some of the stuff before you get dressed. I’m going to go register



us. You better move fast if we are going to make Grand Entry.”

“Come on!” Paul called out as he motioned to Jeff to follow him to the back of the truck. He pulled

the curled-up tent onto the flat open space beside the truck and began to roll it out on the ground.

“We don’t have to put everything away right now,” he explained to Jeff. “Just help me set up this tent. We’ll throw the blankets, mattresses, and backpacks in here for now. The powwow will go late, so at least we can set this up so we have a place to change. If we’re too tired we’ll just make our beds and go to sleep when we get back. We can set up the rest of the camp when we wake up in the morning.”

Jeff quickly pulled one corner of the tent out and pegged it, while Paul did the opposite corner. He was excited to be a part of anything to do with the powwow, especially after hearing Paul talk about it so much. Jeff was also pleased with himself because he knew what Grand Entry meant, thanks to the stories Paul had shared with him.

“You better get dressed,” Jeff suggested to Paul as they tied the last anchor rope to stretch out the awning on the tent.

“I’ll put the stuff in the tent while you get ready. We don’t have much time.”

By the time Paul had put his regalia suitcase in the tent Uncle Lenard was stepping inside with his own bag. “You’d better hurry up, Siha Tooskin,” Uncle Lenard directed his nephew with a smile. “You don’t want to be dancing with the tiny tots at the end of the line.”

“I know,” answered Paul with a sideways grin. “If I’m running at the last minute to catch up with the other Grass dancers then people will know for sure that I’m your relative.”

Uncle Lenard laughed out loud at his nephew. The two of them loved to tease one another.

As Paul and his uncle were getting dressed in their regalia and preparing for Grand Entry, Jeff was making a few trips between the truck and the tent with armloads of blankets, pillows, mattresses, and duffle bags. All the while he could hear the

powwow announcer calling out to the dancers between drum groups as they responded to the drum roll call.

“That’s it,” he announced as he set the last bag just inside the tent door. “I’m ready to go.”

“You might as well wait for us,” Uncle Lenard replied. “We’re almost ready. You can walk over to the arbour with us. I already set up our lawn chairs when I went to register. I’ll show you where they are so you can go sit down when we line up for Grand Entry.”

“Sounds good,” Jeff answered. He was trying to sound calm and cool. He could hardly contain his excitement but he was so glad that Uncle Lenard had brought some chairs. He had wondered where he was supposed to sit or if there was something specific he was supposed to do while he was watching the dances. He wanted to see and hear everything.



As the three walked towards the arbour Jeff was continually amazed by the beautiful regalia that the dancers wore. Even the smallest dancers had such detail in their outfits. There was so much to see and hear, but Jeff was trying hard to pay attention to where Uncle Lenard would direct him to sit. As they approached the arbour, Uncle Lenard motioned towards three lawn chairs in



Glossary

Eeshta ta	Big eyes (eeshta is eyes; ta is big)
Ishawin	Old man
Mi-tooshka	My nephew
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.

Thundering drums, rattling hooves, clinking jingles—come along with Paul, Jeff, and Uncle Lenard to the powwow!

Paul Wahasaypa—Siha Tooskin—has invited his friend, Jeff, to a powwow. It's Jeff's very first powwow, and is he ever nervous! What if he says or does the wrong thing? Grass dancers, Fancy Shawl dancers, Chicken dancers—what does it all mean? Follow along as Jeff learns all about the dances and their beautiful traditions. See you at the powwow!

SIHA TOOSKIN KNOWS

- Siba Tooskin Knows the Gifts of His People*
- Siba Tooskin Knows the Sacred Eagle Feather*
- Siba Tooskin Knows the Strength of His Hair*
- Siba Tooskin Knows the Catcher of Dreams*
- Siba Tooskin Knows the Nature of Life*
- Siba Tooskin Knows the Best Medicine*
- Siba Tooskin Knows the Offering of Tobacco*
- Siba 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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