
NUMU TEKWAPUHA NOMENEKATU NEWSLETTER

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The Comanche Language & Cultural Preservation Committee

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INTERNET SITES WITH COMANCHE INFORMATION

A lot of web sites are brought to our attention, and some are worthy of being passed along to you. Here are some recent ones:

www.texasindians.com: This web site is geared towards children and has some of Catlin's drawings featured. One thing of interest was some Indian recipes, one making a stew using yellow jacket nests, and another told how red dye was made using bugs.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/comanche>: this site had a lot of information, but I saw some information that was not accurate.

WINTERTIME STORIES

Wintertime is the traditional time for Comanche story telling, so we have some old stories that we hope you will enjoy reading. The stories come from different sources and we note each source.

MARY POAFPYBITTY NIEDO

(*From the Doris Duke Collection, June 15, 1967. Interview by David E. Jones.)

THE WATER BIRD

Jones: You were telling me that you knew some stories about the water bird. Could you tell me those?

MARY: Yeah. This water bird, it's a black one. It's got (a) long tail, about that long, (indicates approximately 13 inches) And there's eight or twelve of them (feathers) in that tail and they

about that narrow, (indicates approximately one inch) and they're long. Did you ever see a magpie?

Jones: Yes.

MARY: It looks just like that. The body of this water bird is about that narrow and long.

Jones: That's just about two inches wide.

MARY: And it's real narrow - - long tails and the head comes up like that. (indicates a long point.) Small head and bill about 3 inches long, and it's sharp and when you open their mouth it's about that big (approximately 2 and 1/2" from top tip of bill to bottom tip.) It's got little feet, about one and a half inch long. It dives in the water- - it dives under the water and comes out way out there somewhere. That's why they call it the water bird.

Jones: Where does it come from? Is it around here?

MARY: (It) comes from Florida. There's some up here at the lake, Lake Elmer Thomas, up here at Mount Scott.

Jones: How did the people here find out about the water bird in Florida?

MARY: There was some here all the time, way back in years. Right below Mount Scott, they used to have a big river going through there. You seen that, Medicine Creek?

Jones: You said Mount Scott?

MARY: Yeah, Mount Scott, this mountain over here. There used to be a bunch of Indians over there and they seen them water birds there. They took them and took their feathers, some of

them, and they make fans out of them. But this one man who started it, he got the tail feathers and he doctored with them. When you hear a water bird, out there in the creek, they sound like they whistle real loud and make a pretty noise, you know. And this man he whistles like this water bird and just cry like the water bird. So he got those tail (feathers) of that water bird and went and doctored with it. Like I said, he just fanned them out like this (and) put over burning cedar and he doctored with it. That tail of that bird was really powerful, it got people well.

He start doctoring with that, and up till today, anybody got water bird (feathers), they ain't going to handle it and treat it rough, they going to take care of it. They have a box for it, they put it in there and they keep it. And (when) anybody's sick, all the people that got feathers, they all in the tipi towards morning and they take them out and then they all fan each other with their feathers. The water bird, you might say, it's got a power, it's got a medicine in that feather that could get people well. You fan them with it. That water bird's like that. And you know, it's scarce. That feather was blessed to the Indians. And they go in and sing and drum in the tipi. When anybody's got that water bird feathers, he just goes around and fans those people that are sick and they get well. That's the way those old people used to think about that bird. They think it's a wonderful bird, you know, cure anybody. That's the way they look at that bird.

Jones: Do they pray to it in the peyote meeting?

MARY: No, they don't pray for it. They just sing and fan themselves with it. They don't pray for it.

Jones: How did it get the power in its feathers to cure people?

MARY: I don't even know how they got that. But me, I got an eagle feather, because I haven't got no water bird feathers.

Jones: Does anybody around here have water bird feathers?

MARY: I don't even know, there's a lot of them in Florida. They just like magpie. The people that live down there just kill them and throw them away on the road. They kill them out because they're too thick up there. They ruin their crops, and pick on their peaches or oranges. The people in Florida, they don't like it. They kill them birds. But when an Indian kills that bird, they go through a lot of things to keep that bird. They pray and smoke the feathers. Chief's got to give that feather before they use it in the tipi. When the owner of the feathers die, they get this feather and they build a fire outside and they put cedar on and they smoke those feathers before they use it again. Whatever (illness) that man had, the smoke just drive it all away from those feathers. That's how I believe. Because that's the way we believe in it.

There was some folks over here a week ago last Saturday. A man that had feathers, a feather outfit that he danced with, his whole costume - - he died and we were over there. They built a big fire and when it went down to coals, they smoked that whole outfit that he had and his feather-box, what we call it. It's got his gourd and drum stick and feathers in there that he used in the peyote meetings. They smoked all of that and now it's ready to be used again. They have to do that, that's the way we do. It's like anybody got feathers -- if they die, we got to smoke it before they use those feathers again. That's the way they got it fixed like that.

The following story is from Trickster Tales From Prairie Lodge Fires, as told to Bernice G. Anderson by Maunkee Alice Blackbear Tahbone, Kiowa. See the October 2010 issue for some history of this publication.

HOW SAINDAY BROUGHT THE BUFFALO

At a certain Long-Ago Time the people could not find any buffalo herds when they went hunting. There was hunger and a need for buffalo hides for teepees, clothing and bedding.

One day Sainday was coming along on one of his endless journeys. When he saw how hungry and cold his people were and that the children were taking no interest in their games, but just sitting around shivering, he knew he must get busy and do something to help them. Sainday did have pity in his heart, sometimes.

Being a Medicine Man as well as Trickster, Sainday sensed that something out of the ordinary was wrong. It was true they were having cold weather earlier this year, but it was still autumn. The grass was green, and the waterholes on the prairie were full. Something strange was going on. Sainday kept his eyes and ears open while he continued to call upon his Power to help him find the reason for the disappearance of the buffalo.

One day as he was coming along his attention was drawn to a little girl playing under a lone cottonwood tree at the edge of the village. What he noticed, especially, was that she was playing – all the other children of the village were too listless to move. Next he observed that the girl's body was plump, and her eyes sparkled. "Ummm!" thought Sainday. "There is something queer about this! I should find out where this child lives." Sainday watched the little

girl and discovered that she and her parents lived just beyond the village not far from the cottonwood tree. He learned, too that they did not mingle with the other people of the tribe and never invited anyone to their home.

There was much to know. The child's father, a bird-man named Mah-Saw-Tih, or White Crow, had ordered his wife to keep a close watch over their daughter; she was not to play with any of the village children nor wander far from home.

The villagers did not like White Crow's aloofness, nor the expression in his cold eyes. No one tried to make friends, which did not displease White Crow, for his heart held a secret he did not want anyone to discover.

Because Crow Man noticed the head chief of the tribe looking at him with questions in his eyes, Crow Man told his wife one sun he was going hunting with other men of the tribe. "They don't like me," he said, "but they will not object to my going along."

"But why do you bother to go hunting when we have all the meat we can eat?" his wife asked.

This made Crow Man look around quickly to see if anyone had been near enough to overhear. He cautioned his wife to guard her tongue and whispered, "I go on hunting trips to throw off any doubt the others may have of me. Goodbye, now! Keep our child close to the lodge while I am away." Then he half-flew, half-walked to join the hunting party.

When Sainday saw White Crow among the hunters he said to himself, "This is the chance I've been waiting for!" He changed himself into a small dog and scampered to where the Crow child was playing.

Upon seeing the puppy the Crow girl ran and gathered it into her arms. "Oh, Mother!" she called, "See! I've found a playmate!"

When Crow Man came in from another meatless hunt and saw the puppy, he ordered his daughter to get rid of it. He, too, possessed medicine power, and knowing Sainday's reputation for trickery, he sensed right away that it might not be a real dog. But his daughter begged so hard, that White Crow finally agreed to let her keep the puppy if she would never take it into the teepee.

Being told not to do something always made the little Crow girl want to do it. The next time her father went hunting and her mother had gone to the creek for water she carried the puppy into the teepee. This was what Sainday had been hoping for. He was sure the secret of NO BUFFALO was to be found in White Crow's lodge.

The first thing Sainday noticed was the fireplace. As all lodge fires are, it was in the center of the teepee, but instead of building the fire on the ground as other women did, White Crow Woman had been building it on a slab of rock which could be seen through the scattered ashes. "Why all this?" asked Sainday of himself. He did not have to wait long to learn the answer. The little White Crow girl ran over and tugged at the slab until she managed to pull it aside.

Sainday-the-puppy peered down into the dark hole she had uncovered and saw that it was an entrance to a tunnel. But before he had taken more than a glance the girl picked him up and held him over the edge. "See, Puppy," she said, "this tunnel lead to where we keep our buffalo and other animals. We have

all the fresh meat we want. We don't have to go hungry, as other people do."

Sainday acted as if he were afraid of falling into the hole. This amused the Crow girl, and she laughed gleefully and began to tease Sainday-the-puppy by pretending to drop him. He trembled and giggled and after a time squirmed around so that he could jump out of her arms and land on his feet. Before she could catch him, he scrambled down into the tunnel.

"Oh, Mother, Mother!" she screamed, as White Crow Woman came in with the jars of water from the creek. "My puppy jumped into the big tunnel!"

Crow Woman hastily set her jars on the floor and ran to the uncovered hole. As she started to scold her daughter for disobeying, they heard a rumbling sound like thunder under the ground. The woman knew it was the thundering of hundreds and hundreds of hoofs. "Run! Run!" she screamed. "Get out of the way or we will be trampled underfoot by the buffalo!"

Sainday-the-puppy had found the buffalo and was driving them out: big ones, fat ones, lean ones, young ones, old ones. "No wonder the hunters have been returning empty-handed!" he muttered. "No wonder people were crying for food and old people were starving." In buffalo language – for Sainday could speak the language of every creature – he shouted, "Go up through the tunnel. Scatter out! Scatter to the four winds!"

He found elk, deer, antelope, rabbits, and fowl, too, "Scatter to the four winds – all of you!" he shouted in their own languages. They knew Sainday's voice and they obeyed.

Sainday knew White Crow Man would be in a rage when he saw the buffalo herds clambering out of his

tunnel and fanning out across the plains. And he was sure the selfish fellow would know where to put the blame. Sainday had to do some fast thinking to save himself from Crow Man's own medicine power.

When the buffalo began reappearing on the trails overgrown with grass, White Crow knew his suspicions had been right. "That puppy was Sainday! I knew it! Knew it!" he croaked angrily in his throat as he mounted the air, being half man, half crow. He flew like the wind back to where his teepee had stood. "I'll fix Sainday for this! He must be down there yet for the buffalo and other animals are still pouring out of the tunnel!"

The hunters were grateful to Sainday. They knew it was he who had brought back the buffalo. They had missed him but they knew now, what he had been doing. They quickly shot enough buffalo to feed their hungry families and returned to the village where the women were talking excitedly about what was happening north of the village. "Look!" They pointed with their chins, as all Kiowa do. "There seems to be no end to the herds!"

"There will be an end," said the hunters, "and that's where Sainday will be!" They were right. Sainday was at the end of the herds. But it would be the end of Sainday, too, if he did not think of a way to save himself.

When Mah-Saw-Tih, White Crow, reached the opening of the tunnel he put an arrow in his bow and waited for Sainday to come out either as himself or in the form of the puppy. But Sainday changed himself into a cockleburr and hid in the thick, matted hair of the last buffalo to come out of the tunnel.

Out over the plains this old buffalo went to join his brothers. And Sainday went

along, as a cocklebur in the matted hair near his hind hoof—leaving White Crow Man behind. All day and all night White Crow waited beside the hole in the ground, his bow and arrow aimed at the opening.

That was a good trick Sainday played this time!

SAINDAY and WHIRLWIND MAIDEN

Sainday was coming along in Pi-gih, Hot-Sun-Weather. He paused along the dusty trail to wipe sweat from his brow and kneel on one bony knee beside a river to dip his broad hand in for a drink. The water at the big bend of the river was always clean and mirror-clear. Sainday liked to look at himself down there and listen to the river talking to itself. This time he decided to lie down for a brief rest.

The chatter of the birds in the tree above Sainday and the river-talk were company for him because he could understand and speak their language. Lying there he fell asleep. But soon he was awakened by a swishing and whirling, swishing and whirling sound. Sitting up, he felt as if his head were whirling, too. Then he saw the cause of it all; a tall, slim maiden with unbound hair that reached down to the ground was swishing and whirling about.

The maiden was having such a good time dancing that Sainday thought he would like to join her in her strange dance. Because he didn't know her name, he called, "Good day to you, lively maiden! What is your name and where are you going?"

"My name is Whirlwind. I am going nowhere in particular, only dancing about and stirring up dust to make folks like you ask questions."

"Will you teach me to dance like that? I'd like to whirl along with you

wherever you go. I get lonesome always traveling alone.”

“Oh, you couldn’t do this dance without holding onto me all the time,” she answered. “Only whirlwinds can travel in this manner.”

“Well, that is all right. I think I would enjoy traveling by air; my feet get tired of walking all the time.”

“Very well, then; it shall be as you ask,” said the Whirlwind Maiden with a funny kind of laugh. “Take hold of my sash and hang on tight!”

Sainday did. And soon they were going up...up...up into the air. They whirled round and round in a cloud of trail dust and swirling leaves, stirring up more dust and more leaves. Yes, Sainday was coming along, he was coming along with the Whirlwind Maiden, Ma-Toy-Gah-Mah. She was never still for a moment except when she took a brief rest on a cloud-bed. Then, because there wasn’t room for Sainday, he had to dangle there, holding on as best he could until Whirlwind was ready to start out again.

Never had Sainday imagined such a experience. Traveling with Whirlwind wasn’t nearly the fun he had expected it to be. For one thing, Whirlwind sometimes dipped so low Sainday scraped treetops and got scratched by thorns and jagged branches. Often they missed a ragged cliff by mere inches.

Sainday found it harder and harder to hold on to Whirlwind. Finally he quit trying and fell with a thud to the ground. As he landed he was sure he heard Whirlwind give a faint swish of laughter. Rubbing his bruises and putting herbs on his scratches, he said aloud, “Never again will I ask to travel by air! From now on my feet will take me wherever I want to go.” With a sigh of relief he watched Whirlwind dance a zigzag

pattern across the prairie and out of sight around the End-of-the-Mountains.

WHY ALL PRAIRIE DOGS ARE BROWN

Sainday was coming along. His giant feet knew every trail in the prairies and in the hill and mountain country. Suntime after suntime he wandered about looking for animals or birds to talk with, to play tricks on, or to help – whatever whim seized him. What an appetite all that walking gave Sainday.

One sun, Sainday came to a prairie-dog village. Prairie dogs of every color were scampering about, diving in and out of their holes or sitting on their mounds and wagging their tails back and forth while they chattered to one another in their own language: “Tdek-ko! Tdek-ko!” Some were black and white, some red, some brown, some yellow. There were prairie dogs of every color of the rainbow.

Seeing how fat the little prairie dogs were, Sainday called, “Good day to you, nephews! I feel like singing for you. Come over to this open space and dance to my singing!”

Delighted at an invitation to dance the prairie dogs scampered in a group over to the place Sainday had indicated. As they formed a ring around him, Trickster exclaimed, “Oh! I need a drumstick for beating out the rhythm. Wait here, nephews, wait here, nieces. I’ll go cut a drumstick from that dogwood tree by the creek. The ground shall be my tom-tom.”

While the prairie dogs eagerly waited on the dance ground, Sainday went to the tree and broke off a branch.

On his way back to the dance ground out of sight of the prairie dogs, he stopped at each hole in the village to

clog up the entrance. His sharp eyes missed only one hole.

When he reached the waiting dancers he called out, "Now nephews, now nieces, close your eyes! If you keep your eyes open you'll get a terrible headache." So the prairie dogs tightly closed their eyes. Then Sainday began to sing.

As he sang he swung the club which was supposed to be his drumstick, but instead of beating the ground for rhythm he would hit a prairie dog on the head. The dancing prairie dogs did not know what was happening because their eyes were closed.

One of the prairie dogs had sore eyes and had been unable to close them entirely. When Sainday began hitting his neighbors he was, at first, too frightened to make even a faint bark. Then he got his breath and cried out, "Open your eyes! Trickster Sainday isn't using the ground as a drum; the thumping you hear is the thud of your neighbors as they fall to the ground! Uncle is hitting them on the head and killing them! Run for your holes before he kills you, too!"

The startled prairie dogs opened their eyes and scampered like raining arrows in the direction of their holes. But they could not find them because crafty Sainday had plugged up their doorways.

All the yellow prairie dogs were overtaken and killed; all the black, white, red, blue, green and purple ones were killed. All because of Sainday's mean trick. Only one pair of prairie dogs managed to escape, and they were brown. It was their hole that Sainday had missed.

Because the prairie dogs who survived were brown, all prairie dogs today are brown. There are none of a

different color. Prairie dogs today wag their tails as they sit on their mounds – just as their ancestors did. And each one chatters, "Tdek-ko! Tdek-ko!" in the same manner as prairie dogs long ago. But they don't listen to strangers!

And now something for the students of our language from Comanche Texts with Emily Riddles:

The Bull and the Mule Story

1. Karu suru pimo?roo?nuu kuma kuse urii miakinu.

Is sitting they cows bull them ran after

2. Suru uru pia?kuse taruetutsi?nuu tunehtsuka meka.

He their mother children (Pl) run () she said

3. Suru ku?si muuraba?a karuru kuse nah?noo takwibukina.

He mule on sits whipped him

4. Situkuse so?aana nuraami?aru paku ruu mi?aku pitnu.

These somewhere ran along they went on came to.

Story About

An Indian Woman's Little Dog

1. Samu numu wa?ipu kuse tubitsi tataati sarii?pa?i.

One Indian woman very little dog had

2. Surukuse tsaa hina supana?iyu. He good things knows

3. Situkuse tataati wobikuniba?i tataati nori?naba?i tuasu tataati tukaba?i.

This dog little wood house had little bed had also little light had.

CLCPC MOTTO

Soobesu

Numunuu samuoyetu numu niwunu?etu.

Ukitsi numu tuasu numuniwunuhutui.

Uburitu tuasu Numuniwunuhutuinu.

Carney Saupitty Sr.

Translation:

A long time ago we spoke Comanche.

Today we speak Comanche.

We will speak Comanche forever.