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The Comanche Language & Cultural Preservation Committee

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*(*The following story is from Comanche Oral Narratives, a 1977 dissertation by Galen Buller, who states: "Both the Bannock and the Comanche people are offshoots from the Shoshone Tribe. Because no Comanche creation stories are available, the Bannock stories, which seem to be related, help in developing an understanding of Comanche literature.")*

A BANNOCK CREATION STORY

A long time ago, this earth was made. Nobody knows when, but there is a story about it. Our Father was on this earth. When he was here, the earth got on fire. He had a wife, who stood at his left side. Their son stood at his right side. When the earth was burning, they walked among the flames.

As they were walking, the Father said to his wife and to his son, "Don't look back at the fire. No matter if it is burning your heels, don't look back."

Right behind them the flames made a roaring, and the fire was ready to catch on their skirts. The woman felt it. She looked behind her and was immediately turned into stone. She was turned into a stone because she had done what the Father told her not to do.

He had a walking stick. Wherever he and his son walked, he put his walking stick on the ground ahead of them. There the flames went out, and so the Father and his son could pass through the fire. Everything around them was burning, the whole earth. But because of the walking stick, they could travel around.

Behind the fire came the water. Soon it flooded the whole earth. Everything was covered by water, even the mountains. The Father and his son made themselves very small, so that they could ride on the foam on top of the water. There they remained for a long time, on the water foam.

Thinking about the earth where he had lived, the Father knew he would like to have it back again. He used to wonder, "How can I get the earth back again?"

For many years the water stayed like that. At last the Father knew that it would not go down or dry up. He stayed there on the water-foam another winter. During the time they lived on the water, the Father made his son part of himself. Now they could get the earth back again.

"How can I get help?" he wondered.

He thought of the water-people. "I could ask them to help me get earth," he said to himself. "They must be somewhere around here."

Then he called out, "Water-people, where are you? Come. Let us smoke and hold council."

Beaver came when he heard the call. "Are you good at diving in the water?" asked the Father.

"I am not a good diver. This water is too much for me. I have a younger brother. He could. He is a good diver."

So the Father called out again. "Where are you, water-people? Come. Let us smoke and hold council." Muskrat came, and the three smoked.

Then the Father said, "We will call for more people."

Once again he called out to the water-people.

Otter came and the four smoked together. They held council. Then they said to Muskrat, "You dive to the bottom of the water and bring up earth."

"I will," he replied. "I will go now, at once."

And then he dived off from the water-foam, where they all were sitting. The three waited for Muskrat to come up. They waited and they waited. When they were just about to give up, they saw his body coming up to the top of the water. He was bloated with water. He had drowned.

They pulled him up on the foam, and the Father made him come to life again. Under Muskrat's fingernails, they found bits of mud. The Father took these bits of mud and formed them into a little ball.

"You did get earth," he said to Muskrat.

Then the Father began to roll the ball of earth in his hands, to and fro. Then he would stretch it, and then roll it into a ball again. Then he would flatten it between his hands. He did that again and again, and the earth ball got bigger and bigger. The bigger it got the harder it was for him to work with it. He would stop and look at it and would say, "It is too small yet."

So he would work at it again. He stretched it, he rolled it, he flattened it between his hands. When it got very large, and he had flattened it out, he spread it over the top of the water. Then he began to make hills and mountains on his earth. Later he made springs and rivers beside these mountains. Later he made different kinds of trees and flowers to grow around the springs and on the mountains. Then he made different kinds of animals and birds.

After the Father had finished making all this, he made the earth so that it would turn. He made it turn to the shady side, and it got winter. He made it turn to the sunny side, and it got summer.

**The next stories are from "Comanche/Shoshone Tales, Journal of American Folk-Lore, Vol XXII, reprinted from the American Folklore Society.)*

COSMOGONIC FRAGMENTS

(Shoshone Story)

Our own Father made us. First of all, he made the moose, then the elk, then the buffalo, then the deer, the mountain sheep, the antelope, the crane, the chief of the birds, the big black eagle, the white tailed bald eagle, the chicken hawk, and the owl, the crow, the magpie, and the snake eater. Our Father made everything; he made us.

Our Father sent the Crow, who was sitting on a high mountain, to bring earth. "Get earth! I will once more create the drowned people." Then the Crow flew away, and after a while came back to the Creator. "You must have been eating the drowned people. You stink. Go back! – Now, you, little Chickadee, bring dirt! Then I'll create all the people again." When the Chickadee returned with dirt, our Father made the earth and sky. We now walk on the ground he made. He said, "Now, my children, pray to me; then I will listen to you, and take pity on you."

The whole earth was covered with water. Only on a high mountain there was a dry spot. Our Father sent the Crow to get earth in order to make our land. Then the Crow came back stinking. "You are crazy." Said the Father; "You have eaten the drowned people. Now, go back, and go around homeless. You will eat whatever any

one has killed. Go, now! You will be black.” Then he said to the small birds, “Come, I will now hear which one of you has a good heart and good sense.” He found that the Chickadee was the only one that had any sense and was good hearted. Then he bade it bring earth. It brought it. Our Father made the earth out of it. “It will be small,” he said, “for little hands brought it. You will have six moons. You will not lose track of tongues. You have good thoughts.”

THE ROC

(Shoshone Story)

Two Weasels went hunting. They killed some game, and dried the meat. The older brother said to the younger, “It is not good to eat at night. If anyone builds a fire at night in this place, a bad owl will carry him away. You had best cook meat now, then you will not have to build a fire at night.” The younger one cooked plenty of meat, lay down, and ate in bed. He ate up all he had cooked. During the night he rose and built a fire. “Oh, don’t build a fire!” said the older one. His brother answered, “Oh, don’t make believe it is bad! I will beat it to death.” He laid a bone among the food. He ate and sang. After a while a loud sound was heard. He took the bone, and sat listening. The Owl came near and sat down. He struck at him with the bone, knocking him down. Owl seized him and carried him to his island home. Two young men were there, and one old woman. The young men told the new-comer, “Tomorrow he will eat one of us.” He replied, “In the morning we will kill him.” Next day Owl killed one of the young men, ate part of him, and went hunting. While he was gone, the two surviving young men dug a hole, and put a flint on the blood of the slain victim, sticking it through his flesh. Owl returned, ate of the corpse, and

was killed by the flint. The two youths went into the hole, took the bird’s wing, and made a boat of it. As they were starving, they ate the old woman. Then they returned home.

THE LIBERATION OF THE BUFFALO

(Comanche Story)

Long ago two persons owned all the buffalo. They were an old woman and her young cousin. They kept them penned up in the mountains, so that they could not get out. Coyote came to these people. He summoned the Indians to a council. “That old woman will not give us anything. When we come over there, we will plan how to release the buffalo.” They all moved near the buffalo enclosure. “After four nights,” said Coyote, “we will again hold a council as to how we can release the buffalo. A very small animal shall go where the old woman draws her water. When the child gets water, it will take it home for a pet. The old woman will object; but the child will think so much of the animal, that it will begin to cry and will be allowed to keep it. The animal will run off at daybreak, and the buffalo will burst out of their pen and run away.” The first animal they sent failed. Then they sent the Kill-dee.

When the boy went for water, he found the Kill-dee and took it home. “Look here!” he said to his cousin, “this animal of mine is very good.” The old woman replied, “Oh, it is good for nothing! There is nothing living on the earth that is not a rascal or schemer.” The child paid no attention to her. “Take it back where you got it,” said the woman. He obeyed. The Kill-dee returned.

The people had another council. “Well, she has got the better of these two. They have failed,” said Coyote; “but that makes no difference. Perhaps

we may release the buffalo, perhaps we shall fail. This is the third time now. We will send a small animal over there. If the old woman agrees to take it, it will liberate those buffalo; it is a great schemer." So they sent the third animal. Coyote said, "If she rejects this one, we shall surely be unable to liberate the game." The animal went to the spring and was picked up by the boy, who took a great liking to it. "Look here! What a nice pet I have!" The old woman replied, "Oh, how foolish you are! It is good for nothing. All the animals in the world are schemers. I'll kill it with a club." The boy took it in his arms and ran away crying. He thought too much of his pet. "No! this animal is too small," he cried. When the animal had not returned by nightfall, Coyote went among the people, saying, "Well, this animal has not returned yet; I dare say the old woman has consented to keep it. Don't be uneasy, our buffalo will be freed." Then he bade all the people get ready just at daybreak. "Our buffalo will be released. All of you mount your horses." In the meantime the animal, following its instructions, slipped over to the pen, and began to howl. The buffalo heard it, and were terrified. They ran towards the gate, broke it down, and escaped. The old woman, hearing the noise, woke up. The child asked, "Where is my pet?" He did not find it. The old woman said, "I told you so. Now you see the animal is bad, it has deprived us of our game." She vainly tried to hold the buffalo back. At daybreak all the Indians got on their horses, for they had confidence in Coyote. Thus the buffalo came to live on this earth. Coyote was a great schemer

THE SEVEN STARS (Comanche Story)

A very long time ago there lived a family of seven. The parents got angry

at their children, four of whom were boys, and the youngest a girl. The father declared to them, "We are going to call a council of all the people. You cannot stay here. We are going to have a council to decide what all of you are to become. I am angry at you. All of you will go far off. Make up your minds as to what you wish to become." Then the oldest brother asked the other children to give their advice as to what they were to become. One of them said, "Our father is angry at us. Let us all become stars. Would that all of us might become stars! Whatever we choose, that we shall turn into. Let us wait for our father, and tell him as soon as he returns." When their father returned, he consented to let them become stars. Then they left. That is how they became stars. That is why there are seven stars looking down upon us from above. The one in the rear is the youngest child, while the young men are in front.

DZO'AVITS (MUPITSJ) (Shoshone Story)

Dove was living with her two young ones. Once, while the mother was away, Mupitsj stole the children. When Dove returned and found her children gone, she went to look for them. She got close to Mupitsj house and began to cry. Mupitsj came out and scolded her. "Oh, what are you bothering around here for? You might as well go away, or I will beat you to death." She left. She met an Eagle, who asked her what she was looking for and why she was crying. She told him that Mupitsj had stolen her young ones. Eagle gave her some tallow of an animal he had killed, its paunch, and some of his fuzzy feather. Then he bade her go near Mupitsj house. He hung his game on a high pine and told Mupitsj to get it in the

morning. Mupitsj set out to fetch it, but could not get it down. While he was being delayed, Eagle freed the young Doves, who fled with their mother.

In the evening, Mupitsj returned. When he found his captives gone, he was furious. He followed their tracks, and nearly caught up to them. When he was very close, they were at the bank of a river, where a Crane was seated. "Mupitsj is after my young ones, I wish you would help us across." Crane extended his leg as a bridge. "Well, cross over on my leg," he said. They crossed, and ran on. Then Mupitsj got to Crane. He asked whether the Doves had crossed there. "Yes," said Crane. Then Mupitsj asked how they had crossed, and Crane told him. "Well, stretch out your leg for me, too." Crane extended his leg. While Mupitsj was crossing the middle of the river, Crane pulled up his leg. Mupitsj fell into the water. He swam, and reached the other bank. Then he again followed the fugitives' tracks.

Mupitsj was again gaining on them. They got to a Chickadee. Mupitsj is after my children, help us cross," said the mother. "Well," said Chickadee, "enter my nostrils." They entered his nostrils. Chickadee blew them to the other side of the river. Then they continued their flight. Mupitsj got to Chickadee, and inquired about the Doves. Chickadee told him how he had blown them to the other side. "Well, then blow me, too, to the other side." Chickadee bade him enter his nostrils, but only blew him into the middle of the river. Mupitsj swam to the other bank. He again followed the Doves' tracks.

When he was close to them, the old Dove said to a Weasel, "Mupitsj is after me, save us in some way." Weasel began to dig up the ground. "Go in here," he said. They entered, walked underground, and came out again at a

great distance. Weasel then dug up the earth in another place. Mupitsj came, and asked, "Did the Doves go in here?" Weasel said, "Yes, they have gone in here." "Well, I also want to go in." He entered, but could not find anything. He got out again, and continued his pursuit.

When Mupitsj got close to them, the old Dove threw down her tallow. It turned into a deep gulch behind them. Mupitsj could not get through. He looked for a path. At last he found one and ran on. When he was close once more, Dove threw her paunch behind her. It turned into a big cliff. Mupitsj could not climb up. He looked for a path. At last he found one. He ran on. When he had nearly caught up to them, she threw down her feathers. They turned into a fog. Mupitsj lost the trail. At last he found it again, and ran on. When he was close again, Dove asked a Badger to save them in some way. Badger dug a hole, and bade them enter. When they were inside, he dug another hole and built a fire. Mupitsj got to the place, and asked whether the Doves had entered there. Badger told him they had. "Well, I also wish to go in." He entered. As soon as he was inside, Badger heated rocks red-hot and cast them down, plugging up the hole. Then he called out to the Doves, "I have already killed Mupitsj. Come out! You can go."

DICTIONARY UPDATE

Work continues on the revision of Our Comanche Dictionary. It is slow and tedious, but each of the speakers who participate realize the importance of what they are doing. I feel blessed and honored that I am a small part of this endeavor. Rita Coosewoon made me smile recently when she was trying to remember a Comanche word and said, "Sometimes English gets in my way."

Please check out our new revamped web site at www.comanchelanguage.org