

# The Native Way

The cold fall breeze came sweeping in through my long, thick, brown hair and chilled my body as I was collecting wild flowers in the large meadow. I took my little brown, woven basket that I made from bull weeds and picked some flowers so my mother could dry them at home in the village. It was October 20 which means it was the day that the women of the village would get together and make a huge meal for the whole village. And since I turned thirteen this year I am finally able to take part. My little sister Fawn has been very cranky because of the lack of food in the village and father and my eldest brother Akule have been out hunting bison with the other men. They will return tonight so mother has been very busy, which makes me feel important because I have been handling a lot of the chores in the hut. Thankfully, we live in a hut with two other families from our Nimiipuu tribe so I have some help from Ameyalii, a seventeen year old girl from the Canowicakte Family. And since my father is one of the leaders in our tribe, it is one of the bigger huts in the village, which means it is also more work to take care of. I continued walking because I remembered my mother saying to go quickly since she needed my help in the hut. The breeze swept across the beautiful flower filled meadow and you could hear the animals scurrying about collecting berries and nuts. I quickly collected many bunches of flowers and a few nuts I saw lying by a tree, and quickly walked back.

The stew was boiling over the hot fire and the room was filled with women scurrying about cooking and sweeping and husking corn for the men, as they would return very hungry after their eight days away hunting bison; especially if they did not

catch anything. Food was minimal in the village for winter was coming and if the hunters had not caught anything we very likely may starve. Or else the men would try in the winter but the game is very scarce among the snow and ice. And since the other tribes and villages around are trying to get food as well it will be even more difficult to get food that is why we must catch some Bison. I quickly brought the flowers to the big table in the center of the small crowded room and went to help my mother with the stirring. Since I was still a young lady, I couldn't help with making the stew, but it smelled so good and it warmed my aching stomach and almost made me forget I was hungry. The scent in the air and all the bodies in the room, it truly felt wonderful.

We could hear the tromping of feet and recognized the calls of the men and knew they had returned. I looked through the small crack in the wall and could see a group of about twelve men or so but what I couldn't see was a large, hefty bison, only one man carried a small bag made of bear skin which probably had just one baby bison in it. Unless the men go back out, this will probably be our last large meal for a long time and hunger will take over.

It was a cold November morning and hunger pinched my stomach as I tossed and turned on my mat made from the skins of a bison. I knew I had to get up and help mother with the chores but my dreary, hungry body wouldn't move. I was so hungry but I knew that couldn't stop me from getting up. I slowly rose to my feet and put on my warm deer skins and moccasins and headed for the main room. I entered and Fawn was crying in mother's arms. Mother was trying to rock her back to sleep, but knew in her mind that the little girl would not rest until she had something to fill her stomach. Mother gave Fawn to me so she could make the last little bit of corn bread we had to fill our aching stomachs and last us the rest of the day.

It has now been three days since our village has had food to eat and most of the young children are very sick from starvation and it is wearing the mothers of the village out because they have to care for the youngsters. But they also are weak and hungry. The men are out hunting and I am really praying that the Lord will provide our village with food, so we don't starve. To keep us busy and our minds off of our aching stomachs, the old storyteller, an old, wise man in our village, has been telling us many stories of the unseen one. Like the one time when there was a man named Noah and the unseen one told him to build a large boat for he was going to flood the whole earth. He was to take two of every animal into the boat with him. The people all around Noah laughed and mocked him for building a boat on dry ground when there had been no rain in a very long time.. Soon enough the rains came down and the floods came up and all the people around except for Noah and his family were saved from death. Noah had to have great faith and had to trust the Lord that he would provide for him and his family. The storyteller tells us that we need to do this too. We must put all our trust in the unseen one and he will bring us through all our trials. And that is what gives me hope to keep going even in this time of starvation.

*Come on Kaya, come on.* I kept telling myself as I laid against a tree in the woods. It was early in the morning when I left the village. Father had not caught anything but a small deer in the past few weeks and many people in the village were very sick and dying. Many other villages have almost all been wiped out by the need for food, we are fortunate to only have lost three people. Before starvation hit the village, Akule and I found a little den with foxes, a mother, father and three little waagosh. I had not told my family about the den because I loved the little foxes. Seeing them playfully horse around and tackle each other in the bright meadow brought such joy to my heart

to see them so happy. But winter is here now, and the snow is deep and the air is frigid. The foxes are now probably in their den sleeping peacefully. But my family is starving and food in the village is scarce, so this might be my only chance to provide for my family. The women of the village are often put to the tasks of cleaning, cooking and making clothing. But the truth is I've always wanted to go hunting with Father and Akule but I've always been too scared to tell mother. Now is my chance to prove to my family I can hunt and be good at it. But not if I couldn't get up because I was too tired and hallucinating. I tried to get up but my legs were so tired and my toes and fingers were numb. Then without even trying I slowly drifted off to sleep.

My eyes shot open and looked around, *where was I?* Then I remembered *the foxes*, I was coming out to hunt foxes. The sun was hidden, so I guessed it to be around five or so. I should probably head home, I thought, before it gets too dark to see. The sky was gray and it was so cold I felt as though my fingers and toes were going to fall off. *Food* my mind kept going back to food. As much as I wanted to go home snuggle up in my furs and eat mother's home cooked stew, I knew it wouldn't be there and that if I wanted to eat anything tonight it would have to be the foxes. It was getting quite dark and I knew it, but the village would make fun of me and Father would be ashamed if I came back with nothing. I walked a little ways and there was the den. I crept up slowly trying not to crunch the snow with my moccasins. Slowly I began to dig the snow away from around the burrow. Once I had it cleared out, I stuck my crossbow, which I borrowed without permission from Akule, into the hole of the den. Then with great courage I let go of the trigger. The arrow shot through the air and hit something with force. A few seconds later I heard a high pitched cry of a fox. I did it, I really did it I thought, then I remembered the fox. I shimmied my body into the den till just my waist

was out of the den, and then I grabbed the long arrow and pulled out the large father fox with it. I felt bad for the fox but this was a matter of survival for my family. I laid the fox in the snow and then put it in my big bearskin bag so it wouldn't freeze and then headed home. Food, we finally have food to eat, and I caught it. Father will be so proud of me.

As I sat near the fire with many others around me, I was overwhelmed by all the questions of the little children and was trying to answer as many as I could. I looked up for a moment to see my father summoning me to come to him. I quickly slipped out of the hut and followed my father silently to a high ridge and then Father sat down. I had no idea of what was going on but I followed his motion and sat down beside me. Father looked over at me with a look of approval, "You have made me proud, Kaya," he said, "You are the only young lady in the Nimiipuu tribe that has ever caught a fox. Spring is just around the corner and the caribou will be returning to the high hills to find more lichen and moss. You will come with us and I will teach you how to hunt well." And with that he handed me a necklace with many different fox teeth on it.

"These are the teeth of every single fox I've ever caught. There are only fourteen teeth on there, one from every fox. I think you deserve to have this." I looked down at the piece of jewelry in my hand and whispered, "Thank you father." And with that I gave father a big hug and I could even see a tear in Father's eye. I had never seen Father cry before and in a way I loved it. As we walked back to the hut I put my necklace on with honor and then grabbed Father's hand and opened the door to that sweet smell of food.

