



Chapter Four

Where Stories Come From

HOW IS IT THAT THE SAME STORY can be found in diverse and seemingly unrelated cultures, sometimes on opposite sides of the globe? And why are the same stories passed down from generation to generation for thousands of years? Each question has a different answer and yet they both address the same basic reason as to why stories exist: to perpetuate our human culture and give it continuity. The more rational intelligence and conscious memory a creature possesses, the more his culture is perpetuated by learning rather than instinct.

An example: I grew up with four Wolves who were orphaned so young they had not yet opened their eyes. They never saw another Wolf until they were adults and still they knew the ways of the Wolf: how to function as a pack, how to hunt, and how to raise young.

Some of our human culture is instinctual also, yet we learn most of it from example and through story. A Wolf raised by humans is still very much a Wolf, whereas a Human raised by Wolves becomes Wolflike. She will walk on all fours, growl and howl, and exhibit most of the other characteristic Wolf behaviors. It is because of the missing piece in her upbringing: story. Wolves carry most of their stories in their instinctual memories; we do not. This is why storytelling is essential to the perpetuation of human culture.

THE STORYLINE

The mystery of the same story being voiced by storytellers of every language has fascinated world travelers and story buffs ever since there have been world travelers and story buffs. Why is it that, as they discovered, most stories are universal? Over time, a number of theories have been put forth, which can be summed up as follows:



- A psychic connection exists among storytellers.
- Stories of an ancient, fallen civilization were scattered in the diaspora.

Both explanations suggest that most stories come from one wellspring common to the human experience. Neither possibility is taken seriously by the academic community. And yet reason dictates that if the same stories are found with various peoples, there must be some connection among them.

What might this connection be? We all come from the same mother, the Earth, and the same father, the Sky, so we must all be sisters and brothers. When the surface colorings and flavorings of belief, climate, and region are stripped away, we can see that all of us live essentially the same way, with the same basic values and needs, feelings and aspirations. With this perspective it is not hard to see that we all share essentially the same culture and history.

These common bonds and shared lifeways are core to the human experience and the continuum of human life. I believe they are so intrinsic to the human psyche that they are imprinted in our genes. In the ways that we are part of our surroundings, this shared soul has become part of the world we live in. It is echoed in the wind and etched in the landscape. Psychiatrist Carl Jung calls this the collective unconscious, and Australian Aborigines call it the songline, which they describe as the songs, stories, and ceremonies that connect in lines to form a web that lies over the Earth to guide our lives. Because *story* encompasses all of this, I favor the term *storyline*.

The storyline is the voice of the dimensionless, timeless place where all past, present, and future experience dwells. The ancestors and those yet to be born reside there. Think of it as the womb of all life and all creation, as the holder of all wisdom known and unknown.



Each of us is one with the womb, whether or not we are conscious of it. Within each of us it resonates and touches everything we say and do.

There is no word-based language in the storyline. It is a pure state of communion where all is known and sensed and felt without having to be consciously heard or processed. A story comes to the storyline as a pure subconscious impression. The storyteller chooses the words to wrap around a story in order to make it a communal experience. Therein lies the storyteller's challenge—and her unique and essential gift to her people.

I seldom know when I am about to enter the storyline; it just seems to happen spontaneously and at the appropriate time. Were it not for the lingering feelings of communion and the stories I am sent back with, I do not think I would ever have had recollection of journeying into the storyline. Those rare and special times that I am blessed to remember usually occur during a ceremony or through a spontaneous flash of awareness.

What never ceases to instill in me the feelings of awe and reverence for the storyline is the fact that all people, whether deep in the Amazon, high in the Himalayas, or on a coral island in the South Sea, have access to the same storyline and the same stories. Equally inspiring



is the fact that stories somehow have a way of coming to us from the storyline when we most need them. Even if a story was forgotten because it was no longer relevant, it will—seemingly out of nowhere—resurface when it can again serve the people.

When a traditional storyteller narrates a story, neither she nor her audience experiences it as a standalone, self-contained event, as one might a song or movie. This is because the story is not an entity unto itself. The storyteller is dropping in on the storyline—the ongoing no-beginning, unending mother story—and narrating a piece of it. This piece could be any portion of the storyline the teller deems appropriate to share at the time. This portion does not have a prescribed beginning or end, because the storyline is a continuum that is not divided into set stories. The next time the storyteller recounts the same “story,” it may begin sooner or later in the storyline, and it may end sooner or later. Reflecting this, the title may change as well.

Titles reflect the fact that stories are part of a continuum. We are accustomed to catchy titles designed to grab our attention; however, the traditional storyteller’s “title” is more of a matter-of-fact introduction. It is merely intended to give us a clue as to what the upcoming story is about and to connect the listener with where it fits in the storyline. Here are some typical examples: “This is the story of how Rattlesnake got his fangs,” or “Tonight I would like to tell you why we paddle a canoe rather than swim like Beaver.” You will find more examples with the “titles” of some of the stories in this book.

CONNECTING WITH THE STORYLINE

Is it possible for a member of contemporary society to access the storyline? Many believe it is just Native peoples, or those who lived in pre-industrial times, who were able to enter the

storyline. In speaking for American Natives, Sherman Alexie, a Coeur d’Alene Indian from Washington, says, “Every Indian has the blood of the tribal memory [storyline] circling his heart.”⁴⁷

In 1979 I had a personal conversation with Dolores La Chapelle, Elder of Native American–European descent and author of *Earth Festivals* (Finn Hill Arts, Silverton CO, 1976) and *Earth Wisdom* (Finn Hill, 1984). She told me we are all still intrinsically tribal people even though we may no longer know our tribal ways. This is because we are not enough generations removed from our tribal past to have genetically adapted to another lifeway, she explained. All peoples of all races were once “Indians” in that they lived as tribal hunter–gatherers. Anthropologist Marjorie Shostak in her book *Nisa, The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman* wrote that “The uniqueness of the Human species was patterned—and the Human personality was formed—in a gathering and hunting setting . . . People everywhere are, in a biological sense, fundamentally similar and have been so for tens of thousands of years.”⁴⁸ Based on such references, along with my personal experience and that of others, I believe it is entirely possible for present-day people to enter the storyline.

The storyline differs enough from our modern concepts of time, relationship, and history, however, that it is often hard for some to access. And yet entering it is critical, because stepping aside from the familiar and embracing another reality helps one to gain perspective and understanding.

Let’s take a walk to the edge of the storyline to illustrate. We will not be following a human trail, but that of a close kin, a woodland raptor known as Cooper’s Hawk. From her perspective you might be able to better see yourself in the storyline. As you read the following narrative, think of Hawk as another human rather than a bird. Remember as well that the storyline carries the collective story of all life.



The primary, and perhaps the only, difference between Hawk's stories and ours is not in the stories themselves but in their telling. Hawk speaks in the primal language of the heart, which is the way most of life communicates. This common language is based on intuition, ancestral memory, and sensitivity to the energies that flow through and among all things. To this primal language, we humans have added our recent evolutionary acquisition of verbal speech.

This story takes place at my camp, a circle of bark wigwams out in the wilderness where several Seekers stay with me to learn the ways of the hunter-gatherer. We are sitting around the fire, having our evening meal. They are sharing with me their observations of the day. Henry, a young Canadian Métis (of Native-French ancestry), began to tell us about a Hawk who flew into camp while he was having lunch. When he paused his story to take a bite of food, I continued the story for him.

"Wait a minute," said Henry. "You weren't here; how did you know which direction she flew in from and that she landed on that branch in the dead fir tree and then flew off toward the meadow? Did you see her doing it in the past and then assume it was the same bird doing the same thing out of habit?"

"Yes and no," I replied. "I don't know that I've seen this particular Hawk before, but I know the species and I know that the bird was a female of the species."

"How could you possibly know that?"

"Because I fly in the shadow of the Hawk."

"What Hawk? You just said you may've never seen the bird before."

"A particular bird is just the present physical manifestation of the spirit of her kind. The physical forms of a bird will follow the track of the spirit of that bird, because body and spirit are one. When one physical form dies, another is born and picks up the track. She will shadow

the bird before her, right to the same tree—often to the same branch. And then she'll fly off in the same direction as the bird before her. It doesn't matter that her predecessor had done these things days or even years ago."

"Is this something that parent teaches child?"

Realizing this question might be a doorway to greater understanding, I gave it some thought before responding:

It's not really taught, I began, at least not directly. The spirit of a bird is common to all the birds of her kind, so all of them share in the same spirit-way: the same manner of seeing and hearing, of acting and reacting. They all follow the same tradition of seeking food, building nests, and raising their young. And so it is with flying into a clearing and alighting upon a branch in a fir tree. Each bird, in her given time, is merely following the spirit-trail that was blazed and worn in by her predecessors.

This trail exists in two dimensions. It literally lies across the sky and leads to that branch and then over to the meadow. The track of the Hawk who flew the trail before her can be sensed by her. She does this by attuning to the song of the trail: the subtle echoes and repercussions left by her predecessor's passing through.

The trail also exists within the Hawk. It's instinctual, you might say; it's imprinted in her genetic memory. The trail is so much a part of a Hawk that the first Hawk to come upon the clearing after it was created by a windstorm knew exactly where the trail lay to fly in on, which branch to perch upon, and where the trail lay to leave the clearing.

In essence, the Hawk tuned into the web of guidance overlying the Earth: the storyline. There she found the story that would guide her,



just as it has guided many others of her kind on the trail to the meadow.

CLAN MEMORY

Complementing the storyline are stories that preserve and hand down a particular people's traditions, adventures, and accumulated knowledge. "The Indians did not have a written language, so the older people had to be encyclopedias of knowledge that could be passed from one generation to another,"⁴⁹ said Tokaluluta (Chief Red Fox), an Oglala Lakota from the era of Ohiyesa and Standing Bear. In the words of David B. Andersen, a Gwich'in Athabaskan from the Alaskan interior, "Thirty thousand years of legends have been passed on orally as teaching tools to maintain our existence on how we can live off this land. And how to maintain it is to make sure we do not disturb the resources."⁵⁰ Wandjuk Marika, an Australian Aborigine who lived in the last century, said "Since the dreamtime or dream land, we have followed the customs and laws that were made by the ancestors and we have kept sacred the special places."⁵¹

Some of these archival stories help make an individual's discoveries and teachings available to all of his people, as well as to those who will follow. Ketagustah, of the Cherokee people, acknowledged this in 1730 by saying, "When we shall have acquainted our people with what

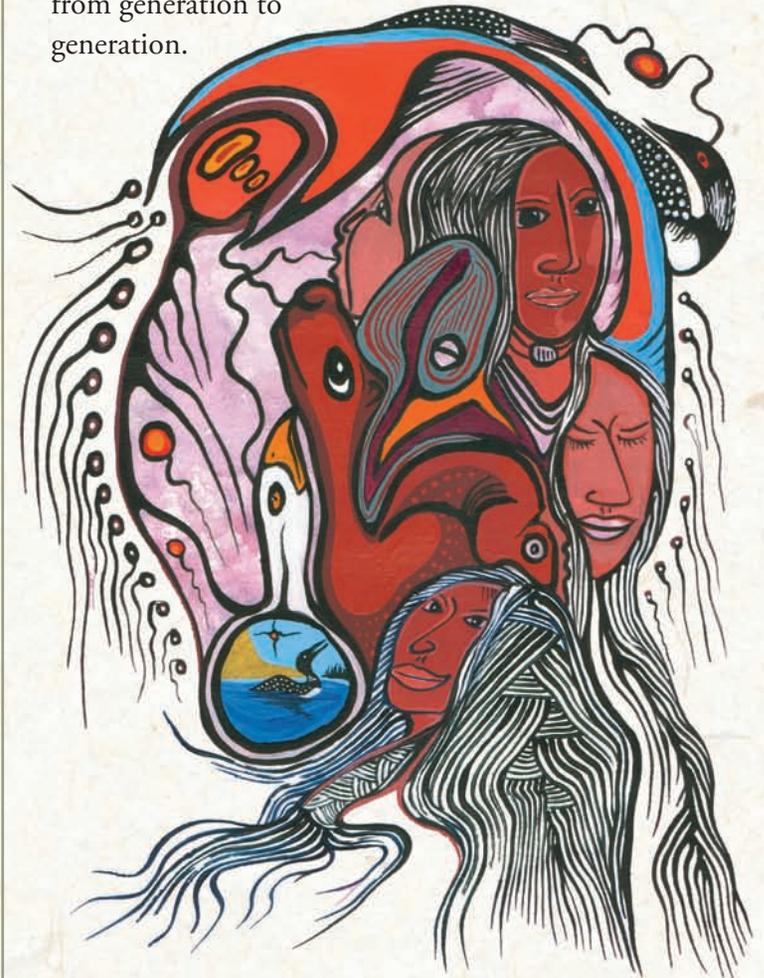
TIMELESS STORIES, AGELESS WISDOM

"We have methods of transmitting from father to son an account of all these things. You will find the remembrance of them is faithfully preserved, and our succeeding generations are made acquainted with what has passed, that it may not be forgot as long as the earth remains."⁵²

—*Kanickhungo, Iroquois, 1700s*

we have seen, our children from generation to generation will always remember it."⁵³ In this way, the passing on of stories allows their Elders to live on through the perpetuation of their wisdom and guidance. This is the substance behind the saying, "The command of custom is great."⁵⁴

Unlike the storyline, which is preserved in the greater consciousness, these stories are memorized and passed down from generation to generation.



Some of my Elders call this *clan memory*. Because clan memory is based on people's experiences, it is fluid. I think of it as an ageless living body that evolves right along with its people. In order to keep the clan memory alive there needs to be a continuum—literally an unbroken line of storytellers. Just one generation without storytellers can virtually extinguish a clan memory.



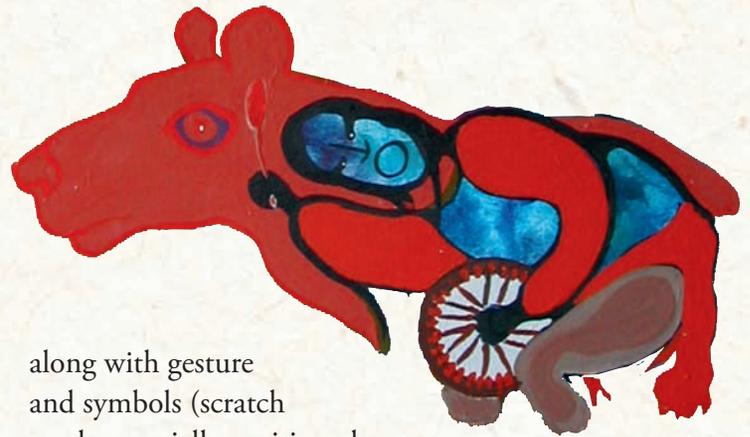
The storytellers are most often Elders because they, having known and lived the stories, remember them in their hearts and can tell them *with* heart. In the following two quotes, Wandjuk Marika describes how the clan memory is passed down in this way:

When I was young boy, my father, who was a very important man in Arnhem Land, started to teach me the beliefs and ways of my people, the Rirratjinu, the songs and dances and ceremonies, and he also passed on to me his skill at playing the . . . didgeridoo. My father knew all the designs or the stories of our ancestors and he showed me how to paint these. In this way I learnt from my father all the important things I need to know about life, about our history, our customs and our ceremonies.⁵⁵

My father was painting and also he prepare for the ceremony, and also he was always with me to show me how to sneak in, how to hunt and keep an eye on me, and protecting me . . . from the danger, the crocodile. He show me where to catch him, how to sneak in behind him centrally on break-away (never to make noise, sneak up silently) where they are laying their eggs on dry land.⁵⁶

In this day, very few of our Elders are storytellers. There is no longer room for them in our youth-oriented world where growing old has become shameful. And there is less and less interest in the ways of the people: the ways of the individual now dominate. This leaves us with no living repository for our clan memory. Were it not for books and audio–video media, much more of the world’s clan knowledge would be lost than already is. The few dedicated writers and producers have become our storytellers, and their books, recordings, and videos have become our clan memory.

As with the storyline, preserving and passing down clan knowledge is not unique to the human experience. Many animals share their clan knowledge through stories, in much the same way that a mime will communicate by using the language beyond words. For example, honeybees dance to tell their hive mates where to find the nectar-laden flowers. Early in our evolutionary history, we also used dance,



along with gesture and symbols (scratch marks, specially positioned objects), to tell our stories. In time we grafted conceptual verbalizing, and eventually word-based language, to this millennia-old storytelling tradition.

Clan memory acts in remarkably similar ways with the various social animals. Following is an example given to me by the Deer people.

* * *

About twenty paces ahead, two Deer—a yearling and her barren mother—cross the trail I am hiking. (Were the mother not barren, she would now be with a new fawn and would have already driven last year’s fawn away.) This morning the two are following their usual path down the trail that crosses a large bog. In places the trail is so deeply worn that water stands in it year ’round. The bushes and small trees along the trail are distinctively shaped from years of pruning by browsing passersby. Eons of their scat has formed a rich compost that supports



unique trailside plant colonies.

The Deer are probably crossing the bog to feast on late-season violets that stay tender and succulent in the shade of the hillside maples. Then they will likely descend the far side of the hill to nap in a thick grove of balsam fir to escape midday's biting flies.

I would know them and their routine even had I not come back to this place for many years, because I knew their clan, their cousins, grandparents, and great-grandparents. If I were not to return for several years, I would still know the same of their children and grandchildren. The cycle of their lives and the pattern of their movements remains the same; the only difference is that one body replaces another as life begets life. The daughter literally walks in the footsteps of her mother and so will her daughter, the daughter of her daughter, and so on.

When they no longer wander this forest with me I will visit them in the cool hemlock grove where they go to die. Then I will come back to see them on this trail. Though the body of a Deer withers with death, it freshens with birth, as the spirit of Deer lives continually on and walks the unbroken cycle before me, across the bog and back again.

CLAN KNOWLEDGE

Many social animals have an intelligence that is centered not in each individual but in the group as a whole. "One head cannot hold all wisdom,"⁵⁷ say the African Masai. This collective intelligence benefits both the group and each member in ways that far surpass any single contribution. We see this phenomenon known by the proverb "The whole is greater than the sum of its parts," demonstrated in our brainstorming sessions and think tanks, and by a school of fish or a flock of birds moving together in choreographed synchronicity. These are examples of clan knowledge.

Clan memory is augmented by clan knowledge. Think of clan memory as the spring that brings nourishing water up to the people, and clan knowledge as the cup that brings the water to their thirsting lips. Clan knowledge is the personal insight and experiential knowledge needed to apply clan memory's ageless wisdom. The relationship is symbiotic, as clan memory is largely useless without clan knowledge, and clan knowledge flounders for purpose and guidance without clan memory.

I see clan knowledge being demonstrated in the daily routines of the two Deer who passed before me in the story above. For example, in the white season when their water sources are frozen up, their Elders take them down to the lake and show them how to paw through the snow to reach pooled water on the ice's surface. (The weight of the snow bears down on the ice, forcing water up between the cracks.) In this way, the Elders pass the story "How to Get Water" on to their grandchildren, who in their turn will pass it on to their grandchildren. And thus the story from the clan memory continues on as clan knowledge.

This is cumulative intelligence: each generation contributes to it. An individual might discover something new which—if it continues to work and contributes to the good of the whole, and if she is able to pass it on to others—becomes part of the body of clan knowledge. A Deer may come across an open spring and share the story of her finding with her clan members, who then come to use it. If the spring remains open and used, its whereabouts become part of the clan knowledge.

Clan knowledge is useful knowledge. If the spring were to dry up or start freezing over in the white season, knowledge of its use would be dropped from the clan memory because it would not be passed on to the next generation.

Just as with human oral histories, Deer clan



knowledge has a life of its own. In order for it to survive, it needs the generational dimension of the clan, including Elders, those in midlife, and the young. This is because the life of clan knowledge is like the continual unfolding of the seasons, where each is essential to the existence of the next. If ever there were a clan season missing, such as the young (the new bearers of the clan knowledge) dying of disease, or those in their middle years (the teachers) being decimated by overhunting, or the Elders (the Wisdomkeepers) dying before their time in a harsh winter, the clan knowledge might not be passed on and future generations could suffer.

This has already happened with human clan knowledge. When our hunter-gatherer ancestors were conquered by agricultural peoples, the Elders were silenced, parents were forced to work alien jobs, and the young were indoctrinated with the ways of the conquerors. The circle of the seasons of our clan was broken and our knowledge quickly died.

Yet there is hope: clan knowledge can be revived with knowledge from other clans. When a Deer migrates to a new area and joins another clan, she may share some of her old clan's stories. If they are useful, they will become part of the clan memory.

Those new to an area not inhabited by their kind face a unique challenge: they have no stories to help them. Imagine if Deer were being reintroduced to an area where they had been exterminated: they would not know where to find water in the white season, where to go to birth their fawns in safety, or what migration routes to take, along with other knowledge that makes life good for those who walk in the shadow of others of their kind. (This is one reason that many animal reintroductions fail, and why most humans who attempt to return to their Native ways also fail.)

When many of us hunt, we look for a big mature animal: a "trophy." Eliminating such

an animal from the clan is erasing some of his clan's memory. He is in his prime—a survivor, a leader—and thus a sire of strong young and a teacher of the ways of the clan. Rather, let us hunt as does Wolf and take either the old who have already passed on the stories and can no longer lead or the young who do not yet know the stories and are too numerous for the clan to accommodate.

If we are going to continue ignoring the example of Brother Deer and Sister Wolf and keep removing our Elders from our communities, we ought to at least gather from them the precious clan knowledge they hold. We are not faring well without it.

WHAT IS MYTH?

"I am reminded of a time when a missionary undertook to instruct a group of our people in the truth of his holy religion. He told them of the creation of the earth in six days and of the fall of our first parents for eating an apple.

"My people were courteous and listened attentively; and after thanking the missionaries, one man related in his own turn, a very ancient tradition concerning the origin of maize. But the missionary plainly showed his disgust and disbelief, indignantly saying, 'what I delivered to you were sacred truths, but this that you tell me is mere fable and falsehood!'

"'My brother,' gravely replied the offended Indian, 'it seems that you have not been well grounded in the rules of civility. You saw that we, who practice these rules, believed your stories. Why, then, do you refuse to credit ours?'"⁵⁸

—Ohiyesa, *Santee Dakota, 1800s*



FAIRYTALE OR FACT?

What we commonly call myths, fables, fairytales, and children's stories—especially when they come from other cultures—are often viewed by us as fiction. This can be disrespectful and demeaning to the people of those cultures because their stories are their clan memory. It is because of their stories that they have survived and can remember who they are. If the stories were fiction, they would not have served these people and would have been forgotten long ago. One person's myth can be another person's sacred ancestral legend. One person's children's story might be the next person's instructions on how to gather oysters.

As I was growing in this awareness, I started to take another look at what I once thought to be the imaginative inventions of isolated people needing to amuse their children on long winter

HOW TO LISTEN

As you rediscover these so-called children's stories and fairytales, I suggest that you listen to them with the attentiveness and respect that you would give an elder. In doing so you are placing your feet in the footsteps of your ancestors and regaining your clan memory. If you have trouble entering the story or feeling its spirit, envision yourself as one of the characters. Listening to the story rather than reading it could help as well.

nights. What I found was still living evidence of cultures whose only remaining traces I thought had to be sifted out of the soil by archaeologists! One of my first discoveries was that “Hush-a-bye baby on the tree top; when the wind blows the cradle will rock” was actually about the old Native cradleboard way of caring for babies.

The more I listened, the more I heard. A whole new way of learning was opening up



for me. From teachings in healing ways to gaining new foraging and hunting skills to instruction in shelter building and craftwork, the possibilities seemed limitless. I learned about clan relationships, animal guides, and ritual practices; I was given guidance sometimes as profound and relevant as if it were being spoken by my living Elders.

THE LITTLE PEOPLE

A particular class of “fairytales” came to fascinate me: those about the crafty, wizardly little people known as goblins, gnomes, elves, and woodsfaeries. The Saami call them *trulli*⁵⁹—trolls. “Why are these stories so heavily laced with references to Native lifeway? And why do these forest sprites sound so much like Native people?” I would ask myself. “Of course!” I exclaimed one day in a flash of awareness,



“It’s because these folks probably *were* Native people!”

That was my doorway. I then began seeing the stories as surviving clan memories of pre-agricultural ancestors. The stories seemed to be describing those who remained behind when we came out of the forest to take up farming and other civilized pursuits. The more civilized we became, the more the forest people appeared to us to be secretive, mysterious, and prankish. To us who had lost touch with our nonhuman relations, their natural ability to commune with the wild plants and animals seemed like a magical power. Their skill in moving stealthily and staying hidden in the shadows created the illusion of them drifting ethereally through the forest—of being invisible.

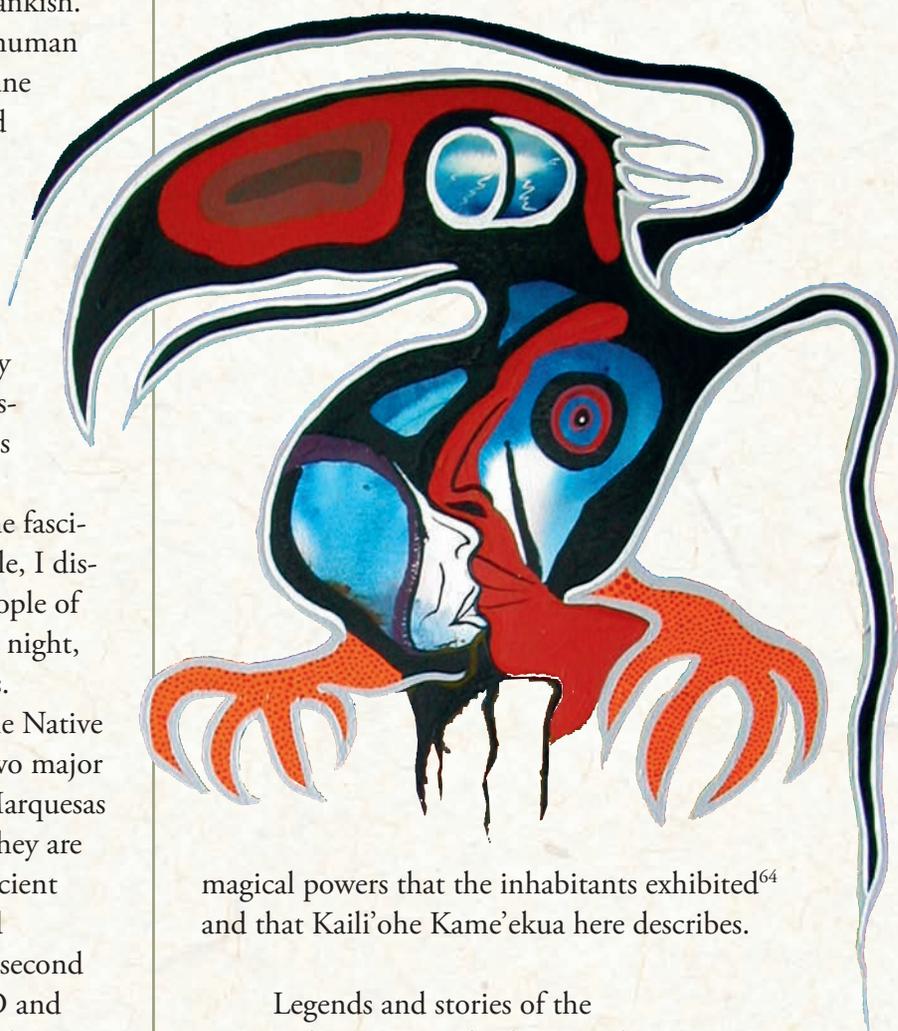
I researched the literature of a variety of cultures to see if I could find some historical substantiation for what the stories were telling me. Not surprisingly, I found ample evidence, along with some fascinating insights into the past. For example, I discovered why the *Menehune*, the little people of Hawai’ian legend who come out only at night, are reputed to have such magical powers.

Archaeological evidence points to the Native Hawai’ians settling the archipelago in two major migrations, the first arriving from the Marquesas Islands at around 400 AD.⁶⁰ In legend they are referred to as *Ka Po’e Kahiko*⁶¹ or the Ancient People. They lived by the clan (extended family) system and had no chiefs.⁶² The second wave came from Tahiti around 1200 AD and were called *Na Ali’i*⁶³ or Chiefs, because they conquered and ruled over the *Ka Po’e Kahiko*.

The warlike *Na Ali’i* were feared by the first people, who were peaceful and of a different culture, so many moved inland and kept a low profile. They became the legendary *Menehune*, living on in story after the two peoples had largely integrated. (The *Na Ali’i* became the

ruling class and the *Ka Po’e Kahiko*, the commoners.)

The following is a more detailed description of how the mystique of the *Menehune* came to be. It is given by *Kaili’ohe Kame’ekua*, an Elderwoman who lived in the 1800s on the island of *Moloka’i*. The island became a holdout for the original culture because the overlords feared the seemingly



magical powers that the inhabitants exhibited⁶⁴ and that *Kaili’ohe Kame’ekua* here describes.

Legends and stories of the *Menehune*’s great deeds came about because the *ali’i* (Tahitian conquerors) would give the order when they wanted a fishpond built, or a temple, or a ditch, and allowed a very short time for it to be done. The *ali’i* would order the *maoli* (indigenous residents) to do the job and then go off laughing. If the work was not accomplished in the given



time, all the people of that place would be slaughtered.

When such orders were given, the maoli or pre-ali'i came out of hiding—down from the mountains, from the caves—and they worked together as one person to accomplish the task. These jobs were done at night because during the day other work had to be done. When enough people were not available on one island, fireballs were sent up as a signal to the ancient ones on other islands that help was needed.

When the first rays of dawn began to show on the day, the project was to be completed. The boats were already gone, the people had returned to their caves in the mountains. There was no sign of anyone. Since the ali'i knew it was not possible for the people of that certain site to do the work by themselves, they thought the ghosts of their ancestors helped them. When they happened to see or hear people coming down from the mountains for such a project, they hid, for the burial places of the ancient ones were in the mountains. This is how the stories of the night marchers began. In those days, the ones who marched were flesh and blood. They would not bow to the rule of the bloodthirsty ali'i so they hid away, waiting for a time when the land would be at peace again.⁶⁵

Kaili'ohe Kame'ekua goes on to give some hint as to the fate of the Menehune "Some families lived for several generations in the mountains before they knew things would not change back to the old ways ever again."⁶⁶ Based on evidence I have garnered from people of other cultures in similar plights, some of the Menehune may have been captured and enslaved, others probably committed suicide, and still others likely chose to join the conquerors—doubtless without shame, seduction,

or threats factoring into their "choice." Invariably some individuals chose to live on in their traditional way, realizing they had to keep their existence a tight secret in order to survive. Their continued existence could have spawned the legend of the Menehune.

Perhaps the greatest blessing of my research was that in getting to know these various elfin people, I came to realize that I was getting to know myself. I saw in myself and others viewed as their peculiar mannerisms and characteristics. I envisioned myself as I might be if I set myself free to dance my days as did they. I still feel comfort every time I realize that these storied people are my ancestors talking to me over what I once thought was an impassable bridge of time. They have come back to tell me what their life was like. Even more meaningful to me is that they are showing me what life could be like.☺

FINDING OUR PERSONAL PAST

Each of us is descended from an ethnic tradition (or traditions) that likely carries some memories of its origins. Ask your family Elders and other Elders of your culture for any stories they remember of the mischievous spirits of the wild places, including meadow, garden, and fencerow. Some of these creatures dwell in trees or in the water. Family and clan reunions are great places for story scavenging. Comb family archives for journals and unpublished writings and tap into library resources. Ethnic festivals are often good story sources, and a visit to your country or region of origin could land you a unique souvenir: a piece of yourself that your immigrant forebears inadvertently left behind.

