

### **The Red Fire People (mihgo iskotew ethiniwuk)**

wapiskasine awasis remembers a story as told to him by his elders or perhaps even the grandfathers about the red fire people. When he first heard Chief Usti tell his story on a conference call, it triggered a whole lot of thought memory that was there or perhaps made available for him to recognize as something he knew. Chief Usti introduced himself as coming from the Southern Cherokee Nation of the Red Fire People. What wapiskasine awasis heard was mihgo-iskotew-ethiniwuk. Those words stuck in his head as Chief Usti spoke of his people.

wapiskasine awasis recalls the story of the red fire people saying Indigenous peoples would struggle for many years until their teaching about walking around the rock or the wall of rocks began to be heard. The original soil of wapiskasine is primarily river, tress and rock. The red fire people said it did not make any sense to try smash your way through the rock because you might hurt yourself. They advised not to dig underneath the rock either because no one knows how deep the rock might be embedded into the earth. The best thing to do as advised by the red fire people is to navigate or walk around the rock.

Before the arrival of visitors and settlers to North America, the wapiskasine peoples traveled to various trading locations to meet new people and do business. Many other nations from every part of North America would travel to these locations as well. They would travel through their regular rive system highway down to what is known as Lake Manitoba and Lake Winnipeg today. On the lower parts of the lake were well - known trading places. These trading places attracted Indigenous Nations from all directions and they would meet at these trading places. In these trading places there was a customary way of doing business involving ceremony, trading, feasting and getting ready to travel. These four events marked the sacred number four and represented the yearly cycle of 13 moons.

When the indigenous Nations from all directions arrived at these locations the very first four days were devoted to ceremony. They would fast, have lodges, pipe ceremonies, prayer, song and share their creation stories. The experience would strengthen the peace, blessings and camaraderie amongst the Indigenous Nations. Each and every Nation was very respectful of the ceremonies of the hosting Nation, which alternated for every gathering.

After the first four days were over, the next four days would be devoted to nothing but commerce and business. Nations would talk business. Talk about the economy. They would set up their booths. Spread their commodities and goods for all to see and inspect, touch, sample and so forth. Everything was done in a respectful and kind way. Obviously some Nations who could carry more goods on their travels and have a larger amount of goods on their booth than others however this was by no means intended to demonstrate disrespect for the other Indigenous Nations.

Starting on the 9<sup>th</sup> day, for the next four days all the Nations would be feasting and celebrating. All kinds of food including wild meats, vegetables, and breads were shared with everyone. No one was left out. They would sing songs. Dance. Tell stories. Celebrate and give thanks for all of life. Abundance was celebrated by all Nations.

On the 13<sup>th</sup> day, the Indigenous Nations packed their belongings and headed back to their original soil. Some would take weeks and sometimes months to reach their home.

On the way home, the wapiskasine Nation talked about what the red fire people shared during the events. They wondered if the prophecy they shared would ever come true. If it were to come true it might be a good idea to always be attentive to the red fire people in their travels.

That day came when wapiskasine awasis, the Customary Chief would hear a similar story again, as told by the hereditary chief of

the Southern Cherokee Nation of the Red Fire People. On this conference call, Chief Usti shared the history of his people. The challenges and struggles they faced to attain sovereignty status. To identify themselves as a Nation State. They have walked around the rock as their ancestors told their story during ancient times. They have fulfilled the prophecy of their ancestors.

Today the Southern Cherokee Nation and Red Fire People are leading the way. They have demonstrated sovereignty is achievable in contemporary times. They are the contemporary role models for all the Indigenous Nations who feel trapped, who feel hopeless, and who have given up on the dream of freedom and perhaps have given up on the authenticity of the ancient teachings.

After thinking it through, wapiskasine awasis remembers breaking the word fire or iskotew or iskoteh into its root meaning as he heard it long ago. Up to then, he wasn't ever sure why he received the teaching of fire until he met Chief Usti on the conference call. The prefix, isko is closely related to the word iskwew, meaning women and the suffix, tew or oteh, which is closely related to the word tehi, meaning heart. According to the wapiskasine Nation fire is the woman's heart. Hence, the reason why women have always had a significant role in aspects of the Nation, especially in the selection of their internal and external leaders.

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