

All peoples of the world have myths to explain where we come from and what life is all about. Besides explaining the world, these myths are used by us to identify those who share our culture, those who understand the world and its meaning in the same way we do--our people. Following is one such myth the Meskwakis used to explain why finding food is difficult, and why people sometimes go hungry.

There was once a great hunter named Kanati, a name which means lucky hunter. He lived with his wife, Selu, which means Indian corn. Kanati and Selu, and their son, lived in the time just after the creation of the world.

When Kanati went hunting, he would always return with something to eat. His family never went hungry. Selu would take the animal her husband brought home down to the river to clean it. After preparing the meat, she would throw the leftover parts into the river, and wash away the blood. Their son, having little else to do, would often play by the river. One day Selu heard him speaking with someone else.

"Who was playing with you down by the river?" she asked, when he came back to their lodge.

"It is the little boy who comes out of the river every day to play with me," he said. "He is my brother, because we both grew from the same food."

Selu told her husband what their son had said. They decided that the little boy must have grown out of the meat scraps that were thrown into the river. Maybe he is a powerful magician, and will bring harm to their son.

The next day they went down to the river to meet the little boy, but when he saw them, he ran into the water and disappeared. Other attempts to meet him also failed. Finally, they instructed their son to challenge the little boy to a wrestling match, and to hold on to him until they could catch him. Their son did as they instructed, and when he had a tight hold, he called to his parents, and they captured the little boy.

"Let me go," the little boy shouted, angrily. "It is you who threw me into the river in the first place, now let me go back to it."

They brought the little boy to their lodge and tied him up. He refused to eat for two days, but finally he gave in. In a short period of time, they tamed him. When Kanati and Selu were sure that he would not run away, they let him go.

The two boys spent their days playing happily together until one day the wild boy asked the son where his father found all the game he brought home. The son said that his father is a very lucky hunter.

"No one can be lucky every day," said the wild boy. "He must have great magic. We must follow him and discover his secret."

The next day the two boys followed Kanati when he went out hunting. Kanati was difficult to follow because he moved so quickly. But, with great effort, they managed to keep up. When they saw Kanati move out on to a grassy slope, they hid in the trees to see what he would do. Near the top of the slope, Kanati came to a great boulder, and moved it aside. Almost immediately a large buck came running out of the opening. With lightening speed, Kanati strung an arrow and let it fly. The buck came to the earth with a crashing thud. Kanati quickly set down his bow, and rolled the boulder back into place.

"So that is his secret," said the wild boy. "We must see for ourselves."

So, when Kanati disappeared from view, the two boys walked up to the boulder. With great difficulty, they managed to push it aside, but as soon as they did a great thunderous sound began to reverberate through the hills as thousands of animals and birds of the air came rushing out of the opening. The animals were moving so fast that the boys were unable to shoot any of them.

When Kanati heard the great sound, he dropped his buck and ran back to the grassy slope. When he saw the two boys, he knew what they had done.

"You are very foolish," he scolded the boys. "We have been living an easy life with plenty of food. We have never been hungry. But now we will have to work very hard to find food, and our lives will not be so easy."

And that is why men have always had to work hard to find food, and do not always find what they need. And sometimes, they go hungry all because of the foolishness of two young boys.