



The Legend of Muskrat

Kayas, long ago when Mother Earth was young and man had just begun walking the earth, Mamawi Ohtawimaw, The Creator, was observing all things around on Mother Earth. When He looked at man, He did not like what he had seen. Man was disrespecting nature, taking more than they needed, fighting one another, lying, disrespecting elders, and forgetting to honour those that had passed on. Mamawi Ohtawimow decided it was time to cleanse Mother Earth and start new. It began to rain first for days, then for many months. Water eventually covered all of Mother Earth until there was no land in sight at all.

Only one being survived the great flood. Wesahkechak, the muskrat, had climbed onto a huge log that was floating in the water and managed to escape death. A lot of other creatures had also climbed up on the log with him as there was nowhere else to go. There were a great many birds, animals, and other creatures that had escaped the water by climbing up on the log. All the creatures were afraid and looked to Wesahkechak for comfort as he was one of the first beings created and, aside from being a Trickster, had a great deal of knowledge.

Wesahkechak looked at all the creatures and said, "My brothers, Mamawi Ohtawimow has decided to cleanse the earth and has taken all the land from us. If we work together though, we can make land come back to the earth. If one of you can dive to the bottom of the water and get me a handful of dirt, using utin, the wind, I can make it so there is land again." All the creatures looked at one another to see who would step forward and offer to dive to the bottom of the great water to get a handful of dirt.

Wesahkechak and the creatures on the log all looked at each other with a hopeless look in their eyes. Just then, Makwa, the loon, stepped up. "Wait my brothers" said Makwa, "I am an expert diver as well and I am much bigger and stronger than sikiip, diving bird. Surely, I can swim faster and dive further to make it to the bottom and get a bit of dirt!" There was a hopeful excitement from all those on the log. Makwa stretched his long wings and kicked himself off the log with a powerful push. He entered the dark waters with a great deal of speed like a missile.

As soon as Makwa entered the cold water he began swimming with quick determination. He kicked his powerful webbed feet and pushed with his slender powerful wings.



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Down, down, down he went. When Makwa felt he was running out of time and breath, he kicked even harder and faster until it seemed he needed a breath of air, and black dots swam in front of his eyes from a lack of air. With one last look into the dark waters, he quickly turned around and swam for the surface.

Wesahkechak and the creatures on the great log watched intently toward the spot where Makwa dove. It seemed a great deal of time had passed before a long pointy beak finally broke the water at a great speed. Makwa shot out of the water and took in a huge gasping breath. He almost passed out before he was able to climb back onto the log. He looked sadly at those on the log and gasped out "My brothers...it's hopeless...I dove so far...still there was no end to the water...I don't think anyone can dive that far to get some dirt..."

Everyone on the log slowly put their head down in defeat. Amisk, the beaver, spoke up loudly, "I think I can make it. I have a powerful tail to push me and strong muscular legs to kick me down further than both sihkip and Makwa. I'm going now so don't worry brothers!" With that said, Amisk dove off the log and with a powerful slap of his tail and a deep breath, he was off diving for the bottom of the great water.

Amisk dove farther than sihkip could, then after a while, passed the point where Makwa had made it. It was then that Amisk felt his strength leaving him and he started to panic. He realized how far he had dived and was starting to get worried that he wouldn't make it back up to the top. He could feel he was about to pass out and he suddenly stopped, turned around and started swimming for the surface. Just as he was passing out from lack of air, he reached the surface. The others quickly grabbed hold of Amisk and pulled him up on the log just as he passed out. When the others could see that Amisk was going to be fine, they looked in his hands and could see no dirt. Amisk had not made it to the bottom of the great water! Everyone slumped on the log in misery.

It was then that a tiny voice spoke up, small and squeaky. "I want to try. I think I can make it to the bottom of the great water," said Wachusk, the muskrat, holding a tiny hand in the air. All those on the log began to look at each other and laugh. Makwa spoke up. "Mah Wachusk, what makes you think a tiny weak little thing like you could make it when the best divers have already tried? Ki mooschoot n'dee-teen!" (I think you're crazy.) Wachusk held his head in shame and embarrassment. Wesahkechak finally stepped up and spoke to the others. "My brothers. Do not laugh at Wachusk for wanting to try. At least he is offering to try when most of you won't even offer!"



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"He might not make it, but at least he is offering. We need to respect that and let him try. Wachusk! You can try if you like. I respect you for that."

Wachusk smiled and awkwardly waddled to the edge of the log. He took a small jump and landed hard on his belly in the water. The others looked away snickering. Wachusk took in as much air as his little lungs could hold and dove. He kicked his little legs as fast as he could and dove down, down into the dark great waters. He closed his eyes and followed the scent trail of sihkip, Makwa and Amisk, just as Wachusk often do. He swam and swam it seemed for days to him. He could feel the burning in his little lungs and could feel himself getting dizzy from lack of air. Just when it seemed he was going to pass out, he kicked and swam harder than ever, pushing deeper into the great water. With eyes still closed he lost the scent trail of Amisk but still he pushed on. He could feel himself passing out but still he swam on....

Wesahkechak and the others were casually watching the water, waiting for Wachusk to swim back up to the surface immediately. It was only after a great deal of time passed that they started to worry. They now looked at the water with concern, for Wachusk was still nowhere in sight.

Finally, after days it seemed, someone shouted, "Look! Over there in the water!" Everyone on the log looked in the direction the speaker pointed, and there, in the water, was a little furry thing floating face down. Wesahkechak quickly reached down and grabbed the body from the water. It was Wachusk. He had pushed himself too far and had not left enough time to allow himself to get back to the surface. Poor Wachusk had died trying to make it to the bottom of the great water. The others on the log gathered around Wesahkechak, looking sadly down at the little body in his hands. Just then, Wesahkechak noticed something. Wachusk had one tiny hand closed in a fist and when Wesahkechak opened his little fist, there was a small handful of dirt in it!

Wesahkechak took the dirt from his little hand and held it up to utin, the wind. Utin blew the dirt from his hand and when the dirt hit the great water, it began to form first just a small island, then a larger and larger island until mountains and lakes began to form. It wasn't long before Wesahkechak and all the creatures were finally standing on land again. They stood around Wesahkechak, who was still holding poor little Wachusk in his hands.

"N'chesunak, my brothers and sisters, our little brother Wachusk has given his life so that we may live. Even though you all thought he was the weakest of us, he was truly the strongest of us all."



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“Even though his body was small and weak, his heart and spirit was fierce and strong. Remember this for all time, never judge someone by how they look, look deeper into them and you will find that they are probably stronger in spirit than even you. Wachusk will always be remembered for what he has done today and how he has taught us that sometimes the seemingly weakest of us can always end up being the strongest. Remember this brothers and sisters.”

To this day, Wachusk, muskrat, are known for their ferocity and resilience. When attacked, they will fight to the death no matter the size of their attacker, and should they get angry and chase an attacker, they will continue chasing them until they can run no more. They are one of the few animals on our Great Mother Earth that will not stop trying even if it means their own death.

Ekosi Maka