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Animal legends
NEBRASKA
FOLKLORE
PAMPHLET SIX

LEGENDS

FEDERAL WRITERS’ PROJECT

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Animal Legends

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These legends are for the most part stories of the supernatural power possessed by animals. The belief that animals had supernatural power did not discount the power of a supreme being known to the Pawnees as Tirawa. Within their habitat the Pawnees had certain places which they held sacred. Five such places of importance in animal legend, which were also known to other Indian tribes are Pahuk, a promontory in a bend of the Platte River a few miles west of Fremont; Nakiskat, on an island in the Platte River near Central City; Tsuraspako, (Girl Hill) on the south side of the Platte near Grand Island; Kitsawitsak, known to white people as Wakouda Springs, near Beloit, Kansas; and Pahowa, a spring near the Republican River. Pahuk, the chief one of these animal lodges, was known and held sacred by other Indian tribes. The Dakotas called it Paha Wakun (Holy Hill).

THE BEAR MAN

There was once a little Pawnee boy who pretended that he was a bear. Before he was born his father had come upon a little bear cub while on the warpath. He did not want to kill it or leave it because it cried after him. He said, "Child, you are a Nahurac; Tirawa will take care of you. I hope that when my child is born the Nahurac will take care of him."
When the man returned to the village he told his wife about the bear.

This boy was like a bear because his father had petted it and told the mother about it before he was born. As he grew up he became still more like a bear. He told his friends jokingly that he could turn himself into one.

When he became a man, he started out on the warpath, the leader of some thirty-five others. They went up on the Running Water and before they reached a village the Sioux discovered them. The Pawnees were over-
powered and all were killed.

The country in which this battle occurred was rocky and overgrown with cedar trees. After the battle, two bears came along and found the dead Pawnees lying in a hollow. The she-bear recognized the body of the boy who was like a bear. She called the he-bear and pointed out the man. She said, "Here is the boy who imitated us and sang about us. Can you help him?" The he-bear answered, "I will try. I have more power when the sun is shining on me." The day was cloudy and cold and it was snowing, but now and then the clouds would pass and the sun would come out for a little while.

The bears gathered up the pieces of the man. The he-bear lay down and held the pieces to his breast. The she-bear lay on top of them to warm them. They worked over the dead man with medicine, and often the bear would pray, "Father, help me." After a while the man began to move and then he became conscious and had life.

When he opened his eyes, the he-bear said, "It is not through me, but the she-bear, that you have been brought back to life. You are not yet well and whole. You must come and live with us, until your wounds are healed." Although the man was very weak and would faint and fall down, the bears took him with them to a cave in the rocks among the cedars. Here were their young that they had left when they started out.

The man lived with the bears until his wounds had healed. The bears taught him everything they knew. The he-bear said to the man, "I am going to make you great, but do not think that I can do great things of myself. I look above to the giver of all power. I shall take you home and I want you to imitate us. That shall be a part of your greatness. I shall look after you and give you a part of myself. If I am killed, you shall be killed; if I grow old, you shall grow old. Look at that tree that Tirawa made. It is always green and young. Take some of it with you, and whenever it thunders and lightens throw some on the fire and let the smoke rise."

The bears made a bearskin cap to cover his naked skull. Soon they set out upon their journey. When they reached the village it was night. The bear said, "Go into the village and get me a piece of buffalo meat, a blue bead, some Indian tobacco, and some sweet smelling clay." When the man went into the village his father was surprised and glad to see him; he had supposed that the whole party had been killed. Then the man went back to the bear.

Before they parted the bear hugged him, put his head against the man's cheek, and said, "My fur that has touched you will bless you and make you great." He drew his paws down the man's arms until they came to his hands and then he said, "I have rubbed my hands over you so that you shall be tough and fear nothing. Because my mouth has touched yours you shall be wise."

The man became the greatest of warriors. He originated the bear dance celebrated among the Pawnees. He died of old age; the bear died at the same time.
TIKE WAKUSH: "THE MAN WHO CALLED THE BUFFALO"

Sometime before the white men came among them, the various bands of the Pawnee Indians lived in separate villages. One winter the Kitkehahki band roamed over the country after buffalo, but they were unable to find any. The women and children cried from hunger.

One of the young men felt very sorry for the sufferers and said to the Head Chief, "I think I can help them. Let them set up a new lodge to meet in outside the village." The chief gave orders to have this done.

While the lodge was being built, this man would disappear in the night, returning at dawn. Sometimes as he sat in his lodge he would reach behind him and bring out a small piece of buffalo meat and give it to someone, saying, "When you have had enough to eat, give what is left to someone else." Although the piece was small and the person hungry, there was always some left to give away.

It was the Head Chief's custom to ride through the village occasionally, urging the people to do right by each other. He announced that this man was going to try to help the people. Many gave him presents and each one said, "Try to help us."

When they were gathered together in the new lodge the man said, "I thank you for these presents; I shall give them to the one who gives me power. In four days, help will come."

Every night he disappeared and came back. He said he had been far away. When he returned the fourth night, he told the people that the buffalo were near. On a hill he sacrificed some eagle feathers, blue beads, and Indian tobacco. When he returned to the camp he said, "When an object comes to that place of sacrifice do not turn it back. Just watch."

The next morning at daylight the people were all in front of their lodges watching the place of sacrifice. As they looked a great buffalo bull came over the hill, stood there a short time, walked down the hill, and galloped off past the village. Then the man said, "That is the leader; the whole herd will follow."

He told the chiefs to send four boys to the top of the hill to look for buffalo. They came running back and went to the chiefs' lodge and said, "A herd of buffalo are coming!"

Then the chief rode through the village and told everyone to make ready for the chase. He said, "Do not leave anything on the killing ground. Bring the best portions to the new lodge and we shall have a feast there."

When the buffalo came over the hill, the Indians surrounded them and killed a great number. Each man brought the best portions of his meat to the new lodge, and for four days and nights they feasted. The man said, "We shall make three more surrounds. See that none of the meat is wasted. Tirawa does not like waste." Each night he disappeared.
On the fourth night he said, "Tomorrow the buffalo will come again. Be careful not to kill a little yellow calf that you will see with its mother." They made the second surround and let the calf and its mother go.

The tribe saw that this man was great. They gave him presents, including their best horses.

In the second surround, they again killed a great many buffalo. Their sacks were full; dried meat was piled out of doors.

As they were about to make the third surround the wind changed, the buffalo smelt them and stampeded. The man ran up to the place of sacrifice carrying a pole on which was tied the skin of a kit fox. He waved the pole and called out "Ska-a-a!" The buffalo turned about and ran toward the hunters. Many were killed.

After this surround, the man called the chiefs and asked, "Are you satisfied?" They answered, "We are satisfied and thankful to you. Through you the tribe has been saved from starvation." He said, "You will make one more surround. Get all you can for that will be the last of the buffalo this winter. The presents you gave me I give back." But the people would not let him return the presents.

During the fourth surround the people again killed many buffalo and saved the meat. That night the man disappeared again. The next morning he asked the people if they could see any buffalo, but they could not.

The next day the Indians broke up camp and started east toward their home. They had so much meat that they had to make two trips for it. They usually had no fresh meat, but when this man came in he would always bring in a little piece of meat and divide it among the people. After it was boiled, everyone would eat, but they could not eat it all up. The man could even change buffalo chips into meat. He would cover them with his robe and when he took it off there would be buffalo meat and pemmican.

The people wanted this great man to marry a chief's daughter and raise children so that his stock would not run out, but he did not do so.

Once more he saved the tribe from starvation. The second time the suffering was so great that they called a council and asked him to help. He consented to help, and again brought the buffalo, allowing them to make four surrounds.

When the man died, all the people mourned for him. The chief rode around the village and called out, "I am poor in mind on account of this man's death."
A STORY OF FAITH

Once long ago before the Pawnees had doctors' dances, there was a certain small boy in one of the tribes. He had peculiar ways and kept to himself. His mother or father sometimes found him with mud smeared over his face and head. This was a sign of a doctor, showing that the boy had faith in the earth from which roots used for medicine are taken.

His parents did not understand his ways, but they did not interfere. After he had grown up he seemed very thoughtful. He would often sit by himself fasting and praying. His father, who was a brave but not a chief, was well-to-do and had plenty of horses.

When anyone fell ill, this young man would go to them and cure them. The doctors in the tribe wondered how he could do this; he had never been taught by them. He did not want to be with the doctors. He preferred to be along. Some of the bad doctors became jealous of him. They had great influence because the people believed they could lay a curse on a man.

His name became so great that it was well known among the other bands of Pawnees. A great doctor from another village paid a visit to this young man and to find out where he got his knowledge and power. The young man greeted him courteously and entertained him in his lodge. The great doctor said, "You may come to me for advice." Although it was contrary to Pawnee custom, they smoked the doctor's tobacco all night long. In the morning he departed.

A short time after the doctor left, the young man began to be ill. He felt drowsy and heavy and seemed to be swelling up with some strange disease. The doctor had poisoned him in some way. The boy felt disgraced and did not know what to do. He prayed and fasted for several days at a time, and was so despondent that he thought of killing himself. He did not tell his trouble to anyone.

He went out on a hill to meditate and pray, and had not returned when the tribe set out on a hunt. The father left a horse in the village upon which he might follow the tribe. When he came back, the village was empty except for a fine horse which his father had left for him. He did not follow the tribe, however, but rode eastward for several days.

One day he stopped and tied his horse to a tree and prayed aloud, "My Father, through you I live and through you that man put me in this condition. You are the ruler and nothing is impossible to you. I pray you take this illness from me." Then he said, "To you, fish of the rivers, you, birds of the air, you animals that move upon the earth, and you, oh Sun! I offer up this animal. If you have any power, intercede for me." After saying this he stabbed his horse and killed it. He placed it upright on its knees and skinned it that the animals might feed upon it.
Although the tribe was camped on the Republican River he went on to a hill by the Platte River called Pahuk by the Indians. As he felt very badly he stayed there several days. One night, having fallen asleep exhausted by weeping and praying, he was awakened by a voice saying, "What are you doing here?" A second and a third night he had the same experience and each time he saw no one. On the third night he answered the voice, saying, "Whoever speaks to me, take pity on me."

As he lay with his head toward the east on the fourth night, something touched his shoulder. When he looked up he saw a large animal with big black eyes and a whitish body, (Pah) an elk.

The elk said, "Right here under you is the home of the (Nahurac) animals. We know your trouble. If one animal's home fails to help you, I will take you to another; if that fails, to another. If they cannot help you we still have the One above." Having said these things he vanished.

As the man sat absorbed in thought a voice roused him. It said, "I have passed here many times and have heard you crying." Looking up he saw sitting by him a little bird blue above white below, with red legs. The boy replied, "Oh, my brother, you understand; take pity on me." The bird said, "You must not talk that way to me. I am only a servant. Tomorrow night I will come again and whatever I do, you do also." The bird disappeared and the man felt a little hopeful.

The next night when the time came the bird flew close and said, "Come, we will go to the edge of the cut bank." When they reached the edge the bird said, "Do as I do." So when the bird dived off the cut bank, the man followed. As he sprang he felt like a bird and could sail this way and that. When he reached the water it seemed that he was standing in the entrance of a lodge and could see the fire burning within.

The bird flew in ahead of him and said, "Here he is." As he stepped forward the bears growled and the other animals all made sounds. Although a bear stood ready to seize him on one side of the entrance and on the other a snake was rattling, coiled as if to strike, something behind seemed to push him ahead. Knowing that he must enter, he looked neither to the right nor to the left but walked straight ahead. As he passed them they sank back and were quiet. Then the Nahurac made a noise of welcome. Looking around he saw all kinds of animals—beaver, garfish, otter, and a sandhill crane. The man looked very pitiful, and the bird servant said, "I have taken pity on this man and I want you to take pity on him." It was very quiet; as the man looked about he saw all the animals roll their eyes. Then the bird stood up and said, "My rulers, I am your servant and am always obedient. I am weary of the crying of this poor-minded man. Pity him because I pity him."

The bird took the young man's pipe, walked over to the beaver, the head doctor, and held it out to him. The beaver stretched out his hand and withdrew it; as the bird continued to cry, the beaver took the pipe. All the animals were pleased. The beaver said, "I take pity on my ser-
vant, but it is impossible for me to promise to help this man." He passed the pipe to the next doctor who said, "I am poor; I have not much power." The pipe went around the circle. The white beaver then said, "None of us have the power to help you. There is another lodge at Pahowa. Go there." The Nahurac made medicine and when the young man awoke he was lying on the hill where he had slept the night before.

He wept all day. The elk came at night and said, "Go to sleep and I will take you to Pahowa." The man slept; next morning he awoke on the point of Pahowa. That night the bird came and dived into a spring. As the young man followed, he found himself again at the door of a lodge. The same thing happened and the animal doctors told him of another lodge on the west side of the Loup River. He went to sleep and awakened on top of the ground near Pahowa.

That night the elk took him while he slept to a place near the bank of the Loup River. The bird led him over the bank to the Nahurac lodge at that place. Here were the same head doctors. They could not help him and told him to go to an island in the Platte near Lone Tree (Central City). The elk took him to the island and the bird led him to the lodge under the center of the island. They sent him back to the lodge at Pahuk which the beaver told him was the head lodge.

He reached the lodge at Pahuk in the same manner as he had before. The animals were glad to see him. This time the man himself asked the animals to help him. The white beaver took the pipe and said, "My brother, I have done this to see if any of the other lodges were equal to me. I have an animal who will undertake to rid you of your trouble." He walked to a certain ground dog and held out the pipe. The ground dog hesitated a long time. At last he reached out his paws, and the Nahurac made a very big noise.

The ground dog said, "I have accepted this pipe for the sake of our servant who has been so faithful to our commands. And if I fail now, we can do nothing for him."

After the doctors had smoked, they told the young man to sit down between them and the fire. These twelve animals paced back and forth. At length the head doctor told him to stand and asked the other Nahurac to sing. The ground dogs danced, made their hands go up and down, made their jaws go as if eating but they did not open their mouths. Next they told him to lie down with his feet toward the entrance. The head ground dog jumped over the man's belly and seemed to be eating a big piece of flesh. Each one ran and jumped over the man and as they jumped each one was eating a piece of flesh. As they were jumping, the swelling gradually disappeared from the young man.

The head ground dog said, "Now, Nahurac, you see the power I have. That is the reason I do not travel on top of the ground. My appetite would overpower me and I would kill men and eat them."
The young man had been unconscious since he first lay down. The ground dogs did not know how to restore him. The head doctor, the beaver, said to the bears, "This man belongs to you. Let me see what you can do." The head bear said, "Very well. I will let you see what I can do."

First the bears began to sing. Then the head bear jumped on the man and acted as if he were going to tear him to pieces. The other took hold of him and shook him until at last his blood began to circulate and he began to breathe. After while he regained consciousness. He felt as he had many months before and he found that his trouble was gone. The head bear stood by him and said, "Nahurac, you have seen what I can do. However dangerously wounded I may be I know how to cure myself if I have any breath left in me." The bears then sat down in their places.

The man arose and thanked the Nahurac. He stayed several days observing their ceremonies. They taught him their ways and their secrets. One day the head doctor said, "I wish to ask a favor of you in return for what we have done." The man agreed, and the head doctor continued, "See that my animals that move in the river are fed. I move in the water. You live in the air but we live where there is no air. The heaven is the house of Tirawa and we all live inside of it. When you do the things we have taught, you must blow a smoke to each of these head doctors, and to Tirawa you must blow four smokes. Blow four to the night and to the east, for something may then foretell events to you while you sleep. Now, go home and after a short time pay a visit to the doctor who caused your trouble."

The young man arrived home in the night. His father had long mourned him as dead and was poor in mind on account of it. He went into his father's lodge and awakened him. His father said, "Is it you or your ghost?" The son replied, "I am not a ghost."

He asked his father to summon his uncles and other relatives and ask them to bring a blue bead, a pipe, some Indian tobacco, and some buffalo meat. The relatives came to rejoice and bring the presents. The boy took the presents down to the river and threw them in; they were carried to the Nahurac lodge at Pahuk.

After a few days the young man mounted his horse and went to visit the doctor. When he reached the village, someone said to the doctor, "There is a man at your lodge." The doctor was a little uneasy; he knew what he had done to the boy. He thought, however, that he knew so much that no one could overcome him. He welcomed the boy and took him into his lodge.

After they had eaten the evening meal, the young man said, "When you were at my lodge we smoked your tobacco; tonight we will smoke mine." While they smoked the boy moved his jaws as if eating. At daylight the boy said he must go. "Then he reached the river he blew upon the ice which immediately melted and was full of blood. The young man had learned the ground dogs' secrets.

The people found the doctor dead in his lodge. He was hollow; his blood and insides had gone down the river to feed the animals. The boy had fulfilled his promise to the Nahurac and had revenge upon the doctor.
The boy became the greatest doctor of his band and taught his people the doctor's ceremonies and many other wonderful things.

**THE SNAKE BROTHER**

Once long ago when a party of Pawnee were on the warpath, two brothers got lost in a thick woods. They could not find the war party; so they decided to try to make their way home. Having no food, they watched for berries or for something to kill. Finally they came upon a buffalo which had been dead for some time. There was no flesh left but the marrow was still in the bones. They took some of these bones and carried them along.

They traveled some time before they came out of the woods. The sun had gone down, so they stopped for the night. In a lone tree near by was a squirrel. One of the boys shot him with his bow and arrow, and they roasted him over a fire.

While the squirrel was cooking, the older brother said, "I believe the squirrel and marrow will be good together."

The younger brother said, "This is not real meat." (The Indians did not consider that squirrel flesh was real meat like the flesh of buffalo or elk). "I do not wish to eat them together. You eat them together if you wish." So the older brother ate them together, taking a bit of marrow and then a bit of squirrel.

In the middle of the night the elder brother awoke with a queer feeling in his legs and feet. He discovered that they were grown together, round like a snake, and had a rattle on the end. He woke the younger brother and said, "There is something wrong with my feet and legs." The younger brother felt of his limbs and saw that he was changing into a snake.

The boy thought about his brother alone on the prairie so far from home. He began telling the younger brother what to do while he was still able to talk. He said, "You will get home safely. I will be a snake and remain here, yet I will protect you and guide you. When I have changed entirely into a snake, carry me to that hole by the tree. When you get home, tell father and mother what happened. I do not know whether it happened because I ate the marrow and squirrel together or whether it was to happen to me and I could not help it. Come back soon, alone. Afterwards, whenever you wish to go on the warpath, come this way with your party. I will help you." While he was talking the change was moving up his body. Then the snake boy said, "Put the robe over my head for a little while." When the younger boy took the robe away his brother had changed completely into a snake, its head as broad as two hands.

The boy picked up his snake brother and placed him on the ground before the hole. "Now, I am going home," he said. "I do not know the
country through which I must go. Remember your promises and take care of me." He felt very sad, and did not wait to see the snake go into the hole; he started on his journey. "When he reached home he told his parents and other relatives what had happened.

"When the young man had been home about ten days he told his mother he was going on the warpath by himself. He took five pairs of mocasins stuffed full of parched corn, also a sack of pounded buffalo meat, and set out to see his brother.

After a week of fast traveling, he came to the place where he had left his snake brother. He went to the hole and said, "I am here, brother, I have come alone and I want to see you. Remember your promises." He heard a rattling, a rustling, and a scraping in the hole; then out of the hole came a cloud of dust, followed by a huge snake that was his brother. Other snakes came out and crawled around, but the snake brother remained by the hole. The boy took the big snake in his arms and hugged it and talked to it. The snake put out his tongue to kiss him. The young man put his snake brother down; all the other snakes went back into the hole, and the snake brother followed them.

The young man went on his way until sunset, when he came to a creek. Here he stopped for the night. His snake brother came to him in a dream and said, "I am glad you came to see me; now I will help you. Tomorrow morning dress yourself for fighting. Put the feathers on your head, and put on the warpaint."

The next morning when the boy awoke, he did as his brother had told him. After dressing himself to fight, he went on. When he reached the top of a little hill, he saw some people and several horses coming toward him. He thought it was a small band of Sioux, so he went back and hid in the bushes where he had slept. "He party came nearer and camped just below his hiding place. Peeking out from time to time, the boy saw there was only a man and a woman and many horses.

After watching them for some time, he crept slowly through the brush until he was about twenty yards away. Then he looked again. The woman was cooking. He could not see the man, but bow and arrows were hanging on a tree. "The man was probably sleeping. As the boy watched he became very excited, thinking of what he was about to do. As he watched, the woman went towards the horses to drive them nearer the camp. When she came back the boy left his hiding place and ran toward the woman. He was quite near before she saw him. He told her to stand still or he would kill her. He shot two arrows into her husband, who lay asleep almost at her feet, and took his scalp.

He took the woman to where the horses were grazing and made her mount a horse; then he got on another. Driving the other horses before them, he went back to where his snake brother lived. He tied the woman to the tree under which his brother lived. He also tied a spotted horse and a mule to the tree. Then he went to the hole where his brother lived and said, "Brother, I thank you for helping me. I have brought these two animals and the woman to you. They are yours. I would like to see you before I
go away." Soon he heard a rattling and saw a cloud of dust coming from
the hole. The snake brother came out, followed as usual by smaller snakes
which climbed the tree until they were thick above the boy's head. The
boy took his snake brother up in his arms and hugged him, and the snake
touched the boy's face with his tongue. After a time the boy put the
snake down and set out on his long journey home.

Two or three days after the first war party visited the snake brother,
they came upon a band of Sioux, took a lot of horses, and killed many of
their enemies. They went back by way of the snake's home, and left a horse
and the scalps they had taken as presents to the snake brother.

The next time a war party went out, it happened that the boy could not
go along, but he said to them, "Go to my brother, leave presents, and ask
his help." They did as the boy said and they were successful.

The boy was always lucky in war. All the warriors wanted to go with
him on the warpath, for they knew his snake brother would help them. The
boy grew very rich, with many horses, and became a great chief.

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