

WILLIE'S TRIBE

(Kootenai)



Developed by Kootenai Committee of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes

Cleo Kenmille, Coordinator

Glen James

Madeline Couture

Sarah Bufton

Sophie Matt

Sarah Eneas

Patricia Hewankorn

Agnes Kenmille

Joseph Antiste, Consultant

Joseph Coburn, Director

Pacific Northwest Indian Reading and Language Development Program

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

Developed by the Pacific Northwest Indian Reading and Language Development Program, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 300 Southwest Sixth Avenue, Portland, Oregon 97204

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One night as a young boy named Willie lay beneath the stars, he wondered if a spirit would come to him. He had been waiting for two nights now and still there was no sight of his spirit. Willie became tired and fell asleep dreaming of what his spirit would be.

The next morning when Willie woke, he went to the nearby stream to catch fish for himself. As he walked to the stream, he noticed that it was oddly quiet. He stopped to listen. The only sound he heard was the rustle of leaves in the wind and the running water of the stream. Willie stood listening, then walked on. After he caught enough fish, Willie went deep into the woods to make his camp and cook.

That evening while Willie was making his supper, he heard a noise. It came from deep in the woods. He listened for a few minutes but didn't hear it anymore. Willie continued to cook his fish. When he sat down to eat again, he heard the same noise. This time the sound was closer than before. Willie looked around. There, not too far from where he sat, stood a big deer, a buck.

The buck moved closer and began to talk to him. The buck said, "Come with me, Willie." Willie knew the buck was the spirit he had been seeking, so he followed him. They walked all night.

The next morning as the sun climbed into the sky, the buck stopped. It said to Willie, "We will stop and make camp here. After we have rested, we will move on. We still have a long journey ahead of us." The buck moved into the trees and Willie found a warm place to lie down. Willie was very tired and fell fast asleep. When Willie awoke, he and the buck shared some food. They went to the stream to drink.

When the sun began to sink behind the hills, Willie and the buck continued on their way. Willie didn't know where they were going, but he knew he must follow. They walked on and on. Finally, they came to a small Indian village.

The buck said to Willie, "In this village you will find an old Indian chief. He will tell you a story. You will learn of the fate that will come to your tribe. The chief will tell you what you have to do." The buck left Willie and disappeared into the darkness. Willie was alone and it was late. He decided to find a place to sleep. He would look for the chief in the morning.

The next morning Willie learned the old chief lived in a small lodge at the edge of the village. Willie went to the lodge to talk to him. When he arrived, he found the chief sleeping on a cot. The chief heard Willie and sat up and said, "I've been waiting for you. The buck said you would be here soon. Sit down and I will tell you a story."

Willie sat next to the old chief. He listened as the chief told of his childhood and how it was when the chief was growing up. The chief told Willie about a dream. He said, "In my dream, there were no elderly Indians left to guide the young Indian people. The young people grew anxious and impatient. They did foolish things like not thinking ahead, not considering what could happen. They traded furs and food for a certain drink. This drink made them do very crazy things. Two men came to the village to buy all the land for lots of money."

The chief added, "When this dream will happen, I will be gone and you will be growing older. What you have to do is learn all you can about your culture and teach others what you know. Teach the young children all the Indian ways, so our culture will never die." They sat in silence for a few minutes.

Then Willie said, "Thank you. I will do all I can." Willie left the old chief. He began learning and teaching the Indian ways. Willie went to all the Indian gatherings and asked the elderly men and women many questions. He learned all the Indian songs, dances and prayers. As he grew older, Willie talked to the young people and told them stories. He taught all the songs he knew. He taught them prayers and hymns.

As Willie grew older, he thought many times of the old chief's dream. He began to wonder who would be the next to carry on the tribal traditions. He hoped he had taught the young well, so that there would be many to carry on the traditions and culture of the tribe.

Today, if Willie were alive, he would be proud to see many young people carrying on the traditional ways. He would say, "Now it is up to you and your children to carry on the traditions from generation to generation."