

My New Moccasins

Little Explorer

A 19th century Lakota Child's life

by
Wolfrunner



My New Moccasins

Little Explorer

My New Moccasins



Little Explorer My New Moccasins

All Rights Reserved © 2002 Wolfrunner

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, or any information storage retrieval system without the permission in writing from the author.

Contact Wolfrunner at:

Paytonlee52@hotmail.com

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, organizations or persons, living or dead is entirely coincidental and beyond the intent of either the author.

Dedication

I dedicate this book to White Hair, Moondove, and the Lakshota Dove Clan who have bestowed upon me the name and responsibility of Keeper of the Stories.

I dedicate this book to my family, Sonya, Shanti, Sara, David, Vincent, Nick, Alex, Alexis, Vanessa, and Veronica.

I also dedicate this book to the reader. It is for you I write. I wish to educate with truth and historical facts.

Special Thanks to Sonya, Alexis, and Veronica who are my editors and contributors to the Little Explorer Series.

Introduction

Let me introduce myself, I am Little Explorer.

This was the name given to me by my grandmother, Crooked Toes, when I was born. Grandmother told me that as soon as I was born my eyes opened wide, and I started looking all over. She told me it was if I had determined at my birth, I would explore my world.

I am older now and I do love exploring and learning everything I can about just everything in our Lakshota world.

My family decided to keep my name Little Explorer for now, but sometimes we Lakshota children can receive many names within our lifetimes.

This is a little background on me. I was born in 12th moon cycle, or you know it as December on the tenth day. We never kept track of years, but marked seasons. It was my mother's twenty-sixth season. Your historical records would have made it the year of 1830. We live in a small camp group of family and friends. We call ourselves the Dove Clan.

The dove is a symbol of peace and we are a peaceful people. My mother's name is Little Bit, because she is so tiny and delicate. My father really loves her and he is tall and big. My father's name is Big Talker because he talks so much and is an important member of the Council of our camp. My Grandmother's name is Crooked Toes because, that's right!

She has crooked toes. I never knew my Grandfather, Lost Spirit. Grandmother divorced him. He had to return to his camp and his family. I have an older sister. Her name is Laughing Eyes because they always sparkle with laughter. I also have a good friend named, Running Waters. That's what his Grandfather calls him and we really don't

know why.

Sometimes the Elders, the Shaman, or even the Chief of a camp might give you a special name, but that usually happened when you were older.

You will learn more about my family as I write more of these little books.

We live on Turtle Island, which is the United States to you. Our camp is near a river and near mountains in a place that you call North

Dakota. This place is our primary home and we have built stronger homes here. We have dug into the earth for these homes. We use them for the cold months you call Winter. In the seasons you call Spring, Summer, and Autumn we move all over following migrating animals that we use for food, clothing, and tools. These animals are deer, elk, moose, and buffalo. We also use other animals for food, clothing and tools. Some of those animals are foxes, wolves, rabbits, squirrels, birds, fish, and porcupines.

This is going to be a story of my new moccasins that my grandmother and mother made for me from soft deerskin and tough buffalo hide.

Come and be my friend,

Little Explorer



My New Moccasins

"Finish your meal," Little Bit ordered. "You must eat everything and be strong for the work you must do today."

"But Grandmother is already waiting for me outside," Little Explorer protested putting another spoonful of pine nut soup in her mouth.

"I know," Little Bit told her impatient daughter. "Grandmother still wants you to eat your food. You slept in late today little sleepy head."

Little Explorer was excited about today, but she loved her mother's cooking and the honey-sweetened breakfast of pine nut mush was really delicious. Little Explorer was also given a wooden mug of cool water and a wooden bowl filled with freshly picked wild raspberries. Little Explorer liked to put the fresh raspberries on her pine nut mush.

"I'm finished, mother! Little Explorer declared showing her clean bowl

to her mother. "Can I go to Grandmother now?"

"No, Little Explorer," Little Bit reprimanded. "You must help me wash the dishes. You know your duties in our household. Then you may go to Grandmother."

Little Explorer picked up her dishes and walked to the river with her mother to wash the morning dishes.

"Where is Laughing Eyes?" Little Explorer asked her mother. "Isn't she supposed to help us?"

"Laughing Eyes is with Long Fingers," Little Bit replied. "She is learning how to dye and weave our

porcupine quills for decoration. She was up early this morning. This is your added duty to remind you of your responsibility to your family and our camp. You are very important to all of us Little Explorer. We must all work together. We must be aware of each other's time we take. Do you understand, Little Explorer?"

"Yes, mother," Little Explorer answered apologetically. She really did understand that because she slept longer than the rest of the family, she had made others late as well. "I'm sorry to make you late too."

"I am happy you understand," Little Bit said proudly. She was very proud of Little Explorer. Her daughter was advanced for her age and everyone in the Dove Clan knew that Little Explorer would grow up to be a very important and talented member of the Dove Clan. Not only was Little Explorer fortunate to be born a Sustainer of Life, she learned quickly many of the talents needed by the clan.

That is why Grandmother was going to soften the skins needed to make a pair of new moccasins for Little Explorer today. Grandmother would

teach her how to soften the skin, sew the moccasin with sinew, and decorate them.



Little Explorer helped her mother wash the dishes and take them back to their lodge.

"Can I find Grandmother now?" Little Explorer asked eagerly while she put the wooden utensils inside their ornately quill embroidered parfleche.

The parfleche was a soft white elk skin bag that Grandmother had made and given as a gift to Little Explorer's family. The bag was beautifully embroidered with geometric dyed quill designs representing the spider. The arrow point was also embroidered into the design of the parfleche.

Little Explorer and Little Bit were very proud of all of Grandmother's quill designs. Grandmother was an expert on design and the tanning of animal hide for dresses, leggings, moccasins, dwellings, bags, and shields. As a matter of record, Grandmother was the best for everything artistic in the camp.

"Yes, go to Grandmother," Little Bit chuckled. She knew how much Little Explorer loved being with her grandmother. Little Bit would join them soon. Talks to Much had a good hunt yesterday and she needed to prepare the rabbit skins so she could make a soft robe for Little Explorer to keep her warm this winter.

Little Explorer opened the flap and ran outside to look for her Grandmother. As she looked about she saw most of the people in the camp busy at work. Even the children were helping and learning new skills. Her friend, Dog Ears was with his uncle Shoots Straight

Arrows. Dog Ears was learning how to make a bow with a tree limb his uncle had prepared for him. Soon Shoots Straight Arrows would teach Dog Ears how to be the best archer in the camp.

"Hello Uncle Shoots Straight Arrows and Dog Ears," Little Explorer addressed as she walked past. It was proper to address the elder first and it didn't matter if the adult was a true relative. All children deemed it respectful to call adults as family members.

Shoots Straight Arrows smiled and asked Little Explorer, "Hello Little Explorer! Are you looking for

Grandmother Crooked Toes?" Shoots Straight Arrows spoke to Crooked Toes earlier this morning. He respected Little Explorer's grandmother for all her talents. All the Lakota talked of Crooked Toes gifts an artist and respected her highly.

Crooked Toes told Shoots Straight Arrows this morning that she would be giving lessons to Little Explorer on how to make moccasins and how to decorated them with quills and seed beads.

"Grandmother Crooked Toes is over by small hill with our women," Shoots Straight Arrows said gesturing

his right arm with a large sweep to show her the direction. "Grandmother waits for you. You are late little one. Grandmother will be upset with you."

"I am a sleepy head and I am sorry. Forgive me Uncle?" Little Explorer asked.

Children of the Lakota were never spanked. They never needed to be. When they misbehaved, all the adults and the children scolded them. That was more embarrassing and corrected bad behavior quickly. It was one thing to have a parent upset with you. It was quite another to have the camp upset with you.

Shoots Straight Arrows smiled and said, "We forgive you Little Explorer. Go to Grandmother."

"And tomorrow do not be such a sleepy head," Dogs Ear added with a laugh.

Little Explorer ran to the small hill near the camp. She saw Laughing Eyes learning to quill with Long Fingers showing her how to soften the berry dyed quills. "Hello Sister!"

"Hello Little Explorer," Laughing Eyes answered. "Grandmother waits for you. I told her you were a little sleepy head this morning."

"Thank you, Sister," Little Explorer appreciated. At least Grandmother Crooked Toes wouldn't be too angry with her for being late.

"You must learn how to sew the moccasins faster so Laughing Eyes can decorate them for you," Long Fingers teased. "This will be your punishment for being a little sleepy head."

"Yes Auntie Long Fingers," Little Explorer replied respectfully. She knew everyone in the camp would be upset with her and she accepted responsibility for her misbehavior. Everyone in the camp needed everyone to live. Everyone in the camp had responsibility for each

other and the need to work together. Little Explorer saw her Grandmother and ran quickly to her side. "I'm here Grandmother!"

"So I see Little Explorer," Crooked Toes said smiling. "Come with me. We have much to do and little time. Your sister, Laughing Eyes will decorate your new moccasins today if we hurry."

"Then I can wear them today!" Little Explorer exclaimed as Grandmother Crooked Toes took her hand and led her to grandmother's friends who were preparing many skins. Little Explorer saw rabbit, elk, deer, and buffalo skins in different stages of being

preserved. Eyes that Water was sitting on the ground. She was on top of a large buffalo skin and was pounding stakes into the ground to hold it straight for drying. If a hide was to keep the hair on it, it was staked to the ground.

Dogs Ear's grandmother, Works Fast, was using a scraper made of antler bone to scrape the hair from an elk skin. The elk skin was tied to a square wooden frame made from cottonwood branches. Leather strips tied to the square wooden frame pulled the elk skin tightly.



Smiling Woman was sitting on another skin. She was treating it with a mixture of brains, eggs, cooked ground up liver, spleen, and fat from the animal to make this hide very soft. It would be made into a dress for her sister, Eyes That Sing.

Grandmother led Little Explorer to a place that had small pieces of scraps left from a skin that had been made into a dress for Laughing Eyes by

grandmother's friend, Muddy Feet. "Sit here Little Explorer," Grandmother ordered. "We will trace your foot on these scraps."

Little Explorer placed her left foot on one of the small pieces of scrap her grandmother had put down on the ground.

Crooked Toes picked up a piece of carbon wood from the smoking fire and traced an outline of Little Explorer's foot. She placed another scrap piece of sturdy buffalo hide on the ground for Little Explorer to put her foot upon and repeated the process.

When Crooked Toes had outlines of Little Explorer's foot on the two pieces of hide she handed a pointed and sharp awl shaped bone to Little Explorer and told her granddaughter, "Watch what I do and you do the same on your piece of hide."

Little Explorer watched her grandmother carefully as Crooked Toes used a pointed sharp awl and started cutting out the oval shape she had outlined of Little Explorer's foot.

Little Explorer did exactly as her grandmother. She was a little slower but felt encouraged every time she looked up to see her grandmother

smiling at her. Grandmother's love and admiration was important to her.

When both soles for the moccasins had been cut, grandmother took two more pieces of scrap. She measured the pieces to fit the outside of the moccasins and then cut the scraps with the pointed awl. Using the same awl grandmother poked tiny holes into the outside of the moccasin sole and the scrap for the body of the moccasin.

Little Explorer copied grandmother except the holes weren't as perfect and close to the edge.

Grandmother continued smiling and offered, "You are doing very well,

Little Explorer. Now we will sew the moccasin body to the sole.”

Grandmother handed Little Explorer a strong but thin piece of sinew. “Watch me,” Grandmother said. “Do exactly as I do.”

Little Explorer pulled the sinew thread through the first hole at the heel end of the moccasin hole and then knotted the end just like her grandmother had done. She pulled the sinew through the moccasin body and then back under the sole through the body and back under again. Little Explorer followed her grandmother’s

example until the holes ended on the sole.

“Take your moccasin and turn it inside out just like this,” grandmother told Little Explorer. “We will sew the rest of the moccasin on the inside.

Little Explorer did as her grandmother told her and weaved the sinew in and out of the holes just as her grandmother had done. She left the larger hole on the top alone. Even Little Explorer knew that would be for the tie to keep the moccasin on her foot.

“Your work is beautiful, Little Explorer,” grandmother praised holding the moccasin up for others to see.

"Your granddaughter shows your talent," Smiling Woman agreed. "Your artistry will live on one more generation."

"I am very proud of her work," grandmother admired. She picked up both moccasins and stood up. "Come with me and let's give your new moccasins to Laughing Eyes. Your sister will decorate them for you."



Together they walked to Laughing Eyes and Long Fingers. The quills were softened for embroidery.

"We've been waiting for you," Long Fingers greeted. "We are all ready to decorate your new moccasins." Long Fingers opened her private parfleche that had little pockets. In the pockets were different color dyed porcupine quills and different lengths of different colors.

Grandmother and Little Explorer sat down next to Laughing Eyes and Long Finger.

Long Finger drew a pattern on the moccasins with carbon sticks just as grandmother had to trace Little

Explorer's foot. Long Fingers drew a circle around the edge of the moccasin near the sole and then made little triangle marks at equal distances around the moccasins. She then drew a special designed cross on the arch top part of the moccasin.

Laughing Eyes took the moccasin and began weaving the quills expertly in and out of the drawn design.

Little Explorer watched her grandmother's eyes sparkle with joy at the way Laughing Eyes was quickly weaving the designs into the moccasin.

"Your Laughing Eyes is very talented," Long Fingers complimented. "Just like her grandmother."

Crooked Toes nodded and beamed with great pride. "Our Laughing Eyes has a good teacher," Crooked Toes complimented.

"As I had a good teacher," Long Fingers returned with pride. "You taught me well Auntie Crooked Toes."

"Will I learn from you Long Fingers?" Little Explorer asked hopefully.

"Oh yes, Little Explorer," Long Fingers replied. "As soon as you are a little older and have more practice with awl and sinew thread. Then I will teach

you how to embroider with quills and make beautiful designs." Long Fingers worked quickly with deft fingers moving the quills in and out for the pattern on the second moccasin.

After a few hours the moccasins were finished. It had taken Laughing Eyes a little longer to finish, but her quill pattern looked as professional as Long Finger's.

"They are beautiful," Little Explorer squealed with delight. She stood up to hug her big sister and Auntie Long Fingers. "Can I put them on right now?"

"Of course you can," Long Fingers answered. "You run along and show Little

Bit how talented you and your big sister are."

"Will you come with me Grandmother?" Little Explorer asked with excitement. She couldn't wait to show her mother.

"No, I must help Smiling Woman prepare the skins for Muddy Feet's dress," grandmother responded. "The dress is for Muddy Feet's maiden ceremony and we wish it to be very soft on her. You run along and show Little Bit how talented you and your sister can be."

"Wait until I put the ties in," Laughing Eyes scolded taking back the moccasins and putting the ties with

quilling decorations on the ends. "Put them on now, little sister."

Little Explorer sat down. She removed her older moccasins that just barely fit her growing feet. She put on the new ones and tied them until they fit snugly. The new moccasins felt very soft on the inside, but the outside sole was very tough and strong. "Don't I look pretty?" Little Explorer said admiring her feet with the new moccasins.

"Yes, your feet look beautiful little sister," Laughing Eyes chuckled. "Go run and show our mother."

"I'll show mother right away," Little Explorer bubbled. She ran to their large lodge to show her mother.

Little Bit was inside making a delicious smelling rabbit stew for supper. The stew had potato and wild celery with other tasty spices in it. Little Bit was well known as one of the best cooks in the camp.

Little Explorer's father, Talks a Lot, was sitting near mother on his Willow back rest seat. Talks a Lot rested comfortably watching Little Bit cook his meal. He spent some of his time today telling Little Bit about his successful rabbit hunt. He smiled

broadly when his Little Explorer opened the flap to enter the lodge.

"Look at my new moccasins, mother and father!" Little Explorer exclaimed. "Aren't they beautiful?"

"Your new moccasins are beautiful," Talks a Lot agreed. "Where did you get them?"

"I made them with Grandmother," Little Explorer said proudly. "Laughing Eyes decorated them for me."

"We are very proud of you," Little Bit praised her daughter. "You have learned a valuable lesson today. You have learned to make lovely new moccasins."

"And I think your sister, Laughing Eyes should get an extra portion of rabbit stew for decorating such a pretty moccasin," Talks a Lot declared rising to his full height and taking Little Explorer in his arms for a big bear hug.

"Yes father," Little Explorer said in agreement hugging her father with her little arms. "Laughing Eyes made my new moccasins even prettier!"

That night Little Explorer's family invited Grandmother Crooked Toes to share the tasty rabbit stew. The entire family shared their love, their talents, and their meal that night as they did every night.

Thank you for sharing with Little Explorer!

