

**Running Wolf, Michael B. and Patricia Clark Smith. *On the Trail of Elder Brother: Glous'gap Stories of the Micmac Indians. Illustrations by Michael B. RunningWolf. New York: Persea Books, 2000. \$16.95 hc. 160 pages***

From the inside cover: "Michael B. RunningWolf grew up in Maine and in Canada, a direct descendant of Beminit, the Grand Chief of the Micmac Nation. A master storyteller, he tells Micmac tales in libraries, schools, parks, and museums. He lives in Los Lunas, New Mexico. Patricia Clark Smith is of Irish, French-Canadian, and Micmac descent. She is the author of two volumes of poetry and many essays and stories. She teaches Native American literature and creative writing at the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque."

Each of the sixteen tales included in this refreshing collection begin with the ancient words: "Wodin'it atog'agan" (woh-DEHN-eet ahtoog-AH-gahn) – "This is a story." The authors gave their readers "the Micmac words for things as often as possible," (xii), and pronouncing aloud the soft sounding words helps to draw the reader into a distant time and place. The Micmac, which means "allies," are part of the Eastern Algonquin nation and live in Nova Scotia, Cape Breton Island, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Quebec, and Maine. They once fought as allies to the French in the French and Indian Wars. In earlier days, their explorations and wanderings took them as far south as Delaware and as far west as Minnesota and the Great Lakes. Sometimes called "keepers of the Sunrise" or "Children of the Dawn," a portion of their traditional stories has been shared here by RunningWolf and Smith. Pen and ink illustrations by RunningWolf at the beginning of each story include "traditional designs and symbols from Micmac quill and bead work, hide paintings, and writings on rock and birchbark" (xii).

The narrators have selected stories which connect us to a far-away past by using complex twists and unexpected continuities. We are led along the knowledge path by Glous'gap - the Micmac embodiment of god's power. A spiritual trickster, the ultimate warrior, and a medicine person, he leads us through woodland forests to bubbling waters. Then we are transported to soaring bluffs and chilly ocean depths. The reader meets young wolf, pine marten, Mrs. Bear, Grandfather Turtle, and others. Glous'gap's actions and words are models for the Micmac people, and we learn consequences, the way things

are, from the experiences Glous'gap has with other creatures including wa'sis (wah-seez) - a baby and tji'nou (Jee-noo) - a cannibal. Laws, morals, and wisdom are presented in action stories like "The Boy in the Birchwood Box." When he was a man, he remembered his experiences as a boy, and "If ever he felt a little impatient or dissatisfied with his lot, he always recalled the time he had spent as a boy in a birchwood box, and he shuddered and gave thanks for his life" (91).

The stories give answers to questions you perhaps have not asked. Have you ever wondered why a bullfrog's skin is wrinkled, or where the painted turtle came from? Have you ever thought about why turtles lay their eggs in sand, or why the gopher has a handprint at the end of its tail? Or even why the stones are red at Pipestone National Monument in Minnesota? It was Glous'gap in his wisdom, the lord of men and beasts, who helped the animals and plants evolve and made the earth the way we know it. These are more than simple origin myths. The stories reflect the human condition and what it is to learn to survive emotionally and physically in a vast, mysterious, and often threatening world. The tales are narrative forms that link the reader to ancient belief systems among the Micmac. Annette Kolodny said of this book: "Through these stories the general reader will enter a world of monsters, magic, sorceresses, spring flowers, irascible porcupines, and troubling prophecies. . . . For the scholar," she continued, "this collection provides invaluable lessons about the persistence of narrative forms, aesthetic codes, and inherited belief systems among the Eastern Algonquin peoples."

It is a good collection for almost any age and would be particularly useful for reading aloud. The stories are complete in themselves but have linking threads that create a continuing saga. The Micmac language sprinkled throughout the book provides an interesting challenge but not a stumbling block. There is a glossary which includes pronunciation guides in the back of the book as well as a map of Glous'gap's trail. The stories take the reader into an unfamiliar world that is sensitively rendered. I would recommend it for ages ten through adult.

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