

## **Standing Deer learns to Walk**

By Paul Hinsberger

When Standing Deer was in his tenth year, he went out with his teacher to find some herbs. They walked for quite a while and then his teacher commented—yet again—about Standing Deer failing to match his namesake when it came to the noise he made while walking.

“You must work on your walking Standing Deer...you are anything but silent. You walk with the Spirit of a Stomping Bear...just look at what you have done to the leaves and twigs that line the path...look at your footprints!”

Standing Deer turned and looked. And as his teacher had stated, there was indeed a very clear and defined path that he had created where there previously was none.

“I’m sorry Grey Fox.”

“Come, it is time for you to learn to walk!”

Now, Standing Deer had been walking for many years. He tried to push down the hurt, but his Teacher saw it.

“I know you know how to walk. But it is time that you learn how to walk!”

Confused, Standing Deer cocked his head. Grey Fox let out a little chuckle and patted his student on the shoulder, “Come with me.”

And so, Grey Fox lead Standing Deer to the open trail that was nearby and they walked North for a while.

Standing Deer felt hungry, but he said nothing about this. He had learned to not speak during his teachings and he knew this was one of those times.

They arrived at the start of a thin trail and Grey Fox lead them into shrubs then into a forest of pines. Laying across the ground were a number of trees that had been struck by lightning. They were charred black and laying on the ground. Grey Fox pointed to the thickest one; “Walk on the tree.”

Standing Deer hopped up on the tree and began to do as instructed. He navigated his way around broken branches and over mossy bark and around burls. The tree was thick and quite stable. He found it fairly easy to walk along its length.

“Walk back and forth until I return.” Grey Fox left.

The air chilled as the sun lowered behind the trees, and all the while, Standing Deer walked back and forth, back and forth. As dusk approached, his legs weak with hunger, Standing Deer looked up from his careful footing and saw his teacher had returned.

“Here.” Grey Fox handed his student some dried elk. As Standing Deer ate, they returned home in silence.

The following day, Grey Fox brought Standing Deer to the same place. This time, he pointed to a thinner fallen tree. “Start walking.”

Standing Deer stepped up to this tree and it worked his way around the half burned branches and the stubby bits and the slippery moss. Up and down he maneuvered his way around the fallen tree. He curled his toes in his moccasins, trying to find good footing. He fell off many times, but he always brushed off the dirt and stepped back on the tree.

All the while, Grey Fox silently watched.

They did this until sundown, and then they returned home.

The next day, Grey Fox took Standing Deer to a new place. Here, there was a very thin Aspen that had fallen over a narrow ravine. A rushing river ran at the bottom of the ravine, some forty feet below.

“Now, it is time for you to walk.”

Standing Deer moved towards the fallen Aspen.

He looked at the narrow trunk and closing his eyes, he took his first step. The trunk wobbled a bit under his foot. He brought up his back foot and moved forward with great delicacy.

“Yes...Deer Medicine.” He breathed this into his heart.

The thin Aspen held steady as Standing Deer crossed the ravine.

Grey Fox nodded; “Now, return.”

Standing Deer moved with tremendous grace across the ravine. He did not rush, he did not linger. Instead, he moved with commitment and with purpose.

Once he returned, he walked up to his teacher.

Grey Fox looked at the boy, nodded and then suddenly, pushed the young boy in the chest. Standing Deer fell on his bottom!

“Though you may walk now, always remember from where you have come. Remain connected to the Earth Mother and honor her as you honor your namesake and your footprints, for the Earth has a secret it needs to tell.”



Standing Deer took the offered hand of his teacher, and bowed his head in gratitude.