

Awi Usdi, the Little Deer

Cherokee



North Carolina



Back when the world was young, the humans and the animal people could speak to each other.

At first they lived in peace. The humans hunted the animals only when they needed food or skins to make clothing. Then the humans discovered the bow and arrow. With this new weapon they could kill many animals quickly and with great ease. They began to kill animals when they did not need them for food or clothing. It seemed as if all the animals in the world would soon be exterminated. So the various animals met in council.

When the bears came together and talked about what the humans were doing, they decided they would have to fight back.

"How can we do that?" said one of the bear warriors. "The humans will shoot us with their arrows before we come close to them." Old Bear, their chief, agreed. "That is true. We must learn how to use the same weapons they use."

Then the bears made a very strong bow and fashioned arrows for it. But whenever they tried to use the bow, their long claws got in the way.

"I will cut off my claws," said one of the bear warriors. He did so and then he was able to use the bow and arrow. His aim was good and he hit the mark every time.

"That is good," said Old Bear. "Now can you climb this tree?" The bear without claws tried to climb the tree, but he failed. Old Bear shook his head. "This will not do. Without our claws we cannot climb trees. Without our claws we will not be able to hunt or dig for food. We must give up this idea of using the same weapons the humans use."

So the bears gave up their idea of fighting back against the humans with weapons.

One by one each of the animal groups met. One by one they came to no conclusion. It seemed there was no way to fight back. But the last group to meet was the deer.

Awi Usdi, Little Deer, was their leader. When all were gathered together, he spoke.

"I see what we must do," he said. "We cannot stop the humans from hunting animals. That is the way it was meant to be. However, the humans are not doing things in

*Awi Usdi,
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the right way. If they do not respect us and hunt us only when there is real need, they may kill us all. I shall go now and tell the hunters what they must do. Whenever they wish to kill a deer, they must prepare in a ceremonial way. They must ask me for permission to kill one of us. Then, after they kill a deer, they must show respect to its spirit and ask for pardon. If the hunters do not do this, then I shall track them down. With my magic I will make their limbs crippled. Then they will no longer be able to walk or shoot a bow and arrow."

Then Awi Usdi, Little Deer, did as he said. He went at night and whispered into the ears of the hunters, telling them what they must do. The next morning, when they awoke, some of the hunters thought they had been dreaming and they were not sure that the dream was a true one.

Others, though, realized that Little Deer, Awi Usdi, had truly spoken to them. They tried to do as he told them. They hunted for the deer and other animals only when they needed food and clothing. They remembered to prepare in a ceremonial way, to ask permission before killing an animal and to ask pardon when an animal was killed.

Some of the hunters, though, paid no attention. They continued to kill animals for no reason. But Awi Usdi, Little Deer, came to them and, using his magic, crippled them with rheumatism. Long, all of the hunters began to treat the

So it is that the animals have survived to this day.

Because of Awi Usdi, Little Deer, the Indian people show respect. To this day, even though the animals and people no longer can speak to each other as in the old days, the people still show respect and give thanks to the animals they must hunt.