

Legend of the Lost Salmon

This story is about when the people ignored the directions of the Creator about caring for the salmon, the salmon disappeared. All of their attempts to bring the salmon back failed until Snake used his powers to revive the salmon. The people were not fooled by Coyote's pretentious effort to revive the salmon.

The creator taught the people how to care for this food which was created especially for them. He said, "Do not neglect this food. Be careful that you do not break rules in taking care of this salmon. Do not take more than you need." He told them if they observed these rules the salmon would multiply several times over as long as they lived.

At first the people diligently obeyed the rules, and they lived happily without problems. All along the river there were different bands of people living in their fishing villages, busy catching and drying their supply of salmon.

But one day something strange happened. The people became careless and they neglected to follow the instructions made by the creator. They became greedy. They did not take care of the salmon. They let them go to waste when they caught more than they needed for their families. They would not listen to the advice from those who were trying to follow the rules. Suddenly the salmon disappeared.

When the salmon were no longer coming up the stream for the people to catch everybody frantically searched the river, but all in vain. There was not one salmon left to be found. Soon they became hungry, their little children were crying and the old people were forced to beg for food.

One day, while they were searching the river, they found a dead salmon lying on the bank of the river. They stared down at it in disbelief when they realized what had happened. They began to cry out in shame and lament their mistakes. "If we are given one more chance, we will do better. If only we could awaken this salmon, the other salmon might come up the stream."

The people called a council and they talked about how they could give life back to the salmon. In legendary times those with supernatural powers could revive a lifeless creature by stepping over it five times. The people tried to use their own spiritual powers to revive the salmon. One by one they each stepped over the salmon five times, but to no avail.

There was a recluse named Old Man Rattlesnake. He never went anywhere always staying off by himself. He was very ancient and all the people called him "Grandfather". Somebody said, "let's ask Grandfather to help us! He is a powerful man. Let him revive the

salmon!" A messenger was sent. "Oh Grandfather would you come and help us revive the salmon. Everybody has failed."

Old Man Rattlesnake listened and said, "What makes you think I am capable of reviving this lone salmon after everyone else has failed? I am an old man, how do you expect an old man like me to possess powers to do the impossible!

The messenger was sad. "You are our last hope. Please help us, Grandfather."

Finally Old Man Rattlesnake agreed, "I will do my best." He was so old it was very painful for him to move fast. He moved so slowly and it seemed like such a long way for one so old.

While Grandfather was on his way, Coyote tried desperately, using all his wily skills to convince the people he possessed supernatural powers. He was thinking to himself, "If I revive this salmon I will be a very famous person." He stepped over it four times, and just as he was stepping over the fifth time, he pushed the salmon with the tip of his tail to make it appear as though it moved. He announced loudly, "Oh, look, my people, I made the salmon come to life. Did you see it move?" But the people were wise to the ways of the Coyote and they paid him no attention.

Finally, Old Man Rattlesnake arrived. Painfully he crawled over the salmon four times. The fifth time something magical happened! Grandfather disappeared into the salmon and the salmon woke up and came back to life and the salmon came back to the rivers. The people learned their lesson well and took care to protect their salmon from then on.

Today when you catch a salmon and you are preparing it for eating or preserving, if you break the spine you will find a white membrane inside. That is old Man Rattlesnake who gave life back to the salmon.

We did not know all this by ourselves; we were told it by our fathers and grandfathers, who learned it from their fathers and grandfathers. No one knows when the Great Chief Above will overturn the mountains.

But we do know this: The spirits will return only to the remains of people who in life kept the beliefs of their grandfathers. Only their bones will be preserved under the mountain.