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The Taming of Fire

Before the age of transformers, the Bill Cosby Show and Lego, there was a time when fire-lighting ceremonies were held. On these special occasions, people from all over the community came together to celebrate the Taming of Fire. Before this time, fire was a wild force that burned forests, shot down from the sky in lightning bolts, and frightened everyone. This is how it all began...

Long ago there was a young girl named Sarah who lived in a small village. Just beyond the village was a thick wood where, even in the middle of the day, it was hard to see. One day Sarah went out to pick blueberries. Now, everyone knows how good blueberries are, and wild blueberries that you pick yourself are very delicious indeed.

Well, as you might have guessed, Sarah got lost. Soon night came and she was all alone - hungry and very frightened. She found a hollow log just small enough for her to crawl into and finally fell asleep.

In her sleep, she had a dream. She was still cold and hungry and alone, but out of the darkness, came a wise old man. In her dream, he saw Sarah huddled in the log and woke her up.

"I can see, little girl, that you are cold and hungry," he said, "Perhaps I can help you."

He took a gleaming red coal out of his pocket, placed it on the ground, put some leaves on it, and blew. Soon the leaves began to smoke, and then to burn. He added small twigs and more dry grass. Before long, there was a fire - a gloriously bright fire that gave heat and comfort to Sarah and the old man. Sarah began to feel all warm and snugly inside.

By this time, it was near morning and the damp cold woke Sarah up. She realized, sadly, that her warm cosy feeling had been nothing but a dream. But there beside her on a bare patch of earth was a glowing red coal. Remembering her dream, Sarah did just what the old man had done. Soon she had a good fire burning.

Last Campfire

And now as we come to our last campfire,
Let's pause for a moment and praise
The Almighty God who saw fit to inspire,
Our founder who gave us these days.

Comes the last day of many days.
The last campfire of all too few
Last-but not lost. In the years ahead
These times our memories shall renew.

Cold night weighs down the forest bough
Strange shapes go flitting through the gloom.
But see! A spark, a flame and now the wilderness is home.

Thanks in part to the smoke of her fire, by the time she was warm, the people from her village found her. They stood around amazed at the sight they beheld, for never before had fire been tamed. It was a miracle, a gift given to a lost and frightened young girl deep in the woods. Rejoicing, the village people took the hot coals home with them and learned to use fire for many, many things.

To celebrate and remember this event, every year in October when the nights began to grow longer and colder, the village people gathered around in a large circle and, from a hot red coal, started a fire that grew into a huge bonfire. The celebration reminded them of the taming of fire, the warmth and pleasure it brought, and the special gift given to a young girl on a cold dark night.

For us, the fire-lighting ceremony symbolizes a gift from God who gave us fire and the power to tame it.

We thank Steve Elson, advisor of the 9th Welland Ventures, Ont., who wrote the tale for a campfire held in Oct. 86. He tells us that, during the dream portion of the story, the fire-master lit the campfire with a hot coal (a stick with a red hot end). "It was quite effective," he said.

How Fire Came To The Earth

Long ago, there was no fire on earth. Only the Sky People had fire. The Earth People had to eat their food raw, and in winter they were very cold.

"This is not right," said Coyote. "I will go and take some fire from the Sky People." He had a plan, which he told to his friends. So Coyote and his friends Rabbit, Blue Jay, Fox, Bear, and Salmon journeyed to the land of the Sky People.

"They have come to steal our fire," said the Sky People when they saw Coyote and his friends.

"No, we haven't," said Coyote. "We have only come to play games and have contests with you." And to prove his words, Coyote and his friends danced

and played games and held contests for three days and three nights. Then Coyote sent his friends away, according to their plan.

"You have come to steal our fire," the Sky People said again.

"No, I haven't," said Coyote, and he began to dance wildly around the bonfire. Then he grabbed a piece of the fire and ran as fast as he could with it. The Sky People ran after him.

When he could no longer run and the Sky People were about to catch him, he gave the fire to Blue Jay, who flew as fast as he could. When Blue Jay's wings became too tired, he gave the fire to Fox, who had been stationed behind another tree. Fox ran until he collapsed and the Sky People caught up with him. As they grabbed him, Rabbit jumped out from behind a tree and took the fire from Fox. Rabbit ran and ran, but when he came to a river, he could not cross. He gave the fire to Salmon, who put the fire in his mouth and swam with it to the other side and gave the fire to Bear. Bear carried the fire back to the camp of the Earth People.

And that is why, thanks to Coyote and his friends, we have fire on the Earth to this day.

-Adaptation of an Indian Legend

If you sit down at set of sun
And count the acts that you have done,
And counting, find:
One self-denying deed; one word
That eased the heart of him who heard;
One glance most kind
That fell like sunshine where it went
Then you may count that day well spent.

Remember the times you've had here,
Remember the friendships true,
Remember the songs you've sung here.
And all the haunts so dear to you;
Remember the hills and the woodlands
The waters and the skyline too;
For campers belong to
Andbelongs to you.

My Friends
The coals of the council fire burn low
Our council is nearly ended
Let the smoke of the dying embers
Carry our prayers to the One Great Spirit. (Scout, Guide Silence)
Our council is ended.

Now as we close our last campfire
Let's pause for a moment and praise
God who saw fit to inspire our founder,
Who gave us these days:
May the Lord grant us His blessing
And fill our hearts with the spirit
of truth and peace now and forever more.

Wood and water, wind and tree
Wisdom, strength and courtesy,
Scouting favour go with thee.

Deep peace of the shining stars to you
Deep peace of the flowing air to you.
Deep peace of the running water to you
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you.
Deep peace of the Prince of peace to you.

The day was long, we've worked and played
And round this fire, we've good friends made,
We've shared a friendship fine and deep
And now this circle leaves to sleep.

We came as strangers,
We go as brothers,
May the spirit of (camp name)
Be with you always.

The embers of our campfire
Are now slowly dying
The birds and the wood folk
Have gone to their rest.

The stars shining o're us
Their light shines before us
Oh God of nature Grant to us a perfect peace.

Around A Canadian Campfire

Opening

Near the waters, near the reed beds,
Near the wigwam, O my brothers,
We will light our evening campfire,
Light the red flower of the forest,
That her leaves and petals rising
Call us to our friendly council.

Closing

As we watch the red flower dying,
Red and golden petals fading,
Grey of ashes in our campfire,
Grey of evening close our council.

-Joan Kearley

Peace Pipe - Campfire Openings

The Indians used to pass a peace pipe around a campfire to show goodwill and friendship to those gather around the fires glow.

Even though there is no peace pipe let the smoke of this fire raise our thoughts to the Great Spirit above.

(adapted from Tom Brown Jr.)

Come, Come

Come, come, light up the fire
Come, come join in the ring
Here find dreams to inspire
Stories to tell
Music to sing.

Closing Benedictions

Great Chief of the Universe, guide us till we meet again. (arms and faces up-raised; lowered slowly)

May the Great Spirit of all good spirits be with you now and forever more.

May the Great Spirit bring sunshine and happiness into the hearts of all big and little braves now and forever in great measure.

Campfire Closing

May the sun be warm and kind to you,
May the darkest night bring a star shinning through,
May the dullest day bring a ray of light for you,
And when you leave here tonight,
God's hand to you.

□from Linda Kish

Around the fire's glow the silent night
Pressed close and closer to the dying flame,
And in the narrowing circle of it light
Closer and closer to its heart we came.

Leap high O golden flame, the day is dead
Bring warmth and cheer, O flame, the sun had fled,
Stoutly your gleam maintain, youths not abed
Ring out the heart's refrain, goodwill to all.

The simple life and friendly cheer,
May all those find who gather here.

Campfire Openings

Behold the fire, my comrades,
May its flames purify your hearts,
Let no unfriendly thoughts be harboured,
Let no uncouth word be spoken
Keep the spirit of the campfire in your hearts forever.
Peace be to all men.

Onward and upward, day by day,
Straight is the course,
And narrow the way,
But others before us
The path have trod,
And the top of the hill
Is the heart of God.

The North Wind brings the cold that brings endurance,
The South Wind brings the war of friendship
The east wind brings the light of day
The west wind, from the direction where the sun sinks brings night and stars.

(Indian campfire-use torchbearers for each direction)

May this campfire be good medicine
Where fellowship, adventure and fun go side by side.

Here is an emblem,
Sparks that upward fly,
So may our hearts be young
And our spirits high.

From the north,
From the south
From the east,
And from the west
May good (beavering, cubbing, guiding, scouting) come to you.

And when the Great Scorer comes to mark against your name
He'll ask not if you won or lost, but how you played the game.

Wood smoke at eventide soothes the soul,
And makes an easy ladder for a prayer
May the smoke of this fire
Carry your thoughts Heavenward,
And make your hearts strong for good Scouting.

As our campfire smoke curls upward,
May all that is evil among us go with it
And may some kind evening breeze waft it away
Never to be seen again.
And may peace and deep contentment be our lot.

As the red log glows,
So may our spirits
As the fire leaps upwards
So may our aims
As the grey ash fades,
So may our Sins,
As the good fire warms our circle
So may our ideals warm the world.

Let the music cheer us;
Let the laughter bring us together;
Let the spirits rise with our songs;
Let the Great Spirit lift us again;
Let the happy fellowship of our campfire circle
Go out into all the world.

□from Linda Kish

By the shore of old Lake...
By the brightly shining waters,
Stand the wigwams of our campers.
Dark behind them stands the forest,
Stands the chestnut, oak and hemlock
Stand the firs with cones upon them.
Many things they learn and do here
How Wakonda, the Great Spirit,
Cares for all his faithful children
Cares for all the forest people
Learn they of the stars in heaven,
Of the birds that fly and nest here,
Learns the language of all creatures
Call them friends when 'ere they meet them
O, Great Spirit, then, in Heaven
Send us flame to light our campfire
That we may for this be grateful
O, Great Spirit, this we ask Thee
Send us fire, and we shall praise thee.

Tall trees that reach the sky
Mountains and lakes nearby
Draw near my friends
Come sing my friends
Our campfire time is nigh.
