

Life Cycle Story of "Jumping Mouse"

by *Skye Bailey*

When I heard the story of Jumping Mouse around the fire on my first Vision Quest, I wondered why this, of all stories, was the most important to tell. Now ten years later, I depend on this life cycle story as a framework for my personal life, as well as for the schools that grew out of my first Vision Quest.

Mouse has a roaring in her ears...

Ten years ago, I heard an undeniable "roaring in my ears" and was instinctively drawn to the Vision Quest. As I embarked on my journey into the high desert mountains to enact this ancient rite of passage, little did I know how much this experience would change my life – for the better, and for good. Having been a clothing designer in New York City and an art director in Los Angeles, I could not have been more detached from the natural world. My performance in a marriage with two daughters appeared to be successful, but as my father said, "it was like watching a flower wilt."

Raccoon guides mouse to the Sacred River...

Giant boulders and tiny sage brush looked like the surface of the moon and paled against the cinematic mountain terrain I imagined. What was I doing here? I was scared in a primal way, but I trusted the ceremony, the combination of fasting, solitude and exposure. Could I really be alone in the desert at night? Would I survive the fast? And most importantly, could I realize my intention to "know I can take care of myself?"

Frog, Keeper of the Water, says "crouch and jump..."

At sunrise on the first morning of my four days and four nights alone, I entered the underworld on the smoke of burning sage and turned away from the threshold circle. A few feet away, I picked up a black rock with four rounded corners that looked as though someone had been carving an animal. It fit perfectly in

my palm, and I felt as though I was holding the hand of Mother Earth herself.

...and you will see the Sacred Mountain!"

With the hot sun on my skin, the cool moonlight breeze, the surface of the boulders and the sand on the soles of my feet, I drank in the passing of each perfect day. I was in the vast living room of mouse, lizard, bat, snake, coyote, fox, toad, butterfly, and beetle. Bird sang my soundtrack. The massive, craggy Sierra Nevada Mountains were my view to the west, the Inyo and White Mountains cradled me from the north and east. I played on the earth and I painted everything I saw. Everything had a message, and everything was a sign.

"You have a new name. You are Jumping Mouse!"

I stayed up all night on the fourth night of my solo time, tending a fire and asking for my vision, but the giant Spirit figures in the sky that I somehow expected to boom down my destiny never materialized. I drew the star sign, and I heard messages from wind. It was hard to go back to base camp at sunrise. Later that morning, I returned to my desert home to dismantle the rock pile I shared with another quester, and it was then that I remembered who I am. Suddenly I was back in the Bitterroot Valley of Montana, a child, a teen, a young woman, deeply rooted in the ways of the earth that I had learned from my family, my grandmother, my elders. As I sat on a warm boulder and held this small being in my arms, I knew it was my destiny to create a place for the little ones, to love them as I loved myself that day, to give them freedom and containment, and to teach them how to reciprocate with their environment and be barefoot on the earth.

"Only the eye of a Mouse can heal me..."

As soon as I returned to my community in Marin County, California, I began to realize my dream of a

school on the earth where children could experience their natural world, grow their own food, take care of their animal friends, make their own sustainable structures, realize their self expression, and be mirrored, loved and appreciated for exactly who they are. Since then, hundreds of families have passed through Little Arrows Schools, Fine Art and Environmental Education programs for people 0-6, where the focus is on sustainable living and self-expression.

Gray Wolf goes back to guide others...

I am grateful to the ceremony of the Vision Quest, where all roads came together to show me my purpose on the earth. My childhood experiences in the Bitterroot Valley, my fine arts degree from Parsons School of Design in New York City, my post-quest studies to become an Early Childhood Education Director, the continuing growth of my schools, and my passion as a Vision Quest Guide all combine to allow me to share my knowledge and love of the natural world with others. As my path deepens, I continue my studies in Eco and Social Psychology and Folklore and am an advocate for Native people.

"You have a new name. You are Eagle!"

Because Jumping Mouse is so integral to the vision and philosophy of Little Arrows Schools, I felt compelled to

adapt the story into a form that would be available for generations to come. In 2008, I collaborated with children, their families, and friends of the Schools to create a multi-media version of the Jumping Mouse story, which includes a book, DVD, and sound track CD. This project enabled me, with the help of many generous and talented individuals, to learn new mediums which were previously unfamiliar to me.

The visuals include a cast of felt characters moved by children's hands across background photos from my years of Vision Quest experiences. My creative team and I combined computer graphics, storyboarding, photography, videography, editing, soundtrack composition, and numerous other techniques to reflect the landscape and intent of the story. I also interpreted the story into a performance piece including script, sets, costumes, and props. The children of Little Arrows Schools performed the play in the spring of 2008.

Ten years after my first Vision Quest, I am no longer a wilting flower, separate from the natural world. I can truly say, "My vision grew corn on the Earth for the people to see."

SKYE BAILEY is a vision quest guide, a certified wilderness first responder, and a member of the Wilderness Guides Council. This story is an excerpt from her forthcoming book series about sustainable living and self-expression for our time in this world. The Story of Jumping Mouse is now available from Lost Borders Press at www.lostborderspress.com. Skye may be reached at Skye@littlearrows.info.

The Challenging Quest for Vision

by Sparrow Hart

We enter the wilderness, and we return. We walk out to seek a vision, the faint tracks of Black Elk, Buddha, or Christ stretching before us. We face the unknown; its presence and power are awesome and palpable. Sunshine, cloudless days, storms, or sleet are all possibilities. Fear and loneliness are our constant companions; culture, consensus, society, and small talk fall by the wayside. We enter the mountains, the dark forest, or the desert; we descend to the underworld.

Rain and raw winds feed our worries; rattlesnake, mountain lion, and bear prowl 'round the edges of our awareness. Accident, injury, hunger, and thirst chatter in the corners of consciousness. The fog of unknowing blocks our vision; the swamps of despair wait on either side. What we have run from lies in wait everywhere

before us as we step forward, trembling. The trail of tears or the road less traveled becomes the path with heart.

Empty days extend into the distance. Watches, schedules, and appointment books have all been left behind. Aimlessness invades our attention. The boat is rudderless, the sail slack as we are spun this way and that by changing winds on a sea of boredom. Our plans dissolve, and intention scatters in every direction. Statements of purpose, images of achievement, and stories of success mock us. Resignation enters our body and eats away at our hearts, like a cutworm that chews a tunnel toward the core of our being. It will not stop. Anger flares up and lashes out at the self or the world: we call them stupid, ugly, or foolish. Why did I ever