**Iroquois Creation Story**

***The Sky World***

At the beginning of the time when people came to be on earth, there was a world high above from where we now stand.  This land was so high that it was not visible from the earth.

 In the Skyworld there stood a tree that grew at the very center of this world.  On this tree grew every fruit.  The sky people were given permission to eat freely from the tree.  They were also warned not bring harm to this tree which nurtured the people.  And they were also warned that they were not to touch the roots of the tree in case it would cause harm to the tree.

In the Skyworld lived a young chief and his wife.  The chief’s wife was pregnant and she began to have strange cravings.  She had cravings for certain kinds of plants, or certain kinds of meats.  She often sent her husband on many journeys to help fulfill her cravings.

Her husband was kind and gentle, but easily taken advantage of, especially by his wife.  He would go without argument and try with much difficulty to please her.  His wife… on the other hand… was kind of grouchy!

One day his wife had a new craving. She craved a drink made from the roots of the great tree.

She asked her husband some questions: Do you love me?... Will you always love me?...  Would you still love me if I asked to go for another journey?... Would you bring me back a drink made from the roots of the great tree for me and our unborn child?

The husband was very concerned about his wife’s odd request.  He knew that they were not to touch anything on the tree except for the fruit.  He knew that they should never touch the roots.

He thought and thought about the consequences that disturbing the great tree could have on him, his wife, their unborn child and the people.  He walked toward the tree, but become increasingly worried. He did not know what to do.

The woman waited a long time for her husband to return.  She waited so long that she became impatient.  She paced the lodge complaining that her husband was not back yet.  She continued to pace and complain.  How could he take so long?

Her impatience caused her to go looking for her husband. She searched all over the Skyworld for him.  After searching for him for a very long time she finally decided to go to the great tree to get the roots for herself.

She arrived at the tree.  She decided that she would have to make the drink herself.

She knelt beside the tree digging for the roots.  She dug with her hands, but in order to reach the tree’s roots she had to pick some smaller plants which were in her way.  She held on to the small plants with one hand and continued to dig with the other.

As she leaned over she heard a sound.  Unsure of what she heard, she bent over further.  As her curiosity grew, she leaned in even further.  It seemed to be the same sound that water makes when it is running, like a river.

Throughout time, storytellers have told different versions about what happened next.  Some storytellers say that from her curiosity she leaned too far over so that she simply fell.  Others say her husband, out of anger, snuck up on her and pushed her through a hole under where she was digging.  Still other variations of the story say that another family member or another type of natural force such as a great wind, caused the tree to fall and a hole to open in the sky, and the woman to fall through the hole.

 It may have been an accident or it may have been on purpose, but within the next moments, she found herself passing through a hole at the base of the great tree, down, down, down…

***Skywoman***

Skywoman quickly tried to keep her balance and pull herself back up through the hole.  As she struggled to find a grasp she was only able to pull more of the plants that grew around the base of the tree.  She continued to fall, now completely through the hole.  She fell deeper into the blackness of outer space.  She continued to fall deeper into the blackness…and fall deeper …and fall deeper… and fall deeper…and fall…and fall …and fall…and …and…and…

She continued to fall further and further from the Skyworld.  The blackness of outer space ever so slowly began to be farther and farther behind her…

As she continued to tumble, something else far off in the distance was starting to take form.  The sky was no longer complete emptiness.  She was heading to something closer and closer and even closer.  Skywoman tumbled and tumbled and tumbled toward a place that we now know as the earth.

She was very afraid. She didn’t know what was about to happen.  She finally caught her breath enough and began to yell for help.

“HEEEELP!”

HEEEELP!

HEEEELP!

She continued to fall from the Skyworld and kept heading toward earth.

On the planet far below lived many forms of the winged creatures.  They were busy with their everyday duties when they heard the cries coming from high above where they were flying.

 The birds quickly agreed to help the being which was headed straight toward them.  They flew up to where the woman was falling.  They offered to bring her to the earth on their wings in order to save her life and break her fall.

When the birds arrived back on the earth with the strange guest on their backs, they soon realized that there would be a different problem.  The entire earth at this time was completely covered with water.  If they let go of the woman, she would surely drown.  They paused not knowing what to do.  They asked all the other creatures for suggestions.

***Turtle Island***

It was then that a giant sea turtle rose up out of the water.  The sea turtle was majestic in form and presence.  He sounded wise and his shell looked strong and sturdy for the woman to rest. The sea turtle offered his back to the woman.  The turtle reminded them that he could stay afloat for a long period of time.  If the birds placed her on his back, she would be able to rest until they could figure out another plan for her.

All agreed and the woman was placed on the turtle’s back.

Soon the small sea animals surrounded the turtle.  They were curious about the new being that was now on the earth.  They decided that in order to make her stay more comfortable that she would benefit from having soil to stand on.

The sea animals agreed to take turns diving into the sea to try to bring back some soil.  One by one the small creatures dove deep into the ocean, the otter, the beaver, the duck, and the loon. One by one they tried, but they failed to bring back soil. One by one their lifeless bodies rose to the surface.

The tiny muskrat was the last animal to try.  He dove deep down, and he was gone for a long time.

Finally, the muskrat’s lifeless body rose to the surface of the water. But the woman saw that the muskrat had soil in his claws and his mouth.  Because the muskrat and the other water creatures sacrificed their lives for the woman, she promised to honor these creatures who worked so selflessly for the woman.

The woman took the soil from the lifeless muskrat. She placed the soil on the back of the turtle.  She started to walk and to sing.  Her song honored the plant life that she carried, and the animals that had helped her: the turtle, the beaver, the otter, the birds, and the tiny muskrat.

  As she sang, she started to dance.  Her dance was gentle.  Her feet did not leave the ground but rather massaged the soil on the back of the great turtle.  As she danced the soil stretched.

Sky woman put the plants that she had taken from near the roots of the great tree in the sky, and they began to grow.

After many verses of her song, the soil covered an area that was further than her eyes could see. This is the land that we call North America, the land on the back of the turtle. This land is known as Turtle Island.