

The Lure of Dreamcatchers

Lore of the DreamCatcher

There are many myths surrounding how the dreamcatcher came to be. The following is my favorite.

The Spider's Gift

"See? Over in the window near Grandmother Nokomis' sleeping space? See the spider spinning away at it's web?"

Day after day Nokomis herself watched the spider working at it's spinning. One day her young grandson came running in excited at seeing her. "Nokomis-ya!!" he shouted gleefully. Just then, the busy spider caught his childish eye. Impulsively he raised his moccasined foot to stomp the poor creature.

"No!" Grandmother's shout stopped his foot in mid-air. "Don't hurt the spider. Let him work."

Her grandson asked, "Why do you protect the spider, Nokomis-ya?" She only smiled and diverted his attention elsewhere.

After the child had wandered elsewhere in search of play, the spider, finding it's voice, piped up.

"Thank you for saving me. For many days you have quietly watched me spinning my web, leaving me in peace to work. And now you have saved my life. In return I shall give you a gift." The little spider busily went to work in the window, spinning a new web that glittered in the moonlight.

"See how I've spun it?" asked the spider. "The web will trap the bad dreams, burning them up in the morning sun. Good dreams, being smarter, will find their way to you through the little hole in the middle."

And that's how man received the spider's gift of a dreamcatcher.

-- my variation of a traditional story

A Wee Bit of History

Francis Densmore was an American ethnographer who studied Native American music and culture extensively. She first encountered the Ojibway - the first makers of dreamcatchers - at Port Arthur, Ontario (now known as Thunder Bay) in 1901, and began studying their culture. According to her notes, "spiderwebs" were hung on the hoops of cradle boards. These "webs" were approximately 3 ½ inches in diameter and strung of a fine red yarn. The yarn was once spun from nettle fibers. Sometimes two "spiderwebs" would be hung on the hoop, catching any harm that might be in the air.

A child's first dreamcatcher was usually made by their mother or grandmother. The feathers used were gender specific, just like gender roles within the Ojibway. A girl's dreamcatcher was decorated an owl feather for wisdom, while a boy's would have an eagle feather for courage. The materials would be all natural, with the webbing being woven from sinew or thin red yarn.

-- from *Dreamcatchers: Myth and History* by Julie Black published by Firefly Books of Buffalo, NY, 1999.

Some Symbolism

Number of Outer Loops:

7 for the seven grandfathers who prophecy

8 for the spider's legs

13 for the 13 moons of the year

Shape:

Circular - Sacred Hoop, Circle of Life

Web - unbroken, symbol of eternity, never-ending cycle of life

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