

# Spiders in Native Culture

There are several wonderful stories from indigenous cultures. According to the Muskogee of Oklahoma, in the very beginning the earth was all in darkness. After awhile, the animals and the people got tired of perpetual night. Some had heard that there was a ball of light called "sun" on the other side of the world and so the animals decided to send representatives to bring some of the sun back to their part of earth. The fox tried but he burned his mouth. Then, the opossum tried to carry a piece of the sun in his tail but it was too hot.

It burned all the hair off his once bushy tail and he came home without the sun. Finally, Grandmother Spider volunteered. First, she made a super-strong bag of silk. Then, she carried the sun back in it. The problem then was where to put the sun. Grandmother Spider said they should place the sun high in the sky so all the creatures could see it and feel its warmth. They chose turkey vulture to carry the sun into the sky because everyone knew that sometimes she flew so high she became just a tiny speck. In those days, turkey vulture had a thick covering of feathers all over her head and neck. And so, she agreed to carry the sun in Grandmother Spider's bag to the highest part of the sky so they could all see it. Up and up circled Turkey Vulture.

But, even though the sun was inside a silken bag, it got hotter and hotter. By the time turkey vulture reached the top of the sky, all the feathers on her head and neck had been burned. But the sun now stayed in the sky. And ever since, Turkey Vulture's relatives have all had bald heads and necks and are remembered and respected along with Grandmother Spider's kin as the creatures who brought sunlight to their side of the earth.

From the Osage of the Great Plains comes the story about how spiders came to symbolize patience. A hunter was impatiently tracking deer and ran

into a great, sticky web which was so large and strong that it made him stumble and fall. He was very angry and after he had plucked the sticky strands from his eyes, he ran after the spider. But the spider dodged and climbed out of reach. And, to the hunter's amazement, the spider spoke.

"Grandson," the spider said, "Why do you run through the woods looking at nothing but the ground? Why do you act as if you are blind?"

The hunter felt foolish talking to a spider but he explained that he was tracking a great deer which would become a symbol of strength for his people.

"I can be that symbol," the spider said.

"How?" the hunter exclaimed. "You are small and weak!"

"Grandson," said the spider, "look upon me. I am patient. I watch and I wait. Then all things come to me. If your people learn this, they will be strong indeed."

And so it was that the spider came to be one of the clan symbols for the Osage people.