

Haudenosaunee Creation Story

Long, long ago, where we are now, there was no land, just water and creatures of the water. But, up above, there was a place called Karonhià:ke *pronounced Ga-loon-HYA-gay* which means the *Sky World*.

Now, in the *Sky World* there were beings who were in some ways like human beings and in some ways they were different. The beings in *Sky World* had more powers than human beings have. For instance, they could make things happen just by thinking about it. There was a tree growing in the centre of *Sky World*. It was called the Tree of Life.

{ cf. Genesis 2.9 & Revelation 2.7 & 22.2 }

On that tree grew many different kinds of fruit. Also, there were blossoms on that tree and those blossoms glowed. They lit up *Sky World*.

The beings in *Sky World* were told not to disturb that tree. But one day, a woman who was expecting a baby, asked for a drink of tea made from the roots of the Tree of Life. Her name was Atsi'tsiakaion which means Mature Flower.

When her husband started to dig around near the bottom of the tree to get at the roots, the dirt caved in and some say that the tree fell down. This was terrible. The woman went to see what had happened.

Some say that she lost her balance and fell into the hole. Some say that she knew she was destined to go through that hole and so she jumped. Some say that she was pushed. Nevertheless, she grabbed some seeds from the Tree of Life as she fell.

Because she fell through the hole in the sky, many people refer to her as *Sky Woman*.

Down below, there was a flock of water birds flying through the air. Some say they were geese. Some say they were blue heron. Some say they were swans. One of the water birds looked up and saw *Sky Woman* falling. He spoke to the other birds and they decided to make a great blanket with their bodies and catch her on their backs. They caught her.

They tried to bring her back up to *Sky World*, but she was too heavy and so they lowered her to the water below. A giant turtle said that they could put her on his back. That's what they did. That is the reason some people call this place where we live, *Turtle Island* (i.e., *North America*).

Sky Woman thanked the creatures, but she said that she needed dirt in order to survive. One by one, the animals dove down to try to get dirt from under the water. Finally, some say it was the muskrat. Some say that it was the otter. But finally, one creature was successful in bringing a few grains of dirt to *Sky Woman*.

She placed the dirt on the back of the turtle. She stood up. She sang and danced in a counter-clockwise direction and when she did that, the turtle's shell grew and the grains of dirt multiplied. She dropped the seeds from the Tree of Life and they started to grow right away. When she finished dancing and singing, there was land and plant life as far as she could see. (*Consider the shape of Earth America.*)

Some time went by and *Sky Woman* gave birth to a baby girl. The baby girl grew up. She was told not to walk

toward the west, but one day, the daughter started to walk toward the west.

As soon as she did so, a wind started to blow from the west and a cloud started to move toward the daughter. The daughter saw the outline of a male-being in the cloud. The daughter fainted. When she woke up, she found two crossed arrows lying on top of her stomach. She had become the bride of the *Spirit of the West Wind*. That's who she had seen in the cloud and now she was going to give birth to twin boys.

(think of two brothers mentioned in [The Book of Genesis](#))

Those boys were very special. After all, their grandmother was *Sky Woman* and their father was the *Spirit of the West Wind*. The boys could talk to each other while they were growing inside their mother and they didn't always agree with one another.

When it was time for them to be born, the twin that was right-handed was born in the usual way. However, the left-handed twin decided to push his way out through their mother's armpit. That's how he was born, but it killed their mother. They buried their mother and from her head grew corn, beans and squash. Those are the staple foods of the traditional Haudenosaunee diet. They are called *The Three Sisters*.

From her heart grew sacred tobacco which is used when there is a desire to communicate with the Creator Shonkwaya'tihson (Soon-gwa-yut-DEE-soon). From her feet grew the wild strawberry which is known as The Big Medicine.

Even in her death, the mother of the two boys was still making sure that they had what they needed to survive. She is called Mother Earth and to this day she still supports all of the people, animals and plants.

The twin boys grew up and went about the task of creating everything that is found in the natural world. They made rivers, flowers, animals and eventually they made the human beings. The left-handed twin became the keeper of the night and the right-handed twin became the keeper of the day. When they were done making their creations, everything was in perfect balance.

The twins fought and did not keep a perfect balance, one would create a perfect pasture and the other would tear through it creating mountains and valleys. Eventually they would fight so desperately that one killed the other.

When *Sky Woman* passed away, her head was flung into the night sky. She is still there. She is called *Grandmother Moon*. She reflects light at night. She helps the people keep track of time (as in "moons" for "months"). She controls the rise and fall of the waters. She keeps company with the stars and the left-handed twin, the keeper of the night. She regulates the monthly cycles of all of the female life which guarantees that new life will be born. She is the leader of all the female life.

Eventually, the human beings were made. They are supposed to be the caretakers {cf. [Genesis 2.15](#)}. They are supposed to make sure that everything stays in balance. However, it is the human beings who keep forgetting what they are supposed to do.

The human beings forget to take only what they need and to leave the rest for the future generations to experience and enjoy.

The human beings are the ones who forget that everything in the natural world is connected and is part of the same web of life and so should be respected.

It is hoped that all of the people of the world will someday remember and respect their original instructions and take good care of their Mother Earth.



Mother Earth

or

Yethinihstenha Ohwentsya

In The Mohawk Language

Pronounced:

Yeh-tee'-nee-STUH-hah Oh-WUN-ja