

Aldean and the Red-tailed Hawk

A Story About a White Mesa Ute Boy

Cultural Note

The Ute people have a close association with nature and a respect for all living things. They share the earth with animals, and they look to them for guidance.

The Utes honor the hawk in ceremonies, and they use hawk feathers in their regalia.

Vocabulary

hovered

perched

pounce

snared

swoop

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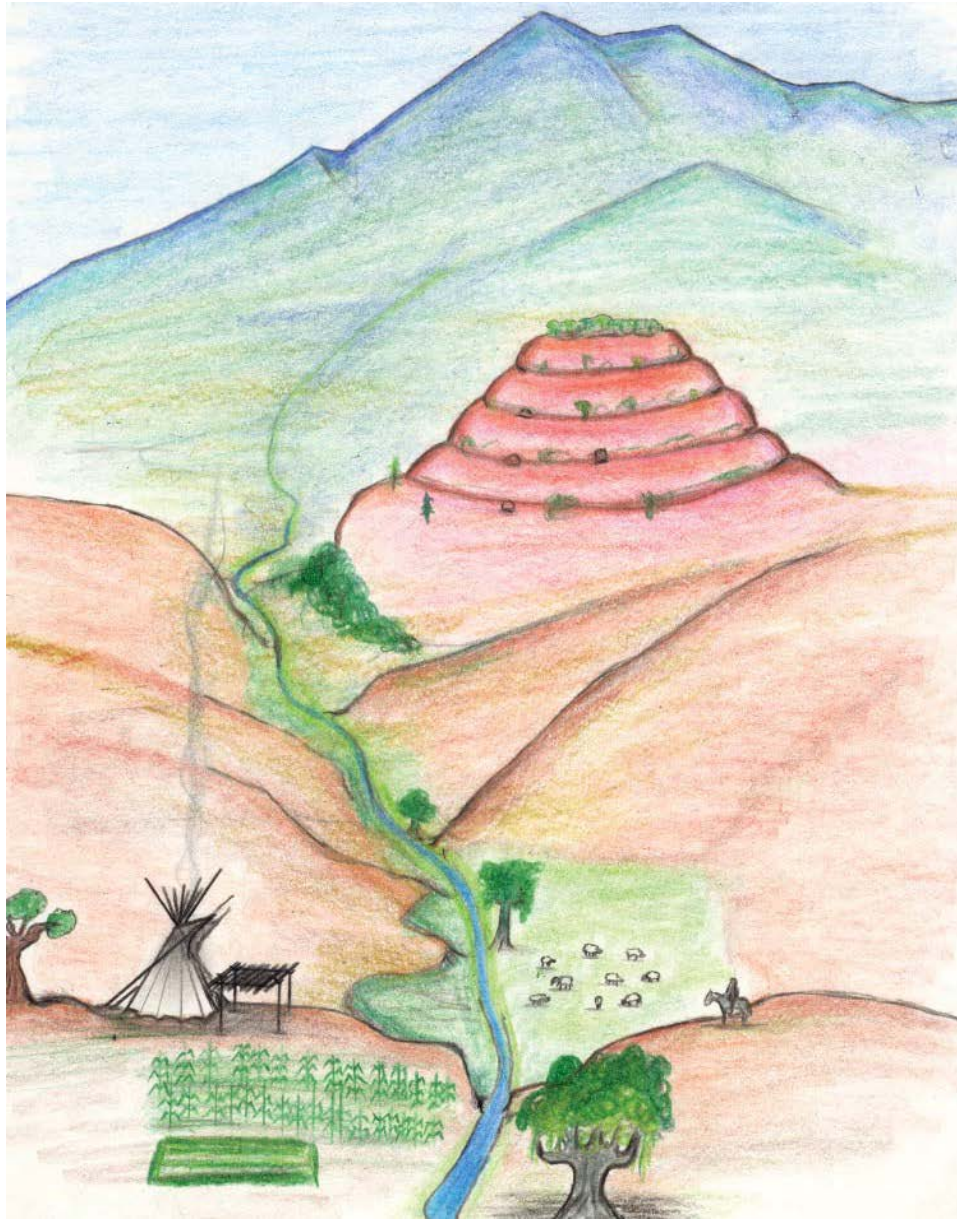
Adapted by
Merry M. Palmer

As told by
Aldean “Lightning Hawk” Ketchum

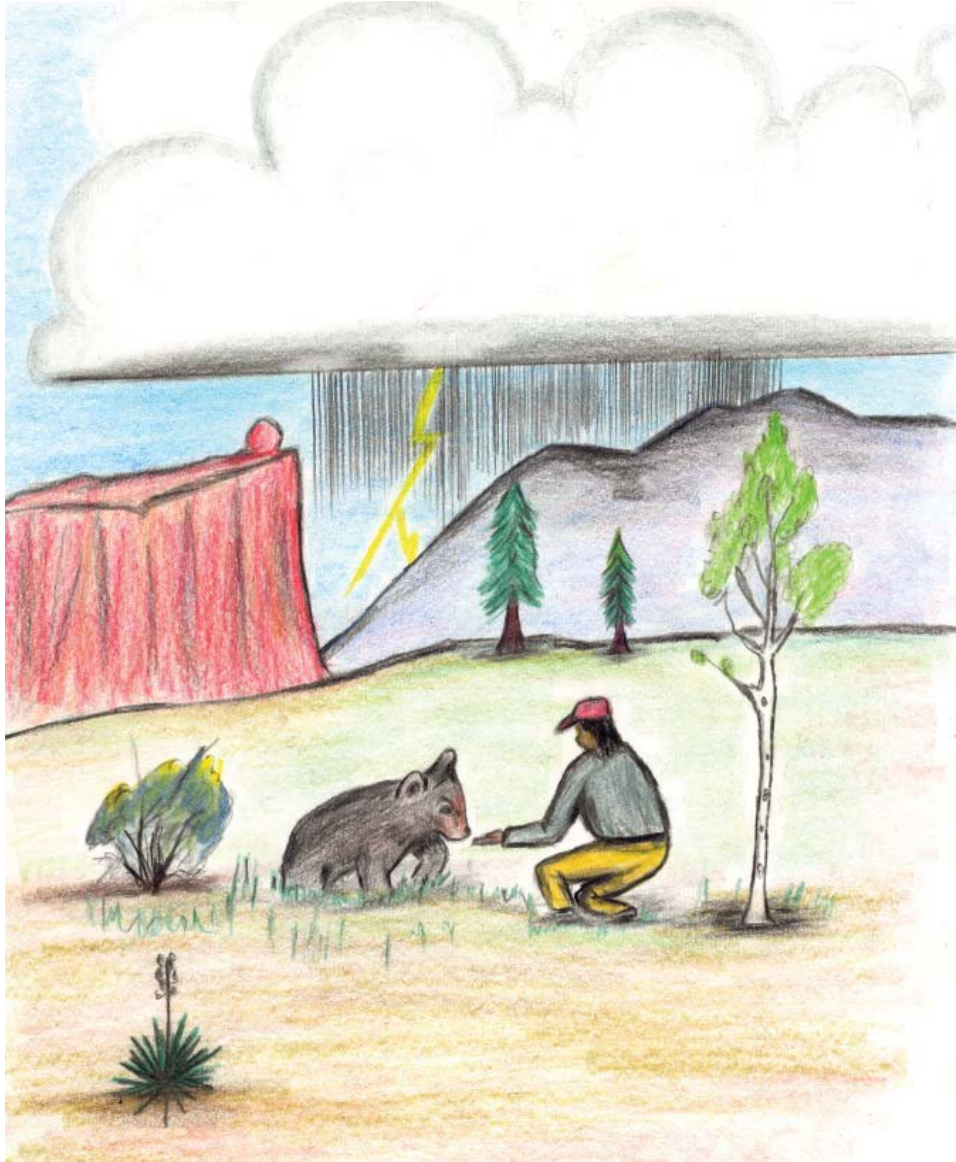
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In the summertime, Aldean Ketchum and his grandparents herded livestock from White Mesa, Utah, to Allen Canyon, about thirty miles as a hawk flies. Living in the wilderness appealed to Aldean. He liked living without electricity and running water. He liked being with the animals.



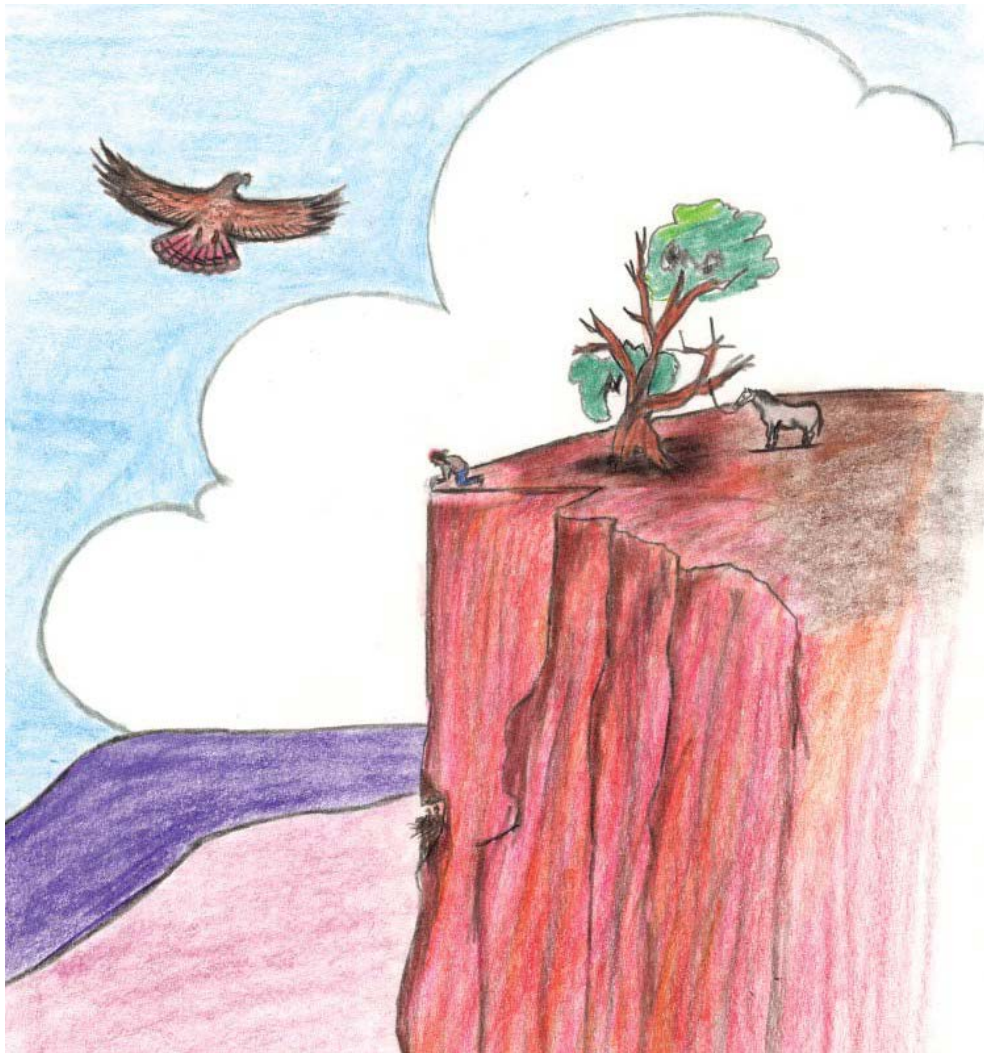
Whenever Aldean found a baby bear, cougar, or bobcat, he took it to his grandparents' camp.

"It will grow up and eat our livestock," his grandpa always told him. "You must take it back where it belongs."

Aldean obeyed his grandfather, but he worried about whether the young animals would survive.

One day as Aldean climbed onto a ledge, he spotted a tiny *akákwanáchich*, hawk, which had fallen from its nest. Aldean knew something was wrong because the parent birds usually swooped down, picked up the babies, and carried them away. This little one had a broken wing, so the parents left it alone.

Aldean took the fledgling to his grandfather. His grandfather knew how to fix the wing because he had once kept eagles and used the *kusi'év*, feathers, for ceremonies.





After the hawk's wing healed, Aldean's grandfather taught him how to raise it. Every day, Aldean brought it bugs and worms to eat. He talked to the bird in the Ute language. The hawk talked to Aldean in bird language. Aldean could understand whether the hawk was hungry or thirsty by the sounds it made.

The hawk grew. Its belly remained spotted, but its tail feathers turned red. Aldean realized he had to teach it to hunt, so each day he snared a rabbit and brought it back alive. He tied a string around the rabbit's leg and pegged it in front of the hawk. At first the hawk just sat and stared at the rabbit, but eventually it learned to pounce. When the hawk grew even bigger, Aldean brought home rabbits and released them. The hawk flew after them, grabbed them, and brought them back. Aldean knew the hawk could survive because it hunted well.



Aldean carried the hawk when he and his grandparents traveled around the canyons. Sometimes Aldean held the hawk above them, and it fanned them with its wings, cooling them.

The hawk's hunting skills improved until it started to hunt food for Aldean's family. It caught cottontails and jackrabbits, but it only ate the heads. It left the rest for the family.





When fall came, Aldean needed to return to school. He wanted to take the hawk back to White Mesa, but he feared someone there might shoot it.

Aldean told his hawk friend, "I'm going to set you free out here. This is where you belong."

He released the hawk, knowing it would be safe in the wilderness.



Aldean and his grandparents returned to White Mesa. Nearly a month passed. Early one morning Aldean's grandmother called, "Wake up! You have company."

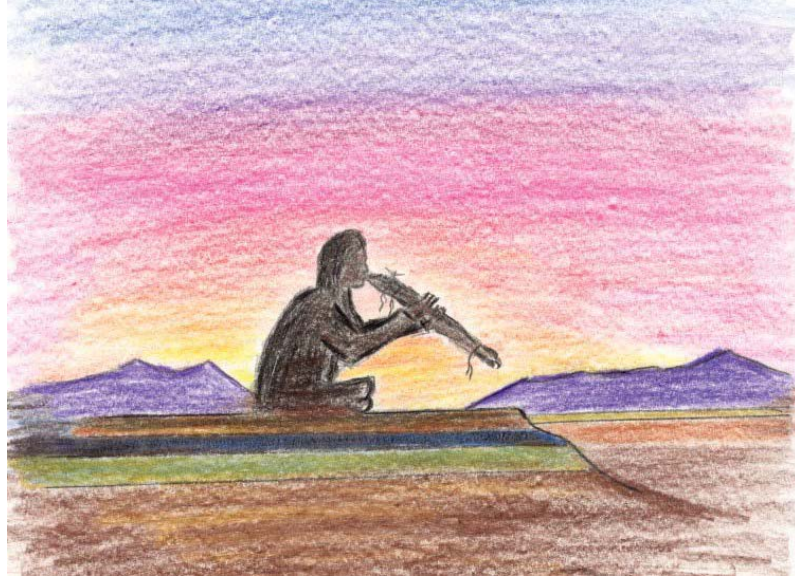
Aldean jumped out of bed, dressed, and headed outside. He thought one of his friends had come to visit, but he could not see anyone.

He was puzzled. He looked at his grandmother, who was cooking over an open fire. "No," she said, pointing at a post, "he's up there."

Aldean's hawk was perched on the pole. Aldean called its name, and the hawk glided down beside him. It spoke to Aldean in bird language.

Before it flew away, it left one of its tail feathers on the ground. Other hawks circled overhead, so Aldean knew his friend had come to show him it had found its place in the world.





When his grandfather came home that night, Aldean asked what the hawk's visit meant.

"He came to say *towéyak*, thank you," his grandfather said, "and to let you know he will watch over you whenever you go into the wilderness."

Later, when Aldean went hiking with friends in the canyons, a red-tailed hawk often hovered over them. Aldean told his friends, "That's our hawk.

He's looking after me."

Because of Aldean's friendship with the bird, his grandfather gave him the name Lightning Hawk. Aldean uses that name when he carves flutes, plays traditional music, or tells stories he learned from his grandparents. His experience shows how humans can relate to animals if they take the time to respect and care for them.

Glossary

kwánach - eagle

akákwanáchich - hawk

kusi'év - feather

towéyak - thank you

tügúv - friend

Reading Suggestions

- Imagine living without running water and electricity. List the advantages and/ or disadvantages to living without these conveniences. Go on a family campout. Tell stories or reread this story at the campfire.
- Write a thank you note to someone who has helped you. It could be your parents, grandparents, a teacher, a principal, a neighbor, or a friend.
- Do you have a story to tell? Practice your storytelling skills. Tell your own story or identify someone whose stories you enjoy. Use your voice, facial expressions, and gestures to enhance the story.

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