

The Whiskey Jack

The bed sat about 18 inches from the inside wall of the old cabin. He always made his bed and he needed the space to walk.... except this morning.

There was one bedroom in the log cabin. The rest of the cabin was open. On the far side, arranged furniture defined the living room with two windows forming the corner. A visitor could see the lake 50 feet away from the east most facing of these two windows. The window above the kitchen table did open but differently from some of the others. That window was hinged on top and a stick was used to hold it open about 10 inches. The old man could keep it open in the rain. He liked that. The table was covered with a red and white checkered vinyl like cloth so a good housekeeper could easily wipe crumbs clean. The old man loved Limburger Cheese (no doubt from the german side of the family) on toast with coffee in the morning..... only not this morning. The smaller windows above the kitchen counter opened like the larger kitchen window - hinged on top. The hand pump on the counter had to be primed so a pitcher of water always rested at the end of the counter. A red 55 gallon fuel oil drum outside had a gravity feed line to the heater which was centered along the inside of the north wall. A six foot wire hung in an arc but mostly parallel to the heater four feet below.

The old man in the bed didn't take up much space and there would have been room next to him in that quilt covered double if need be. The old mattress would show an indentation if he stood up. His dog had a similar but smaller indentation in its rug lined bed on the bedroom floor. The old man thought of Skippy a lot over the last 50 some years. But, of course, Skippy and Skippy's bed had been gone for a very long time.

Anyway, he wasn't thinking of Skipper right now. He was thinking about something on his bedroom window sill. "What is that,?" he thought. He didn't even have to lift his head off the pillow as he answered himself without moving his lips, "Oh, its you."

The double hung window was open. The lead counter weights inside the window frame itself had long ago broken away from the cordage but the window still would stay open by itself. The window screen kept the bird from flying right into the bedroom. "That's too bad," the old man thought.

Except for a familiar feeling that some call loneliness , he had no pain. The lake breeze blew in across his covered body. "The feeling one gets from a lake breeze," the old man would say to any that listened, "is like no other breeze in the world.... especially if it carries the cry of a Loon."

The Whiskey Jack had been on that window sill before. The old man had seen him many times over a lifetime. His lifetime. "My lifetime," he thought. Different today somehow."Whiskey Jack"... "what a neat name for a bird," he thought. He had heard somewhere that the Cree Indians thought the bird to be a "benign spirit." A "fun-loving" and "Cheerful bird" maybe even given to "magic." The Cree called this little guy

“Wihsakecahkw.” This old man would have shaken his head on another day if he felt better because he knew so little about the Indian that lived along his lake shore long before the old cabin stood. Of course, too, he would have shaken his head about knowing so little about his Swedish Great Grandmother from Sweden lifetimes ago. As a young woman, he knew she came to Minnesota on a Steamer working in housekeeping to pay her way. He did know that most Finlanders spoke the Swedish language. At least he thought he knew that but it never made much sense to him as to why that would be.

The old man would have shaken his head many times before today. “It is such a shame that so much history was never written,” he would say. “So much history only passed from person to person”. “One broken link in every chain ended every story.” With opened eyes, the old man changed the subject and looked hard at the Whiskey Jack.

“How are you today, little guy?” the old man moved his lips for the question with a small voice only the Whiskey Jack heard. “I have never heard a bird speak,” he thought, “but that has never stopped me from talking to one.” As a small boy, the old man’s mother took him to the doctor and asked why her young son didn’t talk. The doctor told her that her son, “would speak when he is ready.” The old man smiled as he laid quietly under the beige and red quilt remembering that story from his mother. The doctor was right, the old man had talked plenty over the years. “That was a long time ago” he remembered. “Maybe that is the way it is with the Whiskey Jack”, he thought. “I would like to ask the doctor about the Whiskey Jack and not speaking,” he thought again. But, no one had seen the doctor for a very long time. The old man shook his head one time slightly, but an observer would have noticed.

The old man hoped that if he had company right now ...maybe that Cree Indian that lost the old flint spear head his neighbor just found in a pile of dirt or maybe his Great Grandmother who could speak of family in another time and place. If they did drop by, he hoped they would wait for him to answer the door before moving on. “Yes,” he would answer the door if he heard a knock. “Please let me know if you see someone coming up the lane,” he whispered to the Whiskey Jack. It would give him more time to get ready, he thought.

“Where did everyone go?”, asked the old man to his friend on the sill. To the old man it seemed like just a minute ago the cabin was full of people.....or maybe it was more than a minute. “I don’t know,” said the Whiskey Jack. The old man knew the Whiskey Jack “really did know” where everyone went but for some reason refused to say. The old man laid still and wondered why the Whiskey Jack didn’t tell him the truth.

Some time went by in the cabin on this mild summer day but, still the Whiskey Jack sat there on the window ledge. “Its getting dark, what are you still doing here?” mumbled the old man but he wasn’t sure he was heard. “You told me to keep an eye on your lane”, “Oh,so I did,” he said, ...”how long will you keep watch?” “Not long now, ” said the Whiskey Jack, “there is someone walking up your lane.”

The old man closed his eyes and was suddenly too busy to thank the Whiskey Jack or even smile. He had to get ready and answer the door.

Somewhere in the north woods of Minnesota on a mild summer day, an old man readied himself without a stir. A Grey Jay -also known as a Whiskey Jack- flew from the window sill of an old log cabin located about 50 feet from the most beautiful lake you ever saw. In the breeze floated the distant cry of a common Loon. An old man used to live there.

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Wisakedjak (*Wisakedjàk* in [Algonquin](#), *Wĩhsakecāhkw* in [Cree](#) and *Wiisagejaak* in [Oji-cree](#)) is the [Crane Manitou](#) found in northern [Algonquian](#) and [Dene storytelling](#), similar to the [trickster god Nanabozho](#) in [Ojibwa aadizookaanan](#) (sacred stories) and [Inktonme](#) in [Assiniboine](#) myth. He is generally portrayed as being responsible for a great [flood which destroyed the world](#) originally made by the [Creator](#), as well as the one who created the current world with magic, either on his own or with powers given to him by the Creator for that specific purpose. His name is subject to many variant forms, including **Weesack-kachack**, **Wisagatcak**, **Wis-kay-tchach**, **Wissaketchak**, **Woesack-ootchacht**, **Vasaagihdzak**, **Weesageechak**, and undoubtedly others. The Cree people believe the wĩhsakecāhkw is a benign spirit, fun-loving and cheerful.^[1] The bird is seen in Cree stories as an example of good manners and good company.^[2] It was sometimes [Anglicized](#) as **whiskey jack**, which became an alternate name for the [gray jay](#).