

THE CHEROKEE CREATION MYTH



When all was water, the animals lived above in Galunlati but it was very crowded and they wanted more room. Dayunisi, the little Water-beetle, offered to go see what was below the water. It repeatedly dived to the bottom and came up with soft mud eventually forming the island we call earth. The island was suspended by cords at each of the cardinal points to the sky vault, which is solid rock.

Birds were sent down to find a dry place to live but none could be found. The Great Buzzard, the father of all buzzards we see now, flew down close to the earth while it was still soft. He became tired and his wings began to strike the ground. Where they struck the earth became a valley and where they rose up again became a mountain and thus the Cherokee country was created.

The animals came down after the earth dried but all was dark so they set the sun in a track to go every day across the island from east to west. At first the sun was too close to the island and too hot. They raised the sun again and again, seven times, until it was the right height just under the sky arch. The highest place, Gulkwagine Digalunlatiyun, is 'the seventh height'.

The animals and plants were told to keep watch for seven nights but as the days passed many begin to fall asleep until on the seventh night only the owl, panther, and a couple of others were still awake. These were given the power to see in the dark and prey on the birds and animals that sleep at night. Of the plants, only the cedar, the pine, the spruce, the holly, and the laurel were awake to the end and were therefore given the power to be always green and to be the greatest medicine, but to the others it was said: 'Because you have not endured to the end you shall lose your hair every winter.'

Men came after animals and plants. At first there were only a brother and sister until he struck her with a fish and told her to multiply, and so it was. In seven days a child was born to her and thereafter every seven days another until there was danger that the world could not keep up with them. Then it was made that a woman should have only one child in a year, and it has been so ever since.