

COYOTE AND THE WOODPECKER

AS TOLD BY, ALAN SALAZAR / CHUMASH STORYTELLER *

One day a coyote was walking by a big oak tree when he heard a tapping noise coming from the top of the tree. The coyote looked up in the tree and he saw a woodpecker pecking away. The coyote sat and admired the beautiful colors of the woodpecker. The woodpecker had black and white feathers on his wings and body. The contrast of the two colors was very striking. But, on the woodpecker's head he had the most beautiful red feathers, he had a beautiful red head. The coyote wished that he had a red head like woodpecker.

Coyote was the color of the earth, tan, brown, gray, black and reddish. He got that way when he tried to trick a beautiful woman. He pretended to be sick, hungry and almost dead, laying on a trail the woman was walking on one day. She knew coyote was trying to trick her so instead of feeling sorry for coyote, she covered him with dirt, and left him there. And that is how coyote got his color.

Now after a few minutes of admiring the red head of the woodpecker the coyote yelled up at the woodpecker. **“HEY WOODPECKER, TELL ME HOW YOU GOT SUCH A BEAUTIFUL RED HEAD, TELL ME SO I CAN GET ONE, TOO.”** The woodpecker just kept pecking ignoring coyote hoping he would go away and just leave him alone. But, coyotes can be very persistent and a big pest when they want something. The coyote continued to yell at the woodpecker, **“HEY WOODPECKER, TELL ME HOW YOU GOT SUCH A BEAUTIFUL RED HEAD, TELL ME SO I CAN GET ONE , TOO.”** The woodpecker just kept pecking away, ignoring the coyote , hoping he would go away. But, the coyote continued to yell at the woodpecker for 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 hours. Now the coyote was yelling even louder, **“HEY WOODPECKER, TELL ME HOW YOU GOT SUCH A BEAUTIFUL RED HEAD, TELL ME SO I CAN GET ONE, TOO.”** The woodpecker knew that the coyote was going to yell at him all night if he did not tell him something. But, the woodpecker knew that the coyote was so jealous and envious that he could tell him anything and the coyote would do it. So, the woodpecker yelled at the coyote, **“Coyote if want a red head like mine, find a fire, reach into the fire with two sticks, and get a red coal then, put it on your head, that will turn it red like mine.”** Well, without thinking of what a red hot coal would do, that is what the coyote did. And when he put the coal on his head he began yelp and yelp. He ran as fast as he could and jumped in a near by river to cool his head off. While he was swimming in the river the woodpecker flew away to a tree far away from the coyote. So he could peck in peace and quiet. Now, I always dedicate this story to my little brother, who I thought was a big pest when he was a toddler. And it might have something to do why I live several hundred miles from my little brother. Peace and quiet are very important.

*This story was past on to me by a very respected elder in the Chumash community, Ernestine De Soto. It was past on to Ernestine by her Grandmother, Mary Yee, the last known native speaker of the Chumash language. I thank their family for allowing me to share my interpretation of this wonderful story.