

The World's Greatest Coyote
A modern Chumash Indian myth
By Alan Salazar

For thousands and thousands of years* coyote has been a very respected animal and a teacher to the Chumash Indians of California. If you watch a coyote out in the wild you will notice that they are very smart, but they are also very silly. This story shows the smart, the silly and the lucky side of coyote.

Long, long ago there was a small female coyote that all of the animals would say that she was the greatest coyote. She was the Jim Thorpe* of the animal world. She may have been small but she was powerful.

She was the greatest hunter of all the other coyotes.

She was the greatest runner of all the other coyotes.

She was the loudest howler of all the other coyotes.

She was the kindest and most generous of all the other coyotes.

She was the silliest and most playful of all the other coyotes.

Her name was Little Wot. Wot is the Chumash word for leader and she was a very respected leader.

One day a young coyote pup named Tasin, the Chumash word for red, was sitting under a big oak tree up on top of a hill. He saw Little Wot taking a nap down in the meadow. Tasin thought he would watch Little Wot all day hoping to learn what makes her so great. And that is what he did, he sat under that tree, just watching Little Wot.

For the first part of the day all Little Wot did was take a nap. Every few minutes she would wake-up, sniff the air, look around, then go back to sleep. Tasin thought this is the world's greatest coyote?

Tasin watched Little Wot late into the afternoon. He saw a cottontail walk right by her. Tasin sat-up expecting her to chase the rabbit, but she did not.

A few minutes later a lizard went running by her nose. But, she did not chase him either.

Then a grey squirrel, a jack rabbit, a chipmunk and three field mice all leisurely walked by Little Wot. She would open one eye and watch them stroll on by, but she did not chase a single one.

The pup thought this is our greatest hunter? This is our fastest runner? He thought, he could have caught all of those animals, put them in large willow basket and took home to his brothers and sisters.

The sun was about to set and Tasin was just about to go home, when Little Wot stood-up. She started to sniff the air and began walking very slowly, looking all around. Tasin knew she was about to start hunting a giant deer or an elk at any moment.

But, to his amazement she started to follow a herd of stinkbugs. If a group of stinkbugs are a herd? Then, she began to eat the stinkbugs. This was very confusing to the pup. because he had been told that stinkbugs are very sour. If any of you have ate a stinkbug, then you already know this.

Now, Little Wot did not eat just a few, she ate twelve or more. The stinkbugs were running toward a large berry bush to hide under. And Little Wot was focused only on the escaping stinkbugs.

When she got to the berry bush she did not notice that there was someone else on the other side of the berry bush. She just started eating the sweet, juicy berries. Probably to get rid of the sour taste of the stinkbugs. She was making a coyote sweet and sour sauce.

Suddenly, after eating a few berries, a big, old grizzly bear stood-up on the other side of the berry bush. The roared, "This is my berry bush , how dare you eat my berries."

Little Wot turned and ran as fast as she could. The bear jumped over the bush and started chasing the coyote. Now even though Little Wot was a very fast runner, bears are also fast for a short distance.

As Little Wot was running she looked back over her shoulder to see how close the bear was to her. He was so close she could smell his berry breath.

While checking out the bear she did not notice a turtle slowly walking in front of her. The turtle could not get out of the way and Little Wot tripped over the turtle.

Now this is when a truly amazing thing happened. As Little Wot flew through the air, she rolled into a little furry ball. The bear swatted at her, but missed her completely.

The bear flew over Little Wot and landed flat on his face with a loud thud. All four of his paws were stretched out and Little Wot was now standing behind the bear.

Did she turn and run away? No, as the world's greatest coyote she was also the bravest coyote. Much to Tasin's surprise she jumped on the bears back. She wrapped her paws around his neck and around his big old belly. The bear stood-up, began to run and buck.

The bear was running and pawing at Little Wot, but she held on as hard as she could. No matter how much the bear bucked and pawed he could not get the coyote off his back.

After several minutes of bucking and pawing the bear was exhausted. He fell down flat on his face gasping for air.

Little Wot jumped off the bear, brushed her self off, and trotted away with her head held high.

The coyote pup was shocked. But, he knew now why Little Wot is the greatest coyote. What the pup did not know was that he had just witnessed history in the making, the very first rodeo event,,, bear back riding. It would take cowboys thousands of years to come up with their version of bare back riding and it is not nearly as dangerous. Kiwa'nán, (goodbye in the Chumash language), Alan Salazar