

The Big Fish and the Sun

Told by Charles Elkhair

There was an old woman who had a granddaughter six or seven years old who became pregnant. No one knew how, for in those days children were pretty well guarded, not as today. When the old lady kept watching the girl when the child was born, thinking it might be born at any time, when the girl took sick to deliver the child, when it came, it was a little fish. So the grandmother when she saw it said, "Is this my grandchild?" It was a little fish she was looking at. So she didn't know what to do, for it was a water animal and she didn't know how to take care of it. So she picked it up and remembered a swampy place. When she got there, she saw a little pocket of water, where some livestock had tramped there. She put that fish in the water. The little fish swam round and round in a circle.

Next morning she went back there to see her grandchild the fish. When she got there she saw a big lake there, and this fish had already grown to be a large, good-sized fish. It was still swimming round in a circle, as when she'd first turned it loose. That lake grew to an enormous size. And this fish, the last time it was seen, was an awfully large fish. The mother of the fish went over there one day, but she didn't see it, the water was so deep.

They began to find out some people would go in that direction and would never come back. So they didn't know whether it was this fish who killed the people or not. They didn't know for sure. They got to watching it because everyone who went in that direction never returned. Finally they found out for certain it was that fish who got the people.

So the chiefs got together after they found out this fish was killing the people. So they counseled together to find out a way to kill that fish, because it was going to do worse if it was not done away with some way. They decided that among the tribe there was probably someone who could kill it. So the people gathered this wampum. That was the money those days. They got a big abundance of it. So they took those beads to the chief.

They told the chief those beads were to be given to whoever said, "I can kill that fish," or whoever said, "I know a way that fish can be killed." So the conjurers began to gather where the beads were, as the people all decided they knew no other way of getting rid of that fish. Well, there was an old woman very poor who lived on the outskirts of the town. She had two grandchildren, boys, who stayed in the bark house all the time eating parched corn. The old woman went every day to where they were counseling.

Well, one day one of the children asked the old woman why she was always going over to the town. She took up a club and hit him over the head. "Why do you inquire about other people's business? There's a big pond over there, it grows larger and larger. And there's a large fish that grows larger and larger. It will soon eat up the whole tribe if it is not killed."

"Well," said the boy, "I can kill it." So the old lady, knowing they were looking for someone to do this, next morning went up to where the big gathering was. So she told the people there what this boy had said. So then the puchêl, a man elected to carry messages, was notified to come to the big gathering. When he got there, this puchêl was told, "So get

those little boys and bring them here," -- for the reason that those little boys told their grandmother they could kill this fish.

So when the puchēl got to where those boys were, he told them what he came for, that he had come to get them. So those little boys, who were writhing in the dust in front of the fireplace, jumped right up and went with this puchēl. So when the puchēl got them to where the chief was, the chief asked those little boys, "Well, my grandchildren, I understand you can kill the fish over here in the big lake." So the little boys said, "Yes, that's what we said we could do."

So the chief told them, "My little grandchildren, that's why we've been gathering here, for the purpose of finding someone who can kill that big fish. There's the big pile of beads, wampum beads. If you boys kill that fish, you'll get all of those beads right there."

So after the chief told them, they went back home and their grandmother went with them. When night came, they did nothing, just sat around the fireplace. So the old lady wondered how in the world the boys were going to kill that fish. She got to watching them. So bedtime came and those little fellows made the pallet pretty close to the fireplace. So they laid down the usual way, kind of talked awhile. The old lady didn't want to go to sleep. She wanted to watch these boys. She didn't go to bed.

Finally she went to bed, she laid in bed awake, she was going to find out about the boys. She was watching them but didn't want them to know. So these little boys lay in their bed as if they were asleep, silent. So when she went to sleep, the boys heard her snoring. The littlest said, "How are we going to proceed, to kill that fish. He's an extra large fish and doing great damage."

The older told him, "Well, I don't know any other way but this: the Sun is my friend, so we'll go up and get his fire," the big boy said. The young brother told the older brother: "Now how will we do, to get to where the Sun is?" It was after dark, you know. So one of these boys, the eldest, turned into a raven. The youngest turned into a pigeon. So the oldest said, "That's the best I can prepare you. You cannot turn into a raven, you can turn into a pigeon. But I will help you, as I can, get to where the Sun is."

So he said, "The Sun lives in a house far across the big water. He goes there every night before he gets up in the morning. You, being a pigeon, cannot get there. You will fall. But I, being a raven, can help you. Every time you fall, I will fly under you and raise you. That way we gradually can get to where the Sun is."

So when they got to where the Sun's home is, they went into his house. The Sun hadn't got there yet. And there was an old lady there who was the Sun's grandmother. They asked her if the Sun was there. The grandmother said he had not yet come, but would be in, in a short time. So when the Sun began to appear at his house, he came in with flashes of light, into the house. The oldest brother had hidden his little brother in the corner, back of the door.

So the Sun saw the boy anyhow, even if he was hidden. So the Sun told the oldest boy, "Who is that?" The oldest said, "That's our youngest brother." So the Sun asked the oldest boy what they came for. "Well, we came to get your fire." And the Sun asked what he wanted with the fire. The boy told him, "We want to use it to kill a big fish that's doing us big damage."

So the Sun said, "No, you cannot use my fire, for the reason you will burn up the earth that you live in. But you can go to my ash pile" -- off quite a distance, these ashes had been a good many years back. So those two boys got the ashes, tied them up in very small bundles. So. Those two boys went back with the ashes.

When they got back there, they went to this big lake, to watch the fish's movements. So. By the way this fish moved when they got there, the fish seemed to know what their intentions were when they got to that lake: it was by this fish being so powerful and knowing things ahead. So these boys counseled together and turned into several different things in order to get next to this fish.

So. They found out he was going to be kind of hard to handle. They used little insects to approach him. They found a pale butterfly. They sent him to the fish to locate him. The fish paid no attention to the butterfly, didn't watch him, or anything. So the boys decided the butterfly was the very one needed by them to get near him. So one of these boys turned into this kind of a butterfly, as they found out the fish didn't watch it or pay attention to it. This butterfly got pretty well on top of the water flying around. The other boy dove down in the lake to the center of the earth, and he turned the ashes loose there which he had brought from the Sun. And this other boy, the butterfly, turned his ashes loose into the water.

So then they left and went home. And when they got there, they laid down on the same old pallet. The night wasn't over. Next morning the old lady woke up and looked over and saw those boys there, asleep. So the old lady picked up a wooden poker and began beating the boys. "Here you are asleep. And you said you were going to kill that big fish."

So the older boy said, "Go out and look at the lake and see what we've done." So the old woman went there, walking around, and saw no water in the lake -- she went on walking toward the lake, she didn't believe those boys, when she got to the lake she saw no water. She saw that great big fish lying from one end of the lake to the other, burnt to charcoal.

So the ashes which the boys used, which they had got from the Sun, were so hot they'd dried out the lake and burnt the fish into charcoal. The old lady after she found out how the fish was killed, went and told the tribe about it. So they all went over there and looked at the fish that was killed. So they gave the beads to the oldest boy for a reward, for killing this fish. After they gave him the beads, those two finally grew to be men and were looked upon by the tribe as being something very great. So when they grew up, the oldest one came to be a chief in his band, was well thought of, got to be a great man, powerful.

This is similar to the *Wèwtēñewès* story found in the *Lenape Taking Dictionary* here: <https://www.talk-lenape.org/stories?id=41>