



BLACK HAWK

BY ARTHUR J. BECKHARD



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BLACK HAWK

Before dying, Pyesa, Black Hawk's father and chief of his people, commanded his son to defend their land from whites, who were trying to force the tribe off their land. Black Hawk, however, has no taste for killing and scalping and goes through great internal conflict. The story of this great-hearted leader shows how some whites and Native Americans were peaceful and kind, while others were not. Based on true events, this powerful book teaches about a difficult time period and shares profound, unique messages about love, faith, mercy, humility, friendship, forgiveness, and faith.

"I love stories that are beautifully written, that teach about history, and that dig deep into powerful messages; this book does all of these things. Why do we want our children to love reading? Not so they read fast-paced books without value, but because we want them to be immersed in books like *Black Hawk* that mold the mind and heart in ways that are good and beautiful." –Jenny Phillips





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BY ARTHUR J. BECKHARD

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Punctuation has been updated to modern usage.

Black Hawk

Although Black Hawk came from a long line of warriors, he hated killing and scalping; yet his unquestioned courage and fine generalship against marauding tribes won him the title of “Chief.” As head of the Sauk and the Fox, he was fired upon during peace negotiations—and so started the ill-fated Black Hawk War. Ultimately, this great-hearted leader conquered his enemies with a pen! In his autobiography, Black Hawk justifies the actions that gave him the reputation of a bloodthirsty savage, but there is also evidence that he was a reluctant warrior who spent his life in vain attempts to protect his people not only from the whites but from themselves.

TO
Evelyn and Sigmund S. Weiss, their children,
grandchildren, relatives and in-laws

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CHAPTER 1

An arrow quivered in the trunk of the slender birch tree, just outside a small black smudge that served the two Indian boys as a target.

“Not good enough,” the taller one said.

“Just because you’re Black Hawk, son of Pyesa, Chief of the Sauks and the Foxes, you think—”

“Watch this, Watassa,” young Black Hawk interrupted. He strung his arrow and pulled the bowstring taut. When he released it, the arrow stood in the very center of the target.

A partridge darted out of the underbrush, flying upward. Quickly both boys aimed and shot, but the bird flew away unharmed. At that moment, there was the twang of another bow, and the bird dropped fifty paces away.

They heard a laugh and saw a girl walking toward them. Although her shiny black hair was held in place by a band of brilliant blue beads and her doeskin smock elaborately decorated, her wide grin made her seem like a boy.

“Singing Bird!” Black Hawk exclaimed. “What are you doing here?”

“You should be helping with the spring plowing, not chasing after us, even though Black Hawk is your hero,” Watassa said.

“You’re just angry because I hit the bird you missed, Brother. Come, Black Hawk, let’s find it. You can share it with us, if you’re not too proud to eat something a girl killed.”

“I’m not too proud,” Black Hawk said. “But how did you come upon us so quietly?”

“I’m learning to walk the trails as the warriors do.”

“Your brother is right,” Black Hawk protested. “You should be cooking and plowing and tanning the hides of the wolf and fox so that your men may have food and clothes.”

They had come out into a little clearing. Far below, on the distant plain, lay their village, Sauk-e-nong, “The Home of the Sauks,” which white men called “Saukenuk.” In this year of 1781, it was the largest Indian village in the whole country. Thousands of members of the Sauk tribe lived there in tipis and wickiups surrounding a Long House made of interlaced branches and mud. Across the Rock River lay the Fox village, part of Saukenuk since the tribes were united under one chief, Black Hawk’s father.

They stared proudly down at their village. “It’s no wonder we’ve sworn to defend it against all intruders,” Black Hawk said.

Suddenly all about them rang the war whoops of attacking Indians, and four warriors dropped from the trees above them. Black Hawk’s arms were pinioned behind him. The girl was swept from his side. A hand rose, and sunlight glinted on the blade of a long knife it held. Using the man holding him as a lever, Black Hawk swung his legs in a mighty kick. One foot caught the girl’s attacker in the chest, while his other foot kicked the knife out of the attacker’s hand. Then he was pulled back by his captors as one of them sank to the ground.

Watassa’s arrow had found its mark. Now he closed in with a spear and knife as the fallen warrior rose and plunged toward Black Hawk.

The fight that followed was silent and deadly. Black Hawk saw that their opponents were the wily Chippewas, who neither showed nor expected mercy.

Singing Bird, crouched behind the bushes, planned to slip back to the village for help. But one of the warriors, discerning her purpose, plunged through the underbrush in pursuit.

Black Hawk, engaged in fierce hand-to-hand combat, could not help her. But Watassa flung a rock at the Chippewa, which struck him behind the ear, and he fell dead. Black Hawk somehow freed his right arm and whipped his knife into play as Singing Bird fled, running fast.

He noticed that his opponent wore a necklace of bear claws. That meant he was the son of a chief and had won the right to wear the totem of his father's clan. Also, it meant he had killed and scalped at least one opponent—a distinction Black Hawk had not yet won.

The young brave flung himself free as Black Hawk's knife flashed down so that the wound inflicted was only a surface one. The Chippewa leaped for Black Hawk's throat. But Black Hawk chopped a vicious uppercut to his jaw, and he went down. Picking up his fallen knife, Black Hawk stood over his fallen foe.

"Kill me," the youth said fearlessly.

Black Hawk looked quickly at Watassa, whose man was dead. He had no desire, however, to kill just for the sake of killing. He sheathed his knife.

"Get up," he said. "You are my prisoner."

"Kill me," the Chippewa boy said again. "I am Mowambee—Grey Owl—a chief's son."

"You have fought well and fairly," Black Hawk said. "We Sauks have the privilege of allowing a worthy enemy to live and to make him a son or a brother. I have no brother. I will have the Council make you my brother."

Slowly the young Chippewa arose. "So be it," he said solemnly. "I shall follow you throughout life. I am your brother." He hesitated,

then added, "I hope I may also be your friend."

Watassa joined them, carrying the scalp-lock he had cut from his defeated enemy. Silently the three walked toward home.

That night, War Chief Pyesa and White Cloud, the Peace Chief of the Sauk, stood on the mound at the end of a long, rectangular clearing surrounded by the wigwams of the Sauk families. Opposite them was the Long House where the Council met. In the center, a great bonfire roared.

Around the fire danced Black Hawk and Watassa, while fifty drums beat out the cadence. The firelight gleamed on the faces of the watchers. The boys were appealing to all the inhabitants to be admitted as braves.

"What brave deeds have you done to deserve being called braves?" one spectator asked.

Both boys pantomimed the action of the fight that had taken place on the hill that afternoon. They were not very good actors, but luckily Singing Bird had told how brave her brother and Black Hawk had been. When the dance was over, everyone cheered to show they wanted them to become braves.

Black Hawk and Watassa walked down the length of the field to where their fathers stood with the other councilors.

"We are braves now, Father," Watassa said. And White Cloud smiled proudly.

"I understand you have chosen the breast feathers of the robin as your totem," Pyesa said.

"Yes," Watassa replied. "I wish to change my name to Red Bird."

"Here is your totem," Pyesa answered, handing him the robin feathers. "And, because you have a scalp at your belt, you may also wear the feathers of the great eagle."

"Thank you, Chief Pyesa," Red Bird said.

“You, my son,” Pyesa said to Black Hawk, “may not wear eagle feathers until you have scalped an enemy. Until you do, you must wear only your totem—the tail feathers of the sparrow hawk. As the bird is black, you shall still be known as Black Hawk. When you scalp an enemy, you may change your name.”

“I shall always bear the name you gave me, Father,” Black Hawk answered. “I want to make it a name our people will remember. I want to make you proud of me. When may I lead a party of braves against the Sioux?”

Pyesa’s eyes twinkled, but he answered solemnly, “You need more than bravery to be a leader. It will take some time to learn. After all, not two hundred full moons have passed over your head. Be patient.”

“And much less solemn,” said the voice of Singing Bird, who had joined them. “Chief Pyesa, Father, there is to be dancing in the Long House to celebrate the two new braves. Can’t the boys come now?”

“They may,” White Cloud promised. “Let us all go to the Long House.”

“Take your brother and go, Singing Bird,” Pyesa said. “I want to speak to my son first.”

As the others went toward the Long House, Pyesa said, “I wanted to ask you about your prisoner. Young Grey Owl is the son of a Chippewa chief—not a head man nor a medicine man, but still a chief. Do you think it was wise to make him your brother?”

“Yes,” Black Hawk answered. “He fought well. He is brave. He did not plead for his life. It seemed senseless to kill him.”

“You knew that if you killed him and brought in his scalp, you’d have been entitled to wear the feathers of the great eagle?”

“Yes, I knew. I even thought I might not be accepted as a brave.”

“I’m not sure you acted wisely, Black Hawk. I do not want my son

to shrink from killing.”

“I will not shrink when it is necessary, Father.”

“Who can say when it is necessary?” his father demanded. “I do not want my son to grow up to be a sentimental old woman.”

Black Hawk’s eyes flashed angrily. “I thought we killed and took scalps to protect ourselves and our land. Also because the Great Spirit teaches that an un-scalped enemy can keep one of our people from entering the Happy Hunting Ground. But if one can make a friend out of an enemy, there is no need.”

“The Chippewa may soon be at war with us,” Pyesa said sternly. “Who can say whether the son of the Chippewa chief will fight with or against us?”

“Grey Owl is my brother,” Black Hawk answered. “I have given him my promise. I can’t go back on my word.”

Pyesa was secretly pleased that the boy had the courage to stand up for his convictions. He raised a hand, and one of the runners, who stood in constant readiness near their chief, hurried to him.

“Have my son’s prisoner brought to me in the wickiup next to the Long House.” To Black Hawk he said, “I shall interview this young man in the small council chamber.”