



MICHAEL BURNS

Into
the
Dark
Forest

Therapeutic Storytelling

Child Care Press



Into the Dark Forest

Therapeutic Storytelling

by Michael Burns, M. Ed

With Drawings by Karin-Ann Bosma

Published by Childcare Press, 2008

You will find included in this package:

- A sample of the book cover,
- An introduction by the author,
- The table of contents,
- A sample story introduction,
- One of the stories found in the book,
- Information about the author,
- An advertisement for CYC NET, and
- Information on ordering this book.

Into the Dark Forest

Therapeutic Storytelling

Storytelling is one of the oldest forms of teaching and healing. It has been practiced and developed by humans since the beginning of the spoken word. Therapeutic stories have been passed down from generation to generation and are ancient accounts of stories that have been crafted by humankind's wisest storytellers. They have evolved for over 25,000 years, before the birth of Christ (Schmidt, 1926). Each generation of storytellers adapted the telling of these stories to fit the experiences, struggles, and dreams of their audiences. The early translations of myths and fairy tales, as well as some of the recent adaptations by 20th century authors, provide renditions of these ancient tales that are poignant and irresistible to the children and youth of this millennium.

Since Marie Von Franz's first publication of *The Interpretation of Fairy Tales*, in 1970 and five years later, Bruno Bettelheim's publication of *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, North American culture has been captivated by a collection of stories commonly referred to as fairy tales. The most notable contributors, Charles Perrault, Hans Christian Anderson, and Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, took ancient myths, folk tales and folk legends and transformed them into the timeless aggregation of narratives that we enjoy today. Many of these stories survived the oral tradition intact for over 2000 years. Fairy tales, along with the vast collection of myths handed down from culture to culture, are a record of the struggle and the adventure of the human experience. So seductive are these tales that countless books have been written telling and retelling these stories to generation after generation of children and adults.

The present interest in the interpretation of fairy tales in Europe and North America appears to have been a direct result of the works of Dr. Carl Jung. Jung's emphasis on universal symbols and his style of dream interpretation opened up a new dimension to these simple folk tales by offering an avenue of insight into their possible psychological meanings. Von Franz, a Jungian psychoanalyst, and her colleague Bettelheim, a Freudian psychoanalyst, pointed to the unconscious messages and the myriad of possible interpretations of these ancient tales. Since their pioneering works, many professionals from the field of psychology, most notably Jungian psychology, as well as experts from other professions, have written about the messages these stories have for us and how we might best benefit from them.

Into the Dark Forest is a selection of 24 of the most powerful myths and fairy tales that I have used in my practice in child and family therapy. The experiences of the characters in these stories mirror the same wide range of fears, trauma, and abuse that many of today's children and youth encounter in the world. This makes this compilation easy for them to identify with and easy to relate to at a conscious level. In addition, these stories mirror the inner reality of most children, and it is the workings of the internal world, the unconscious, where these stories have their greatest effect. The conflicts, confrontations, failures, and eventual transformations of the characters in the drama of the story symbolically represent the drama of the lives of the audience. The stories instruct them in ways to successfully cross from evil to good and from lost to being found, from a state of despair to one of joy—and many of them deal with the equally difficult transformation from joy to despair.

Michael Burns



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The White Tigress

This ancient Chinese legend dates back to 250 B.C. and tells the popular tale of Mulan, the young woman who passed herself off as a man to save her father and ended up saving a nation. This is the story of the woman warrior – all women possess this feminine energy, and in many cultures it is not recognized or valued. In fact in many instances when women exercise their warrior spirit, it is stifled, rebuked, or stopped by the collective. This is the energy necessary to heal abused or victimized children, teens with eating disorders, depressed youth, suicidal youth, and youth with conduct problems. This energy is also in the masculine, but there it is more acceptable, only it is often the wounded warrior that surfaces in the masculine psyche. The warrior in this story sacrifices her life for something greater than herself – the life of her father, the honour of her family, and the pride of her nation. This is a selfless act and one of raw courage.

The story opens with a crisis – the nation is going to war and all men must serve in the conflict. The eldest daughter devises a plan to save her father by taking his place in the battle. Many eldest and sometimes youngest daughters have sacrificed all, or given up all, to protect their father or parent. Abused children's' silence, parentified daughters of single-parent families, anxious daughters of addicted parents, and depressed daughters in violent homes, all reflect the sacrifices made. Children in these circumstances crave the woman warrior's spirit – to be able to battle your adversaries rather than surrender to them.

In this story the eldest daughter is inspired and instructed by a reoccurring dream, the dream of the white tigress. Her father instructs her to listen to this dream, and the dream becomes the impetus for her plan. She also experiences other dreams, daydreams of becoming a famous woman warrior, the Maiden of Yueh. The dream world is that of the unconscious, and this character is well in touch with her unconscious, which is often a necessary strategy for young oppressed women and men. When the oppressed warrior makes the unconscious conscious, she is provided with an opportunity to tap into her inner wisdom or to address her internal enemy.

This warrior also takes years to develop her craft, and she is an enthusiastic learner, reading, practicing, and speaking to seasoned warriors. This is an important message to the oppressed for it speaks of patience, planning, and hard work, all necessary ingredients for gaining freedom.

The story is completed when she achieves her quest and the heroine returns home. She is reunited with her family and her village, and she forms a new union with the masculine warrior. This is another message to all children and youth, that completion requires both the masculine and the feminine energies living in harmony.



The White Tigress

Long ago in a village in the Central Plains of China during the Sui Dynasty there lived a special young woman and her family. Each morning they would drink cha and discuss the plans for the day.

“She came to me again last night Father,” exclaimed the eldest daughter.

“Who came to you my Eldest blossom?” her father replied.

“The white tigress in my dreams!” she said. “She attacked the enemy and killed all of them.”

“This is a most powerful dream my Eldest one! We must think on it and try to determine what it is telling you.” her father mused. “But not now I want you and youngest daughter to go to the marketplace and bring some nice sweet fish back for our dinner tonight.”

“Yes Father,” the daughters replied in unison and set off for the centre of the village.

Eldest Sister! Stop!” Youngest Sister shouted as the two walked from the family farm to the market. But Eldest Sister sliced the air with a bamboo stake.

“I am a swordswoman like the Maiden of Yueh!” she cried.

“Proper young women do not play with swords!” chided Youngest Sister. “They do not go to war!”

“War may come to me,” Eldest Sister said. “The Tartars have crossed the northern border and are burning many towns.”

Just then a small group of horsemen approached the market; the foot soldiers in the distance were coming closer. A horseman with silver scales

stopped in the village square, and reading from a small scroll, he shouted, "Your baron has pledged 50 men from this district, one from each family," and then called out the family names.

Eldest Sister gasped when she recognized one name. "Our father!" she cried. "But he is too old and frail! How is he to fight? He has no grown son."

"If a man does not report to the Khan's army," one of the village woman said, "he and his family will be punished."

The next day as Eldest Sister sat at her loom she formed a brave plan. At last she went to her parents. They saw her troubled look and heard an anxious sigh. "What is on our daughter's mind?" they asked gently. "What is in her heart?"

"The Khan is drafting many men into service, and Father's name is on the list," Eldest Sister explained. "Brother and Youngest Sister are too young. I am strong," she added. "Let me serve in Father's name."

"It is too dangerous!" her father protested, "and the Khan does not let women serve as soldiers."

Eldest Sister told her parents of her plan to disguise her self as a man and take her father's place in the army.

"I know this is what my dream is telling me Father. I am to be like the White Tigress and defeat the Khan's enemies."

The more her father and mother protested, the more certain Eldest Sister was that this was the only way to save her father and the family honour. In the end her parents agreed.

Eldest Sister went back to the market the next day, and with her father's help she bought a spirited stallion. At dawn the next day she cut her hair short, put on her father's armour, and fastened his weapons to the horse's saddle. Bidding farewell to her sorrowful family, she set out bravely for the Yellow River, where the Khan's army was camped.

"What is your name?" a soldier with a scroll demanded.

Deepening her voice, Eldest Sister gave her family name, "Fa." She said. The man nodded, marked his list, and waved her away.

Leading her stallion to the water, Eldest Sister whispered, "I am afraid, but also excited." She pointed her sword at the setting sun.

"I will be like the Maiden of Yueh, the greatest swordswoman."

By nightfall she was camped by the banks of the Yellow River. She thought she heard her mother calling to her, but it was only the sound of the river crying.

Before sunrise the army broke camp and moved out towards the Black Mountain. They reached the base of the mountain by dusk. In that lonely place, the only sound was the cry of birds and the whicker of wild horses. But as the troops marched forward across the grasslands beyond to join with other armies that Khan had raised, Eldest Sister thought she heard the sound of her father's voice. But it turned out to be the faint jangle of Tartar bridles and armour as they approached.

Soon the Tartars swept over the plain. Spotting the Khan's forces, the enemy halted. The two armies faced each other.

Shouting orders, the Chinese generals positioned their troops. Eldest Sister and other new soldiers were placed beside veterans. All of a sudden the pounding of drums filled the air – the signal to attack!

With a shout, Eldest Sister urged her steed at the enemy. An armoured Tartar raced to meet her. The shock of their clashing spears unseated Eldest Sister. She got to her feet and called upon the White Tigress and struck the Tartar's shield and helmet as he charged her again. The Tartar's mount lurched sideways, unsettling his rider. Taking this advantage, Eldest Sister delivered a fatal thrust, and the man tumbled into the dust.

The war waged on for hours and Eldest Sister fought hard. Eventually, the Khan's forces broke the Tartar line, and the Chinese surged forward; Eldest Sister helped drive the enemy back.

In the months and many battles that followed, Eldest Sister increased her strength and improved her swordplay. "You are gifted Fa!" an old veteran soldier exclaimed. "You are able to balance the yin and the yang – the male and female energies. A good swordsman should appear as calm as a fine lady, but must be capable of quick action like a surprised tiger." His words stayed in Eldest Sister's mind all day, and that night she dreamed again of her White Tigress so quick that it defeated entire armies. Eldest Sister was soon to become this white tiger.

She studied the art of war and questioned the older soldiers to learn how great generals planned and carried out battles. Her courage and skill with a sword were praised by soldiers, officers, and even officials sent by the Khan.

Eldest Sister was lonely and missed her family, but she kept apart from her squad because of her secret. But sometimes one or another of the brave, handsome young men would touch her heart. She would daydream of leaving the battlefield for the fields of home, of being reunited with her family and becoming a bride, a wife, a mother. However, duty to family and country, and her sense of honour, pushed all these dreams aside.

Each time the Khan's armies met the Tartars, Eldest Sister was in the thick of battle, encouraging her fellow warriors, setting a brave example, and driving back the enemy. She fought fiercely and with great speed. She was soon known by both armies as a formidable enemy. In one battle Eldest Sister had a vision of the White Tigress and felt as if she was in her soul. She fought with such ferocity that many of the enemy fled at the sight of her ruthless treatment of her foes.

In time her extraordinary valour and ability won her the command of a company; one year later she was in command of a small troop that made surprise raids on the Tartars. She and her company, which she referred to as her "fire companions," dogged the enemy back across their borders. Eldest Sister steadily rose in rank until she became a general, commanding one of three main armies of the Khan's forces.

The time had come for the deciding battle of the 12-year war. On the night before the battle, the White Tigress appeared again in Eldest Sister's dream. She spoke to her of a plan to defeat the enemy.

The Tartars were camped near the mountains with a swift running stream to their flank. They had been reinforced by armies from the north and were now threatening to attack the Khan's forces on two fronts.

Meeting with the other generals, Eldest Sister outlined the plan from her dream that the others quickly approved. "We will follow the classic wisdom of our elders," she said. "You, my comrades, will disperse and let my army act like a wounded bird ready to surrender to make the enemy think we are no longer a threat. Then we will surprise them like the hawk let loose on her prey, catching them off guard and outnumbered."

The Khan's army separated, one group heading east, the other west. Eldest Sister's troops marched north toward the Tartar force. She ordered her soldiers to put on their oldest and most tattered clothing, armour, and weapons. She instructed them to scatter and advance ragtag so they looked like a mob and not a real army.

When the two armies faced off, the Tartars laughed to see Eldest Sister's troops looking so disorganized. The Tartars charged thundering across the plain like hounds after a hare. But the hare had a surprise waiting for the unsuspecting hounds. At Eldest Sister's command, her foot soldiers formed crisp battle lines and began to charge the enemy. Then her cavalry regrouped and galloped to meet the enemy. Eldest Sister led the cavalry attack and struck a wedge between the Tartars as they were caught off guard. The Tartars, reeling from Eldest Sister's attack, were crushed in the jaws of her deadly trap, as the Khan's other troops charged in from the

east and west. The Tartars were driven back into the mountains and were not seen nor were any threat to the Chinese for over a century.

At the height of the victory celebration, messengers arrived and informed Eldest Sister that she must appear before the Khan in the royal city of Loyang. She was instantly on guard fearing that the Khan might have discovered that one of his generals was a woman. If so, he might punish her and her family for her daring.

When she reached the royal city, Eldest Sister was immediately brought to his palace. She bowed before the Khan's throne. "General Fa," the Khan began, "you have served me well and have brought honour to your family and our nation. Your deeds and stratagems are enough to fill several books. I give you 1000 strings of copper coins as a reward. What else can I give you?" the Khan asked. Winking at her he whispered, "You are as cunning and renowned as the Maiden of Yueh!"

Eldest Sister blushed and now understood that the emperor knew her true identity. "My Lord, I am at your service," she stammered

"And how shall you serve me General Fa?"

"Now that the Middle Kingdom is safe," Eldest Sister answered, "I ask only to return home and take up my old life. And I ask for the loan of your swiftest horse to take me there. I wish to leave at once."

The emperor Khan granted her wish, and a small honour guard of her "fire companions" accompanied Eldest Sister home to her village. What excitement there was at her arrival! Father, Mother, Elder Sister, and Eldest Brother – how grown he was! – showered her with tears and smiles. The entire village turned out to welcome Eldest Sister.

In her room, Eldest Sister changed her armour and boots for a silk robe and brocade slippers. She powdered her face and arranged her hair like a soft cloud. At last Eldest Sister stepped into the room where her fire companions and family waited. Her comrades were amazed and confused.

"Our general is a woman!" cried one of them.

Smiling, Eldest Sister said, "When the male rabbit bounds across the meadow, and the female runs beside him, no one can tell which is which. So it is when soldiers fight side by side."

The companion who had spoken – the one Eldest Sister felt closest to – returned her smile, saying, "In the field there is no need to differentiate between the two. But when they return to their burrow, the rabbits know which partner is husband and which is wife, so they can build a life together. My wish is to stay here and build our lives together."

Shortly after, Eldest Sister was married to her favourite fire soldier. The wedding feast was a long and merry celebration. The Khan sent his blessings along with many gifts. All the villagers and people from the neighbouring villages came to join in the celebration. Eldest Sister bowed to them in turn.

Finally Father said, “We have all heard of famous warrior women, like the Maiden of Yueh. My daughter shall be known as the White Tigress, and her fame will outshine and outlive them all.”





About the Author

Michael Burns has been a child and youth counsellor for over 30 years. He received his Child Care Worker diploma from St. Clair Community College in Windsor, Ontario and is a certified Child & Youth Counsellor. He also holds a Bachelors degree in Sociology and a Masters degree in Adult Education. Michael has taught Child and Youth Work, with five community colleges, for over the past 25 years and is currently teaching in the Child and Youth Worker Program at St. Lawrence College in Kingston.

Michael has written five books and several articles in the field of child and youth work. *Time In: A Handbook for Child and Youth Care Professionals*, a textbook on therapeutic activities, is widely used in Child and Youth Worker Programs throughout Canada. Three books: *Stories in Child Care*, *Into the Dark Forest* and *Dancing in the Forest* on therapeutic storytelling and his recent text on the therapeutic milieu *Healing Spaces: The Therapeutic Milieu in Child and Youth Work*. Michael has recently been honoured by his alma mater, St. Clair College, with the Alumni of Distinction Award and he is currently working on his next book, *Honouring What Was: The Self in Child and Youth Work*.

“Child and youth work is not about changing or molding the child - it is about meeting the child in his world and allowing him to emerge from it and delve into it with his own ideas, interests, emotions, and associations. We are not here to make the child a better person but to allow him to become his person whether that supports our own vision of him or not.”

Michael Burns, July 16, 2006

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www.childcarepress.ca

\$29.95 + shipping, handling, and applicable taxes.

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ISBN 978-0-969-7302-2-4

Graphic Design for *Into the Dark Forest* and this promotional
package provided by

Karin-Ann Bosma Art & Design. karin-ann.bosma@hotmail.com