



Brothertown Oral Traditions

The Little People or Makiaweesug

Long ago, before White people came, there were giants and little people as well. These "little people" were called Makiaweesug by the Mohegan, and those who were especially perceptive could see them sometimes in the woods. They were generally friendly to the Indian people, especially if they were left alone. The Little People were quite shy, and if you stared at them, they would point their finger at you and then you could no longer see them, and they could cause mischief and you wouldn't know whether they were doing it or whether it was just an accident.



Photo from the book: Makiawisug: The Gift of the Little People

If the Makiaweesug came to your house asking for food, you should always give them what they wanted. Otherwise, they might point at you so you couldn't see them and then take whatever food they wanted. And even if the Little People did not come to your house, it was a good idea to leave some food for them so they would not have to come up to the house. Small baskets were made for this purpose, and the Mohegan left these baskets with food at the edge of the woods so the Little People could take it and not bother the people.

Although the Little People were shy, they occasionally needed the help of Indian people. On one dark and stormy night, a Mohegan man and his wife were at home by their fire. They heard a rap on the side of their wigwam, and the woman went to see who it was. The wind blew in as she opened the door to see who was there. A Little Person was there—a man—but she thought it was a boy. He said that he needed her help because his wife was sick. She packed up a few things and told her husband that she was going out to help the man. With the Little Man leading her, she walked on and on through the storm, and the woman didn't know where she was being taken. At last, she saw a light in front of her, and there was a house. Saying nothing, the Little Man led her inside and showed her his wife: a Little Woman lying ill on a bed of skins. The Mohegan woman was surprised, because it was at that point that she realized that she was with the Little People. But keeping her surprise to herself and not asking any questions, she doctored the Little Woman and stayed with them until the Little Woman was well again.

Because the Little Woman was better, it soon was time for the Mohegan woman to go back to her own wigwam. The Little People gave her presents, thanking her for the kindness she had shown in leaving her own home to take care of the sick Little Woman. The Mohegan woman packed up her belongings and medicines and then the Little Man put a skin blindfold over her eyes and led her away from their house and back to her own. When they arrived, she took the blindfold off, but the Little Man was already gone, and she could not tell which direction they had come.

She told her husband about her adventure, and they wanted to find the Little People and looked and looked for them but couldn't find them. Some think that the Little People died out when the Whites came, but the Mohegan feel that they just live far back in the woods and show themselves only to those who still believe in them.

(Adapted from William S. Simmons, 1986, Spirit of the New England Tribes: Indian History and Folklore, 1620-1984. Hanover NH: University Press of New England.)

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