

BLUE-JAY AND BEAR

This story I heard from the Chehalis people of Western Washington down near Longview. It goes:

A long time ago, Blue Jay, that little blue bird, Blue Jay, he was standing on the riverbank and he was watching all the animals work. Now Blue Jay loved to watch the other animals work because he doesn't like to work himself. Blue Jay is a smart little bird. He is a very talkative little bird. He also has a temper and he also plays tricks on people, so he's an interesting little guy. But he was standing on the riverbank and he saw an animal that he'd never seen before. Its name was Fishing Duck. And Fishing Duck is the kind of duck that flaps his wings, flies high up in the air, dives under the water, and catches a fish. And Blue Jay saw this and said, "That's really cool and I've never seen anything like that before." Well he watched as Fishing Duck did it again. Flapped his wings, flew high in the air, dove under the water and caught another fish. And Blue Jay said, "That is so cool. I wish I could do something like that." Well Fishing Duck did it again. He flapped his wings, flew high up in the air, dove under the water and caught another fish. And Blue Jay got caught up in this and said, "I can do that, too. I have wings, I can fly up in the air." So Blue Jay flapped his little blue wings as fast as he could, he flew high up in the air, he dove down towards the river. But he'd never done this before. So, he missed the water completely and crashed into some big rocks by the side of the river, hitting his head on a big rock and knocking himself out. He fell into the water and he would have drowned, except someone heard that loud crash and came to investigate. It was Blue Jay's friend Bear. And Bear came and found Blue Jay laying in the water. He dragged him out of the water and said "Blue Jay, Blue Jay what happened?" Blue Jay moaned and said, "aahh, I cracked my head on the rocks." Bear said, "Blue Jay how did this happen?" Blue Jay said "Well I was trying to dive into the water like Fishing Duck. Only I cracked my head and I missed the water and now my head really hurts." Bear said "Blue Jay you have to be more careful about who you try to copy. I'm going to take you home Blue Jay and take care of you." So, Bear lifted up Blue Jay and carried him back to Bear's house. He laid him down by the fire, he put a blanket over him and even wrapped a bandage around his head. Bear said "Blue Jay, you rest here. I'll check on you later." A while later, Bear came back and said, "Blue Jay, how do you feel?" Blue Jay said "Aahh a little better but my head still hurts." Bear said, "Blue Jay are you hungry? Blue Jay said "Yah, yah I'm really hungry. What do we have to eat here?" Bear said, "Blue Jay it's the end of winter. I don't have much food left. Only a little bit of a dried fish. And you are welcome to it." So, Bear climbed to the rafters of his house and brought back some little bits of dried fish. And he said, "Here is your dried fish, Blue Jay. But I'm sorry to say I don't have any dipping grease. Now in the old days in every native house here, they would have different boxes, containers of grease...fish grease, seal grease, whale grease and they would take their dried food and they would dip it in the grease. It would make it easier

to chew and make it taste better." Well Bear was saying "I don't have any dipping grease." But then he said, "I have a power I can show you." Blue Jay said, "A power?" I wonder what kind of power Bear has. Well Bear went to another part of the house and got a big clam shell. He brought the clam shell back and he put it by the fire. He stood by the big clam shell, by the fire and he clapped his paws together four times. And then he put his paws over the fire. Now if you've ever seen a Bear's paw, they have pads of fat, fatty pads in the palm of their paws. Now after a while, the heat from that fire started to soften and then melt the fat in those pads, and grease started to drip, drip, drip right out of those bear's paws right into the clam's shell. And Blue Jay watched this, and said "Wow, that is a really cool power. I wish I could do something like that." He watched as that grease kept dripping out and into the clam shell. And Bear picked up the clam shell and said, "Here is your dipping grease, Blue Jay." And Blue Jay said, "That is so cool, that is so cool. That is such a cool power." So, he took a piece of the dried fish, he dipped it in to the grease. He took a bite. It was really good, so good. I wish I could.... wait a minute, I have feet. I can get a clam, uh, "Bear would you like some dipping grease for your dried fish?" Bear said, "Blue Jay what are you talking about?" Blue Jay said, "I have powers too you know." And Blue Jay went and got another clam shell and dragged it by the fire. He got a chair and sat by the fire, by the clam shell, and he put his feet over the fire. Now if you have ever seen a blue jays' feet, you know they don't have any fatty pads at all. And so, no grease was coming out of his feet. Nothing was dripping out. Instead his feet and his legs were starting to shrivel up in the heat, and he was screaming, "ow! ow! ow! Hold on Bear, hold on Bear. Ow! Ow! my feet hurt, and my legs hurt." And he looked at his feet and instead of grease coming out of his feet, there was smoke coming out of his feet. And then poof, his legs caught on fire and his feet caught on fire and he jumped up screaming "ow! ow! ow!" and he hopped out of the house and jumped into a stream nearby to put out the fire. And the proof of this story is, the next time you see a blue jay, look at his feet and legs. They are black. They look like burnt pieces of wood. That was about the time that Blue Jay tried to make grease in Bear's house. And that is all.