

Thabeeszus, an Eehnkhanzee Medicine Man

From an Interview with Rosa Campbell, Patuanak

Translated from Dene by Isidore Campbell, English River Reserve

You want me to tell a story about a medicine man - a little man named Thabeeszus. He lived with us many years ago. He was very very playful. He used humour as a front, a way to teach. The only time he would get serious or angry was when someone retaliated in a negative way.

There was a medicine woman at Stanley Mission, or someplace down the river. Her name was Egoowapee (which means a person sitting in a cradle board made out of moss). There were goods being hauled down river in the spring and back up river in the summer. It was during the spring trip down river that this medicine man decided to jump on board because he had heard about Egoowapee.

He had heard that this medicine woman was knowledgeable in medicine and that people feared or revered her. It was also known that because of this fear, people automatically gave her some of the goods from the York boat.

Thabeeszus was on the York boat on the return trip with the knowledge about the misdeeds of this medicine woman. The main reason he was on the boat was because he was very curious in comparing medicine powers. He had seen her on the down river trip. And he kept quiet and on the

return trip he was preparing himself for the confrontation.

She was bringing her tray down where people would put their gifts or offerings on. And this is where Thabeeszus began the confrontation. "You are not the only one that requires these goods; there are a lot more people that need this more than you!" "Because of that we are not giving you any goods today."

She held a medicine bundle in her hand as she replied, "You have been warned. Three times you will have a vision of my medicine. You will remember this on your travel back."

It was also known that this was a big body of water. When the boat left the community, a big wind suddenly erupted bringing great fear to the crew. Thabeeszus calmly dug in his pocket and took out his medicine bundle and he removed two fingers worth of powder and he blew it towards the storm. The wind died down immediately and the crew continued their way.

That evening he had pitched up his tent away from the main camp. Within this tent he had set up what looked like a mosquito net. He was sleeping underneath this net, and Thabeeszus was awakened and he saw this water monster approaching. Thabeeszus again reached into his bundle and blew the medicine towards this creature, and it disappeared.

The next day they arrived upon a camp that had a fire going. As he was seating himself on a log he found himself

being hurled through the air. He landed quite a distance away. He could not move. He told his fellow crew members to pitch up a sweat lodge. They pitched up a sweat lodge over top of him. After the sweat lodge was erected, people began to hear Thabeeszus talking in a very loud guttural language. Out of this noise people recognized his voice calling for a wolf to remove a porcupine quill stuck in his rectum. That was the reason why he could not move. The wolf could not remove it.

The wolverine was Thabeeszus's guardian spirit. The people outside the tent heard the wolverine approaching with its familiar sound - "Oogoh, Oogoh - he simply took out his medicine bundle and blew it towards the wolverine. At the end they heard a wolverine say, "Hey, let me give it a try!" Then everything went quiet, and shortly after Thabeeszus emerged from the sweat lodge proclaiming in a humorous way "Now, I really don't like Egoowapee!"

What had occurred was that a porcupine quill was put in his chest. He used his knowledge in the sweat lodge to move the quill through his system. It ended up in his rectum where he couldn't get it out. He called on the animal spirits to help him. The wolf tried but was unsuccessful, and so he asked the wolverine for his help. The wolverine with his powerful muscles was able to pull the quill out. He was telling the people as he pointed to his chest area, "where ever this woman put the medicine in me, I will send it back the same place." Back at her community as Egoowapee was mending her fishing net, people saw her being hurled a great distance.

The following season, Thabeeszus again was accompanying the crew. As they were stopping at the community, he inquired in feigned way about the old medicine woman, who used to bring her tray down. People told him that shortly after a boat crew had left last summer, she had passed away. In a humorous way Thabeeszus replied, "I never did like Egoowapee."

Later on as he was finishing his life, our people were living at Gravel Point on Ile a la Crosse Lake, and he began to eat sand. He told his people, "I am beginning to eat sand with my food. That is not a good sign." With that he jumped into the lake. Three days and three nights he was gone into the water. At the end of the third day people could see his head bobbing on the water as he was swimming back. He had cleansed himself. He continued to live amongst the people in his very humorous approach.

Because he had eaten his meal with sand, eventually he would turn to sand himself. When he died ten people could not lift him. And this is where they buried him where he fell.