

Trackless Paths
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Joshua Chiang



For my nephew Javier



Acknowledgments

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And last but not least, my parents who can always be counted on to be there when needed.

Introduction

Native Americans believe that every person is connected with several animals acting as his or her spirit guides. These animal spirits often appear in one's life in the form of dreams or other representations, such as in paintings or figurines. With only a superficial understanding of the spiritual tradition of the Native Americans, it would be presumptuous of me to claim any supernatural influences by totem animals in the making of this book, however tempting it may be. But without doubt, the idea for this series of illustrations that pair anthropomorphic animals with wisdom sayings could not have arisen were it not for the love of animals acting as a guiding force for much of my life.

The affinity for animals began at a very young age. My earliest memories were of my first trip to the zoo when I was three. By the time I started going to school, my shelves were already filled with many books about nature and animals; I would pore through page after page marvelling at the colourful pictures, trying to remember all the names of the animals in those books. David Attenborough and Gerald Durrell were my childhood heroes. When I

reached my teens, the mangrove forest near my home became my stomping ground during the twice-yearly migration period of shorebirds.

This fascination for animals is probably matched by an equal interest in giving them human characteristics and attributes; and likewise, I blame books. The exploits of Peter Rabbit, Mr Toad, Kancil the mousedeer, Sun Wukong, etc, occupied many lazy afternoons and school holidays. Many of the characters you find within these pages had been living inside my head for a long time, just waiting for the right moment to manifest. I had always believed that the moment would be in the form of stories, be it in book form, or in animation. Little did I suspect that spiritual personas from Jesus, to the Buddha to Confucius would eventually come to play a part.

My spiritual inclination arrived when I was well into adulthood. It wasn't a gradual awakening to the God-shaped hole in the heart which the likes of people like C S Lewis experienced, but an unexpected plunge into despair and self-doubt – the proverbial dark night of the soul. What began as a search for a meaning to that chapter gradually became an interest in the Truth and all its infinite incarnations. It became a journey to discover who, or what is God, YHWH, Allah, Buddha-nature, Tao, Shiva, etc, a journey that I suspect, will last a lifetime, and beyond.

This book thus represents a convergence of all these various passions. Every artist hopes to share parts of himself or herself in the works they produce; likewise, the illustrations within these pages are no exception. But I hope to do more than that.

The sayings which inspired the illustrations in this book come from a diverse range of spiritual (and the occasional non-spiritual) sources from different cultures and time periods, covering themes from love, to courage, to coping with grief, and are chosen for their ability to inspire, heal and challenge. The diversity is intentional; Wisdom and Truth are not confined to any creed or denomination and there is always beauty in every spiritual tradition. It is this universal beauty that I hope to share.

I am convinced that there are few pleasures greater than being able to contribute to your fellow humans in a positive way. If you have enjoyed the illustrations or the accompanying notes, if you have been moved by the selected sayings, if this book has uplifted you in any way, that would be reward enough.



January 2013

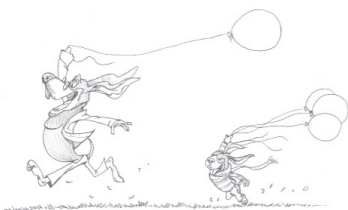


This was the illustration that started it all. I designed the elephant monk for an animated movie concept. In the story, the elephant, named “Muzou” (meaning no elephant) is a mentor to the hero. Bodhidharma, the monk who started the Zen school of Buddhism in China, was a major influence on Muzou’s look. For this illustration, I wanted to convey the sense of an enlightened being unladen by any emotional baggage, and so Muzou literally walks on air. The raccoon-dog pilgrim represents the spiritual journeyman who tries to faithfully follow the Buddha’s path every step of the way but is left bewildered, for he fails to understand that every person’s journey to Enlightenment is a different one.

“The path of the enlightened one leaves no track —
it is like the path of birds in the sky.”

– Buddha





One of the hardest things for us to do as adults is to completely forget ourselves and surrender to the moment. For this piece, I wanted to express that feeling of uninhibited exuberance and genuine enjoyment, and at the same time convey that child-like innocence found in Lennon's drawings. The result is one of my favourite illustrations in this entire collection.

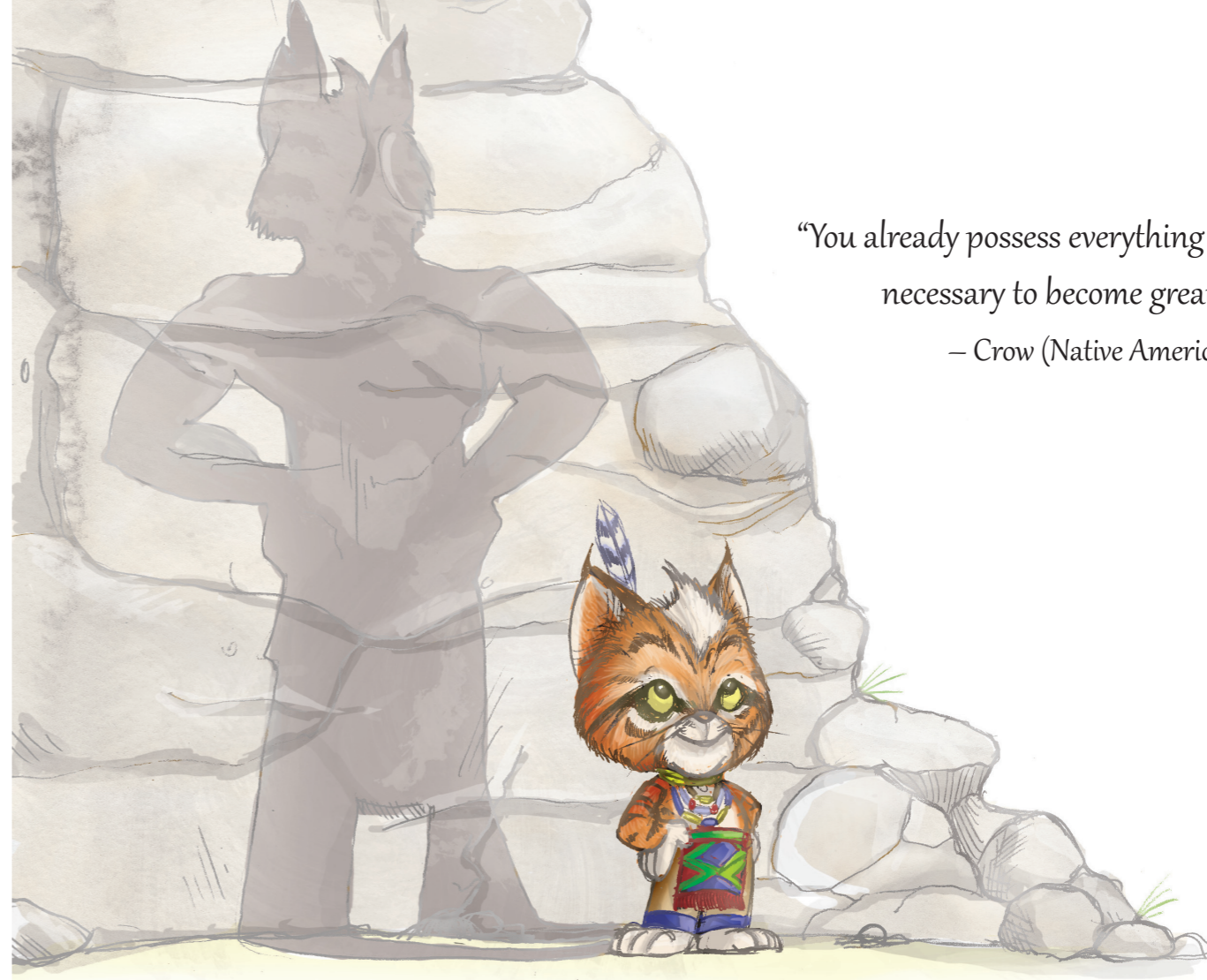


“Time you enjoy wasting, was not wasted.”

– John Lennon



My favorite stories are those where the protagonist starts out as an ordinary person, but is eventually driven by a purpose so strong that he will endure whatever hardships to achieve his goal. Not everyone is gifted with extraordinary talents, but I believe everyone possesses inner strength and determination — the most important ingredients for greatness.



*“You already possess everything
necessary to become great.”*

– Crow (Native American) proverb



Here we once again have the use of the wolf and sheep to show the connection to Mother Teresa's Christian faith, and that Love can unite even the worst enemies. This time however, I portrayed the wolf and sheep as children — a reminder that non-discriminatory love is the natural state we are born into, but have largely forgotten as we grow into adulthood. Hate is something that is taught, but we can all unlearn that by remembering what we are created for.



*“We all have been created for the sole purpose
to love and be loved.”*

—Mother Teresa

Afterwords

The illustrations to this book were originally conceived as inspirational cards. It is thanks to my publisher that you are now holding this collection in book form. Nonetheless, the original intent remains, and the individual illustrations are available in postcard or greeting-card format at www.tracklesspaths.com. We hope to add more to this collection over time, so do visit the website periodically.

About Joshua Chiang

Joshua Chiang is a self-taught illustrator/writer/director. He is the illustrator for several print books and ebooks such as *Monsters On The Wall*, *Javier's Day*, *The Chronicles of Oujo* series (which he also conceptualized) and *Hae: The Cat With a Crooked Tail*. In 2003, he co-wrote and co-directed the digital feature film *S11*, which has been screened at various international film festivals such as the 9th Shanghai International Film Festival. He has also written for animated series such as *Nanoboy*, *Master Raindrop* and *Zigby*. He is now developing original concepts for animation and books through his company Cerealbox Studios. For more information about Joshua Chiang and Cerealbox Studios, visit www.cerealboxstudios.com