

How Turtle Got His Long Neck (Tuscarora)

Long ago, Turtle had a short neck. Still, even though it was short, he was always stretching it as far as he could so that he could hear what the other animals were doing.

Everyone said that Turtle was very wise. It was true that he could use his wits, as he did once when he won a race against Bear. However, Turtle was not as wise as he thought. In fact, Turtle was vain.

One day, Turtle heard something in a pine tree which grew near his pond. He crawled over to look. There, high in the tree, were some birds. They seemed to be eating something.

"You up there," Turtle called, "what are you doing in my tree?"

The birds stopped what they were doing and flew down to Turtle. "Don't you know?" the birds said. "We are eating the seeds in the pine cones. They are the best food in the world."

"Of course I know that," Turtle said; then he crawled back to his pond.

Soon after that, Turtle heard something in the tree again. He crawled over to look. There, high up in the tree, were some squirrels.

"You up there," Turtle called, "what are you doing in my tree?"

The squirrels climbed down the tree to where Turtle waited. "Don't you know?" the squirrels said. "We are eating the seeds in the pine cones. Don't you ever climb up and eat them? They're the best food in the world."

"Of course I know that," Turtle said. "I often climb up that tree. But I'm just not hungry right now. You go ahead and eat all you want. I'll climb up and get some later." Then Turtle crawled back to his pond, but he was not feeling happy.

It was not long before Turtle heard someone else up in his pine tree. He crawled out to look and saw a little bear high up in the tree, eating his pine seeds!

"You up there," Turtle called, "why are you eating all my food?"

The bear cub climbed down to where Turtle waited. "There's plenty to eat up there, Turtle," he said. "Would you like me to bring some down to you?"

"No," Turtle said. "I am a great climber and I can gather my own food."

"Are you sure?" said the little bear.

"Of course," Turtle said, taking a deep breath. "I

will climb up right now and get some of those seeds." Then Turtle crawled to the base of the tree and tried to climb up. He clawed and scratched at the tree but was only able to pull himself up a little way. Then he fell over, right onto his back with his feet swimming in the air. The little bear came and turned Turtle back onto his feet.

"You are not very good at climbing, Turtle," the little bear said.

"I am a great climber!" Turtle said. "I am only practicing." Then Turtle went back to the tree. He scraped and clawed and scratched, but he was not able to get up. No matter how many times he tried, he slid right back down again. The little bear watched without saying a word.

It seemed as if Turtle would have to swallow his pride. However, all of his scratching at the trunk of the tree made something happen. The tree began to ooze out sticky pine sap. Turtle saw how sticky that sap was and he got an idea.

"Now," Turtle said, "I have done my exercise. Now I am going to climb up and get my pine seeds." He covered his feet into the sticky pine sap. Then, just like a fly climbing up the wall of a lodge, he began to go up the tree. Step by slow step he went up and up until he was at the very top. At the bottom of the tree, the little bear watched and shook his head.

There, at the tip of the tree, at the end of a slender branch, was a big pine cone. It was just beyond Turtle's reach. He walked out onto the branch, but he still could not reach it. He leaned out further and

further, trying to grasp it in his mouth. Just as he grabbed it, his feet slid off the branch and he began to fall. Down he went, head first!

Fortunately for Turtle, he landed in the soft mud at the edge of the pond. However, he landed nose first! He hit the mud so hard that his head was buried. When he tried to pull himself out, he was stuck. He pulled and pulled, but he could not get loose.

The little bear was watching and he took pity on Turtle. He grabbed on to Turtle's tail and began to pull. Turtle's neck stretched out longer and longer and then—POP!—he was free. But Turtle's neck was now three times as long as it had been before and all Turtles are like that today.

Turtle is always pulling his head into his shell because he is ashamed of having made such a fool of himself way back then. However, whenever Turtle hears something or becomes curious, he sticks that long neck of his way out of his shell. And to this day, Turtles do not eat pine seeds.