

"The Uncle Tales" is as collection of short stories to help children consider some of Life's most difficult questions on freedom, choice, death, forgiveness, and Nature. Beautifully illustrated with five mandalas.

**The Uncle Tales:
Wisdom Stories for Children of All Ages**

By Lin Butler

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A Parable About a Tree

One lazy summer day, when the sky was blue, the sun warm, and the air seemed to hang heavy in the branches of the trees, the children of the village were gathered in their favorite shady spot. Their chores were done, it was too hot to play, and they were growing bored.

Just then Uncle came by on his way down to the river and he saw the children sitting around. He overheard their complaints about “nothing to do” and being “stuck in this place,” “this village is so boring.” So Uncle stopped and asked if they would like to hear a story about a tree who, like them, also felt stuck where he was in the forest. Quickly they all agreed, and Uncle began:

Once there was a young tree growing deep in the forest. Unlike other trees his age, he was bored and restless. He didn't want to be like all these other trees around him. “I want to be free, to move around, to not be stuck in the ground.”

Seeking help, the young tree prayed to the Great Spirit, “Please, Great Spirit, let me be different. I don't want to be like all these other trees. Let me be free.” The Great Spirit heard the young tree's prayer and changed him into...a bird. The bird spread his new wings and flew high up into the sky. He flew around all day long, above the lakes and the big river; over fields and meadows he flew. As the sun set in the western sky, the bird became very hungry. He found some berry bushes and ate and ate until his belly was full of delicious fruit. The adventurous bird continued his high flying and

exploring for days, feasting on the fruits and berries he found in the woods and meadows.

But one day, as the nights grew long and the winds turned cold, he noticed the berries were not as plentiful; he became worried that there would not be enough to eat. And he thought to himself, I want to be a farmer, like the ones I saw down below, then I could raise all my own fruits and berries. "Please, Great Spirit, make me a farmer so I can grow my own food."

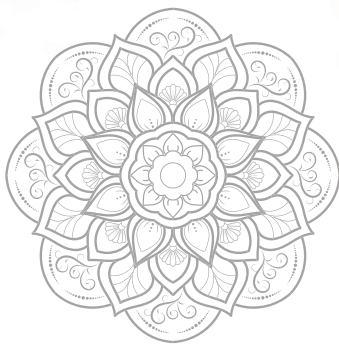
And when he opened his eyes, he was...a farmer. The farmer worked very hard. Each day he tilled the soil, pulled the weeds, and watched over his fruits and berries and vegetables. He would never have to worry about being hungry again. He now had plenty to eat. He was thankful to the Great Spirit for hearing his prayer. But all this work, day after day after day, made him very weary; he was so tired at the end of every day. To find rest, the farmer went to a nearby church. There he found a peace and calm he had never known before.

The farmer prayed to the Great Spirit, "What should I do?" And as he prayed, he listened to his heart, and looked back on his life, and an answer came to him: "I will go and become a monk, so I can offer prayers of gratitude all day long for whatever I receive." He went out and found a monastery in a forest nearby. There he learned to pray each day, morning and night, and to work in the garden and kitchen doing all the chores needed to help one other as a community. He gave thanks in his prayers for the quiet, calm of the forest, for the lakes and rivers, the mountains and the sun and sky. He gave thanks for the hard work of gardening and cooking, and for the blessings of a community with food and songs and prayers, the way they shared and cared for one another.

The monk was grateful for the food from the fields and gardens that sustained him; grateful for his travels and adventures; grateful for his roots that went deep into the soil and soul of Mother Earth; grateful for all of his brothers and sisters surrounding him in the forest.

And by the end of the story the children had many questions and were wondering, "What do I want to be when I grow up?", "Will I be stuck in this village forever?", "Do I want to get out of this village?"

Uncle smiled to himself as he listened to their wonderings.

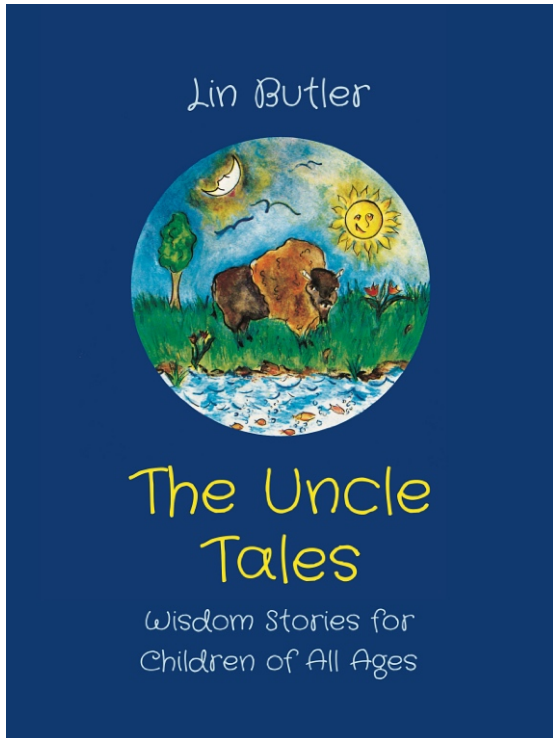


About the Author and the Illustrator

Lin Butler is a father and grandfather who wanted his children and grandchildren to know some of his thoughts and reflections on the world we share. If other readers reflect on these words, and then share them with other children, it will be time well-spent for all of us. Lin has been a community organizer, social worker, counselor, instructor, manager, and chaplain over the years. He has learned to appreciate deep listening in the words of others, the sights and sounds of nature, and the telling of a good story.

Leigh Partington is a freelance artist/instructor with over 30 years' experience teaching mixed media workshops for children, young adults and persons with special needs. She also does ceramic hand-building in her studio, "Playin' In the Mud". Leigh believes it is important for people of all ages and abilities to express themselves visually. Everyone has an artist within—imagination is their only limit.

The author wishes to thank Mary Logue, reader, editor, guide and Friend who encouraged more stories beyond these five; perhaps when the Muse strikes, the Spirit speaks, and the Inspiration is there...



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