

***BESHKNO***  
**THE TRAIL OF DEATH**  
by  
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This is the story of a Potawatomi Native American Indian boy. Potawatomi means ‘Fire Keepers’. His name was Beshkno, which in English means Bald Eagle.

As a boy, he grew up in the northern part of the state of Indiana. His family lived along the shores of a two beautiful lakes called Twin Lakes. The lake provided fish and good hunting. The land was rich and the forests were thick. It was good place to live.

He loved to go fishing with his father. His father’s name was Wis-ki-gete, which means Rising Smoke. They would go into the forest to hunt for deer. It would take many days to find and kill a deer. It took a lot of patience, but the time with his father was very special to him. His father would tell him stories of when he was a young boy. It had been a time of war and many of the people in his tribe had been killed.

He told about how their tribe had fought with the British in the War of 1812. The British promised that our tribe could keep the land. The English lost the war so the white government of the United States was not friendly toward us. They had not forgotten that our tribe had fought in the war against them.

The land was very important to them. Many white people came and built houses. They wanted the land to use for farming. The white man cut down trees in the forest to make their farms larger.

The Potawatomi did not like this and it caused many arguments with these new people. The settlers were making the forests smaller and it was harder to find food.

The government was beginning to make plans to move the Indians from their land. The white government passed a new law, which gave the settlers the power to take the land from us and their build farms.

These laws and actions by the settlers caused many problems and many people were hurt. There was talk of war on both sides, but the chiefs of the tribe realized that war was not something they could win. There were too many white soldiers.

This is the story of those people and the journey away from their homeland. The year was 1838.

### **This is Beshkno's story.**

My father worked hard all of his life. He was an honest man who could be trusted when he made an agreement; just like our chiefs. Unfortunately, the white man never kept his promises. Our tribe had signed many papers that said that we would be safe. We gave land to the white men and traded with them, but they always wanted more. If we disagreed, they would threaten us with the soldiers. Many people in our tribe became angry and wanted our chief not to make more agreements with the white man and his government.

There was one white man who was kind and generous. His name was Father Benjamin Marie Petit. He tried to talk to the soldiers and he tried to help us, but they did not listen to him. Most of us were Catholic and Father Petit treated us very well.

We had many arguments with the settlers. We were willing to share and live in peace, but we were always asked to give up more.

The leaders of our tribe agreed to sell the land, and in exchange, they were given land in a far off place.

The treaty said the government would pay the Potawatomi money to us over a twenty-year period. We were to receive horses, farming equipment and they were even supposed to build a mill for grinding grain where we were to live.

This treaty's name was the 'Treaty with the Potawatomi, 1832'. On October 26, 1832, it was signed.

They agreed to move to Kansas and start a new life there. Some of the chiefs and the people who were in other tribal groups left Indiana and went to Kansas to start a new life. They decided that it was better to live in peace.

Our chief, Menominee, decided we would not go. He wanted our tribe to stay on our land. We were to leave by August 5, 1838, but our leaders refused.

One that day, the soldiers came. They told us that we had to leave our land.

Because we refused to leave, the soldiers came and burned our houses, and our crops. They kept us from rebuilding what they had destroyed. Finally, we had to move. We had no choice. The soldiers came and took us away. They put Chief Menominee, Chief Black Wolf, and Chief Pepinawa, as well as the other leaders, into a wagon with iron bars

Some of our people ran and hid in the church. Father Petit did what he could to protect them, but the soldiers came and took them as well.

Eight hundred fifty-nine of us left for Kansas, one thousand sixty kilometers away.

Each day we traveled about twenty-five kilometers, depending on the road and the weather. Every day when we stopped for the night, we buried our dead. The trip was difficult, especially for the young and the old.

We traveled along a road called 'The Michigan Road'. We walked through many towns along the way. When we entered these towns, the people lined up on the side of the road and stare at us as we walked down the main street into their town. It was like a parade, only there was no music and no cheering. Mostly the people stood quietly and watched us.

After a week of continuous travel, we stopped for three days and rested. Father Petit and Bishop Brute came and held mass for us. They helped the sick and got a doctor to come and give us much needed medicine. The doctor estimated that over three hundred of us were already ill.

Even though many of us were weak and sick, they forced us to leave and continue our journey. Some of the members of our tribe were too sick to travel and had to stay at the camp. Some of them would join us later, many of them died. Father Petit stayed behind to care for the sick.

When we got to the Illinois River, they allowed us to wash our clothes and bathe. The cool water of the river felt good. It was also nice to have clean clothes to wear. The doctor became ill with the fever and he had to stay at the hospital in the St. Louis.

We took a ferry across the river. It took several hours for all of us to get to the other side.

When we got to Illinois, Father Petit joined us and never left again. He helped to take care of the sick and baptized many as they died. Children were born on the trip, but few survived the hot sun and dusty roads.

When we got to Springfield, the capitol of Illinois, the soldiers promised to give the men tobacco if the tribe was clean and presentable when we went through the city. The soldiers wanted to impress the governor and the leaders of the state. Chief Ioway helped to make sure we all looked good.

When we entered Springfield, the city streets were full of people who were curious about who we were and what we looked like.

As we went through the city, at the very front of the line was a soldier with the United States flag. Behind him came the wagon with metal bars that held our chiefs so they would not escape, followed by horses, smaller wagons and people walking. The line of our people stretched along the road. We walked quietly through the city just as curious of them as they were of us.

If some were walking too slowly, the soldiers would yell at him or her. It was the same day after day. The soldiers were always there to make us go faster. They wanted to finish this journey so they could return to their homes.

For me, the trip was long. During the day we could not speak. We could only spend time with our family at night when we were supposed to be sleeping. It allowed us

time to talk and find out how the others were doing.

We would sleep on the ground or if we were lucky, under a wagon. The cold autumn nights made sleeping difficult. After the sun came up, the day would get hot and we would get very thirsty. Each day they gave us a very small amount of food and water. Many times my father shared his food with the others in our family. They were becoming very weak.

We stopped in the town of Quincy Illinois to prepare to cross the Mississippi River. This was time for us to relax a little. We were able to clean our clothes and bathe in the river again.

Father Petit held mass for us in St. Boniface Catholic Church there.

We crossed the Mississippi River on a steam ship.

After that, the soldiers allowed us to rest on Sundays and attend mass with Father Petit.

My mother's name was, Wapati that means Antelope. She was not well. Three weeks after we left Illinois, she got the fever. My little brother Sugnog, which means Blackbird died, when we reached Missouri. My mother died three days after my brother. We buried them in shallow unmarked graves along the path to Kansas far from each other. I was never able to go back to visit where they had died.

My older sister Nikan, which means My Friend, took care of me most of the time after that.

Some of the young men were able to escape during the night. We never saw them again. We found out that some of them went to Michigan, while others went to Canada where they would be safe. My father wanted to join them, but he had to take care of our family.

Sometimes, during the day, my father and a few others went to hunt for food. My father was an excellent hunter and he always brought food. The soldiers would eat the best meat and then give the rest to us to divide among all of our tribe. At least we had some fresh food.

The farther we got from our home the harder it was to find food. The land was so different from our homeland. The open grassland stretched farther than the eye could see. There were few trees and many rocks. The road was dusty and made us cough.

Father Petit stayed with us for the whole trip even though he was sick.

On November 4, 1838, we arrived at the reservation where we were to live. The land there was very different from our home in Indiana.

We had lost many people on the road to Kansas. We started with eight hundred fifty-nine and when we arrived, we were less than seven hundred fifty.

There was no lake in which to fish. There was no forest to hunt for deer. The ground was covered with grass. There were only a few trees. We could see only open grassland.

Our lives here were much different from before. We had to learn how to live in this place. Some of our tribe had arrived in Kansas on their own before us. They helped us to learn how to live and hunt. Other tribes of Indians who lived there before our arrival also helped us to learn how to survive.

After we arrived and settled into our new home, Father Petit left our reservation and went to a hospital in St. Louis where he died of the fever. I will always remember him for his love and care of my people.



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**VOCABULARY:** (*Match the word to its definition*)

- |                   |                           |
|-------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. share _____    | a. pioneers, newcomers    |
| 2. tribe _____    | b. warn, intimidate       |
| 3. settlers _____ | c. place to grind grain   |
| 4. journey _____  | d. give some to others    |
| 5. threaten _____ | e. Plant used for smoking |
| 6. treaty _____   | f. church service         |
| 7. mill _____     | g. split, separate        |
| 8. tobacco _____  | h. clan, family           |
| 9. divide _____   | i. agreement, pact        |
| 10. mass _____    | j. long trip              |

**TRUE / FALSE:**

- |  |       |
|--|-------|
| 1. Beshkno means Bald Eagle in Patawatomi.     | T / F |
| 2. The tribe lived near Clear Lake.            | T / F |
| 3. Beshkno went fishing with his father.       | T / F |
| 4. The tribe was part of the Patawatomi tribe. | T / F |
| 5. The settlers were friendly.                 | T / F |
| 6. Beshkno's mother died.                      | T / F |
| 7. The soldiers hunted for food.               | T / F |
| 8. The tribe crossed the Missouri River.       | T / F |
| 9. Many in the tribe got sick and died.        | T / F |
| 10. Their new land was in Indiana.             | T / F |

**MULTIPLE CHOICE:**

1. What state did the tribe live in before being moved? \_\_\_\_
  - a) Illinois
  - b) Michigan
  - c) Missouri
  - d) Indiana
  
2. Who went along on the trip and held mass for them? \_\_\_\_
  - a) Father Petro
  - b) Bishop Brute
  - c) Father Petit
  - d) Father Time
  
3. What were the lakes called where Beshkno grew up? \_\_\_\_
  - a) Lake Michigan
  - b) Twin Lakes
  - c) Clear Lakes
  - d) Chain Lakes
  
4. What does Beshkno mean in Patawatomí? \_\_\_\_
  - a) Bald Eagle
  - b) Running Deer
  - c) Rising Smoke
  - d) Falling Snow



**COMPREHENSION:** (*Write a complete sentence to answer the question.*)

1. Why did the Patawatomis have to move from Indiana?

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2. Where did some of the Patawatomis hide when the soldiers came?

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3. At what city did they get cleaned up before they went through?

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4. What was the name of the big river they crossed to go into Missouri?

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5. Where were the chiefs put for the journey?

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6. What did some of the young men do at night?

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7. Where did the young men who escaped go?

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8. What was the name of the road the Patawatomis traveled on?

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9. How many people left Indiana?

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10. How many arrived at the end of the journey in Kansas?

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