

Fables From a Long-Ago Volcano



Animal Stories for the
Rocky Butte Neighbors



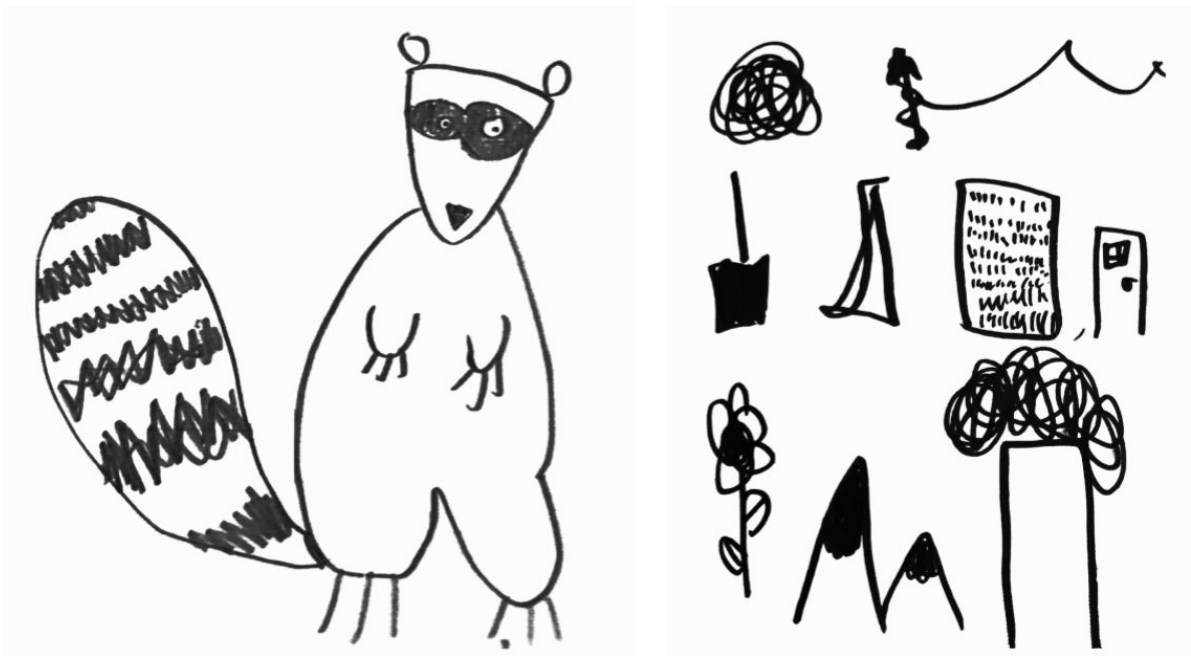
Written by Levi Rogers Art by Clementine Kostouser

How the Raccoon Got His Mask

Raccoon loved living in the forest for many reasons—the tall trees, the dappling light through the leaves. But perhaps his favorite thing was the food. He loved eating! Raccoon was an omnivore who ate both meat and plants, and he ate anything he could get his tiny paws on. This included acorns, small fish, fruit, vegetables, birds, eggs, even frogs!

However, other animals like Coyote were often faster than Raccoon and got the first choice of any delicacy in the forest. Squirrel and Crow were also quick and always got the ripest acorns, corn, plums, and persimmons. Over the years, this grew to annoy Raccoon, who didn't like simply scavenging the leftovers of whatever Coyote or Squirrel didn't want to eat. Just once Raccoon wanted something to himself and didn't want to share with the others.

So one night—the night of his birthday—Raccoon decided he was due for a treat. He fashioned a black mask out of some tree bark to cover his eyes and tied it around the back of his head. In this way, he was able to sneak up on many small animals that night and travel through the darkness without being seen. Raccoon helped himself to the best fruits and nuts in the forest. He even startled Coyote! This made Raccoon feel bold and powerful.

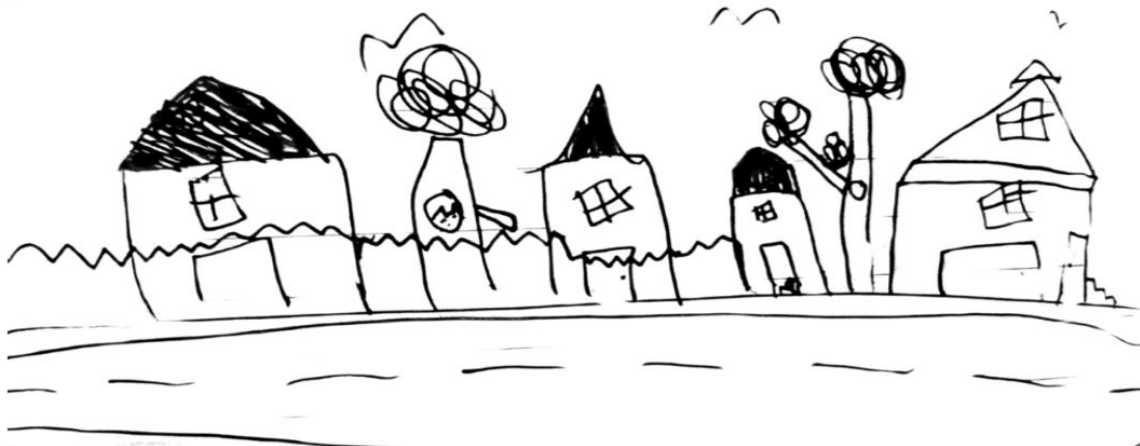


When Raccoon went back to his tree in the morning he fell asleep, fat and happy. When he woke up that afternoon however, he found that the mask had rubbed into his fur and wouldn't come off. He went down to the stream to use water to scrub the black out of his thick grey fur, but nothing worked. At night, from the moon's reflection in the water, he could still see black rings around his eyes. If the other animals saw him in the daylight they would make fun of him. Raccoon wondered if he was now cursed to wear the mask for the rest of life.

When the humans arrived in the forest one day, they cleared many trees, but they also brought yummy leftovers and dried food for their pet horses and dogs. Raccoon then began to spend more time in the human world than the animal world. Raccoon found much success in the human world because he could open things with his five fingers other animals couldn't, such as plastic containers and trash cans. In this way Raccoon was able to taste food other animals could only dream of. Cookies! Cakes! Pizza! Peanut butter!

It wasn't an easy life—sometimes the dogs chased him and sometimes the humans called him funny names he didn't understand, like trash panda. Sometimes his tummy hurt from eating food not meant for him. Still, sometimes the people smiled at him and called him cute.

The other animals grew to respect Raccoon for the way he walked in the world of humans. You can still see Raccoon in our neighborhood today. Climbing down from their home in the trees of in Rocky Butte and pacing the streets and sidewalks of the houses below.



Coyote Family Moves to the Golf Course

Father and Mother Coyote had two pups—Klickitat and Siskiyou. Their little family lived on Rocky Butte, underneath some chestnut trees and blackberry brambles. If you listen closely in the fall, you can hear their yips at night. Father Coyote looked beautiful. He wore a coat of reddish, brown, golden fur and would have made an enticing coat for the trappers of yesteryear. Mother coyote was greyer, slimmer. Taking care of two coyote pups made her tired and malnourished.

Together, the coyote family walked the avenues of the city at night or early in the morning, hunting. (Coyotes are nocturnal, just like owls and cats and bats.) When the coyotes paced the streets it was the only time the squirrels would hide. Sometimes human parents who stayed up too late could see them trotting down the street, chasing cats and rats.

One day, as they were walking, Klickitat found a quite peculiar object. It was made of something like animal hide and tough, but also round and quite chewable. It smelled like children's feet and the mouths of the humans' dogs. It was fun to hold and to let roll away and chase. Do you have any idea what the young coyote found?

Klickitat could not see certain colors, so he could not see the pentagonal pattern of red and black that surrounded its globe. Both Coyotes and dogs have dichromatic vision, which means they can see colors like yellow and blue well, but not green and red.

Father coyote refused to keep anything from the human world in their den and so Klickitat had to leave his ball outside and he was quite sad about it. His father took the toy away from him and threw it on the road, where one of the humans collected it. In his den, all Klickitat had to play with was an oval shaped rock that looked like a potato. His sister, Siskiyou, knew how sad this made him, and so she gave him her favorite stick to chew on. Still, it wasn't the same as that patterned ball.



One early morning, on the way home from a hunt, Klickitat saw a huge field of people and a bag full of those same toys he loved to play with. He took off, determined to grab another ball, the rest of his family, watched in awe, and then fled. When the humans saw Klickitat coming they began to yell and shout. Mothers grabbed their young and held them close. This confused Klickitat. I am not here for your children, he thought. I just want one of your toys!

Klickitat began to sneak off and steal soccer balls from the neighborhood children. He just couldn't help himself. Yet he was also putting his family at risk of discovery by the humans. Father Coyote decided they would move and he found a nice den by the golf course down the hill. There, Klickitat could watch the golfers hit their balls and run around at night with his other ball without being seen.

Just like Rocky Butte, no one was there at night, but in the day, while the coyotes slept, the humans would return. The clink of metal clubs on golf balls often was the first sign for them to crawl back in their den. Then they'd hear the humans buzzing around in their little machines, though they didn't know what they were called. Do you? And this is how the coyotes moved to the Rose City Golf Course. And if you're ever missing a soccer ball, you might first try looking in the forest below Glenhaven Park and the golf course, where they say there are many lost soccer balls.



Eagle vs. Crow

The crows had taken over Portland. As if the sky wasn't grey enough, now there were huge crowds of crows cawing loudly in the day. The jet-black birds sat perched over downtown buildings and numerous Douglas Firs, over freeway exits and tree-filled parks. These urban crows scavenged all manner of trash and persimmons and carrion (dead animals). They cawed loudly in the day as the humans left their homes. The crow was quickly becoming the cities unofficial animal logo.

All this greatly annoyed Bald Eagle. While once Bald Eagle had been the King of the Northwest, he found his territory greatly encroached by humans and crows (just like the old, and now almost-extinct Beaver). Both Beaver (part of the Oregon State flag) and Eagle (part of the U.S. flag) had once dominated the landscape and now they were few in numbers. And although Eagle could fly higher and faster than Crow, the crows often circled him as he bore down for a bite to eat or a tree to roost in. The crows would fight Eagle along with Seagull and even Owl and Hawk for food. The crows were very smart. They could even remember faces and were said to hold grudges against the humans and other animals who were mean to them. So be careful next time you yell at a crow!

One day, Eagle flew to Rocky Butte, where he asked the help of two Red-Tail Hawks and one Horned Screech Owl.

"How do we get rid of these crows?" Eagle asked. "They make it impossible for us to live!"

"Why do you ask us," asked the Hawks, "we are just two."

"Why do you ask me?" said Owl. "I am just one."

"Exactly!" said Eagle, "These groups of crows are too many. They are even more numerous than the squirrels."

"A group of crows is actually called a *murder of crows*," said the Owl, nodding as if the word alone proved his point.

"I've heard Crows hate shiny objects and so I have seen some humans hang shiny pieces of metal that flash and reflect the sun," said Eagle. "Perhaps we can collect such shiny objects and spread them around the neighborhood?"

"Maybe we can have the humans help us?" said one of the Hawks.

"The humans have very mixed opinions about the crows," said Owl, "Some humans feed them. Others shoot firecrackers at them."

"Or perhaps we should ask the help of the geese?" said the other Hawks. "They are as numerous and much bigger than the crows. Yet because they live on the ground and not in the trees, they are not bothered by the crows."

So Eagle and friends tried everything they could to get rid of the pesky and numerous murders of crows. They hung shiny objects between trees, they had the geese do flyovers. Nothing worked.

One day Eagle came to a realization. There would be no getting rid of the crows. He would have to live with them. Such was life in a big forest. Sometimes you had to find ways of getting along with people you didn't get along with. Yet not all was lost, for days of solitude, Eagle would fly to the Columbia River Gorge, and all the way to the tops of Mount Hood, but when he felt lonely, he would fly back to Rocky Butte, and say hi to the Owl and the Hawks, and Geese. He even took pity on the crows. He realized how big and scary he must appear to them, which in turn, only made the crows fight harder. He began to understand them, in his own way, even becoming jealous of them. For Eagle was a solitary creature and the crows were multitudes. Now, if you see an Eagle fighting the crows, you can see them both smiling.

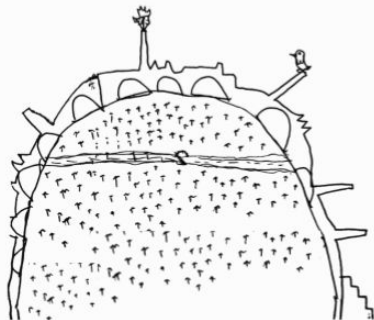




Levi Rogers is a writer from the Mountain West who now lives in the land of the Multnomah and Clackamas people. He is the author of the novel *Utah! A Novel*, and the poetry chapbook, *The Children Are My Gods Now*. He is working on a new novel about the Cascadia earthquake. Levi and his wife Cat have lived in the Roseway neighborhood since 2019 and have two daughters that attend Lee Elementary, right next to Rocky Butte! He enjoys climbing the volcano giants of the PNW when he has time.



Clementine Kostouser is a local artist who in the second grade at Sunrise Elementary School (formerly known as Jason Lee). Her work is inspired by first hand observations of the wildlife in her neighborhood as she regularly sees raptors, racoons and coyotes while traversing Rocky Butte with her family and friends. Her media is a mix of pencil, pen and ink on paper with a style combination of line and gesture drawings.



Rocky Butte is a 612-foot-high extinct cinder cone volcano in Portland, Oregon one of many buttes in the Boring Lava Field. The crown of the butte, Joseph Wood Hill Park, offers a panoramic view of the city, rivers and gorge over a tree canopy of bigleaf maple and Douglas-fir. The butte is known by many for its basalt masonry and wildlife, but also as a landmark, which has both physically and metaphorically elevated the the individuals who have been there.



Keep an eye out for Raccoon, Coyote, Eagle and friends.

You can walk, hike, cycle or drive up Rocky Butte.

Please don't use poison on rodents, this hurts our local wildlife food chain.

Say Hi to your neighbors and tell them about the animals of Rocky Butte!



The Rocky Butte Preservation Society is a 501(c)(3) working to maintain and establish public access to the unique historical, geological and ecological features of Rocky Butte. The Friends of Rocky Butte is a 501(c)(3) Friends of Rocky Butte seeks greater trail and climbing access and to improve safety and ecological diversity in the natural areas of Rocky Butte. We are a coalition neighbors, hikers, rock climbers, and mountain bikers.