



## BEARS! TIMES THREE!

“—Orange gummy bear!” shrieked Sierra. I jerked awake to find not a bear but Sie, my best friend, plucking a sticky orange gummy snack out of my hair. “Hold still. There!” she said, placing it in a napkin. “It was camouflaged in your hair.”

My heart was still pounding from my dream. I don’t know how long I’d slept, but the humming of the van’s tires meant we were still on the road.

“Thanks.” I felt my cheek, the one that had been pressed against the hot window, and pulled off another warm sticky gummy snack. This one was lime green and covered in fuzz.

“Tierra!” I groaned. Tierra, or “T” my other best friend and Sie’s



twin, was always hungry and always snacking. “Your gummy zoo fruit snacks are all over me!”

“Yeah, they kinda flew all over the place when I opened the package. Sorry. I thought I got ‘em all,” T said, shrugging. She was fixing her ponytails when she spied a less hairy, red snack on my shoulder and squealed. “Cherry camel! I was looking for you, mister.” She popped it into her mouth.

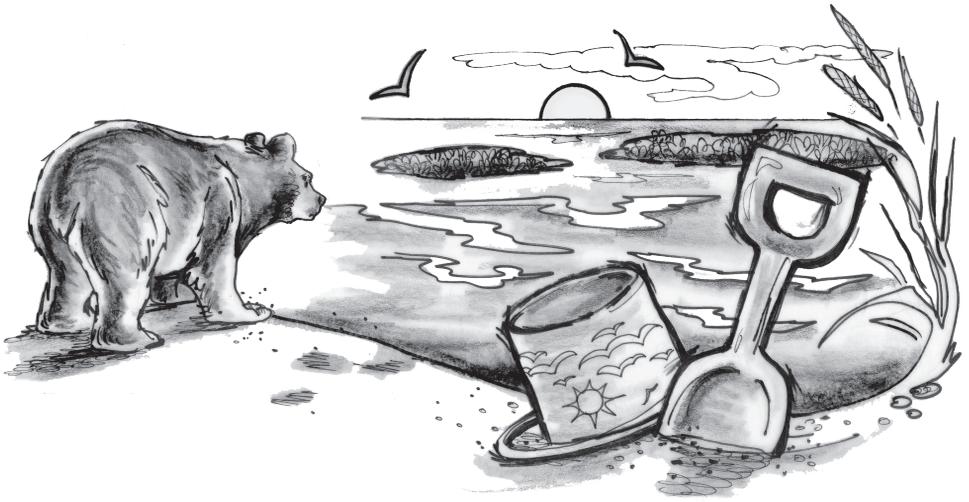
The Team, T and Sie and I, along with my Gram and Aunt Kitty and her dog, Hunter, were on our way to Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore in Empire, Michigan. It was our summer vacation and the trip should be fun, but going to a park named after a bear made me nervous. Not just any bear, either,

but the great mother bear, Misha-Makwa, of the famed Sleeping Bear legend.

Aunt Kitty, a biologist and naturalist—meaning she studies nature—told us that we’re going to Sleeping Bear Dunes to help her park ranger friend with P.A.W.—Park Adoption Week. Whatever that was, it sounded cool. I always wanted a park in the family. We already had an island in the family—Beaver Island, the one some of my Wild relatives had come from and the one we had left just this morning.



The ranger had also mentioned to Aunt Kitty that the park was having water problems of the mysterious kind, which got us GeEKs excited. T and Sie and I are GeEKs, Geo-Explorer Kids. It's a club we formed. We explore stuff and sometimes poke gross things with a stick, like poop, and collect bones and stones. The twins were excited to hit the beach. And me, being a Wild explorer and all like my relatives, I was ready to solve another nature mystery. We were about to embark on a new mission in the biggest sandbox in the world, or at least in my Michigan world.



“How’s it going girls?” hollered Gram from the front seat. “Want me to finish the story now, Holly?” I had drifted off after the first part of the Legend of the Sleeping Bear. A hot, crowded van with no air conditioning, the drone of tires, plus Gram reading, equals a sleepy Holly. I picked a hairy lemon yellow gorilla snack off the seat and fed it to Aunt Kitty’s drool machine basset hound behind me.

“...and the mother bear, Misha-Makwa, along with her twin

bear cubs, escaped the fires of Wisconsin by swimming across Lake Michigan,” Gram yelled, reading from my book *Michigan Myths and Legends*.



“This is not your fairy tale three bears story,” I said to Sie and T. “This is the mother bear and her twin cub’s

legend. The Goldilocks story is a fairy tale, this one’s true.” Sie rolled her eyes at me.

“The small cubs tired and the mother crawled up on shore to watch for them and waited for them to join her,” Gram continued, “but they never did. The Great Spirit took pity on the sad mother and raised up her drowned cubs as two islands and set them before her. From her perch high up on the shore she could watch over them



for the rest of her days.”

“Poor mom.” Sierra shook her head and polished her glasses.

“Poor cubs,” Tierra sniffed and popped another fruit snack in her mouth. “I mean—they were twins, like us.” T was emotional when it came to animals,



especially baby animals.

“Poor shore!” I said. “Bear claws are long. I can almost see the mother bear ripping up grasses and biting and splintering birch trees, peeling off their bark like cheese sticks,” I gulped. Sie moaned. T grabbed her growling belly. The mention of food does that to her.

“Today, the islands are known as the North and South Manitou islands,” Gram finished and slammed the book shut. Everyone in the van got all quiet except for the panting and snuffling of a hungry Hunter.

“And the mother still waits for them atop her dune. Asleep.” I said smiling, successfully concluding the Sleeping Bear legend. I gazed out the window at the rows and rows of fruit trees in the orchards as we zipped by.

We left Beaver Island this morning, taking the two-hour boat ride back to the mainland’s docks in Charlevoix. Then



Mom and Boy, my brother, drove Aunt Kitty’s car back home with Kenny, my pet snake, and Wilma, T’s hamster, and Wilma’s babies. After our goodbyes, Aunt Kitty and Gram loaded the rest of us in our rickety van for the journey to Empire. And after all of the Hunter breaks, nature breaks, roadside stand cherry breaks, and Gram breaks, what should’ve been a two-hour van ride turned into four. So Gram decided to read to us to take our minds off our sweaty, smelly trip.

“Asleep. The mother still waits for them atop her dune

asleep. Today,” I repeated loudly, mainly to comfort myself.

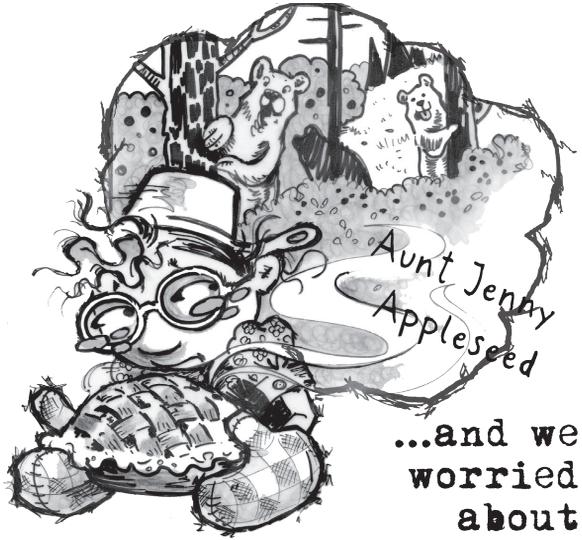
“Well, yes and no, Holly,” Aunt Kitty piped in. There she goes again. Aunt Kitty, the well-meaning, nature-knowing naturalist, likes to put a hint of fright into nature facts. Kind of like how she adds a hint of peppermint or lavender in most things she cooks, to spice things up and keep us on our toes.

Even though my Team and I are GeEKs, we aren’t totally fearless. I mean, sometimes exploring can be scary, that’s what makes it fun. It can make you brave. But right now I would have been completely happy with a simple, “Yes, Holly, she is still sleeping” response to my statement.

Things like spiders and snakes have never bothered me, but bears—it’s a Wild family thing. My Wild women relatives were known for their run-ins with bruins or “bars” as my Great Aunt Daisy Crockett Wild called them. Ever since the day that she



saved her brother Davy from one, and ever since Cousin Pauline Bunyan ran one out of her lumber camp and ever since Aunt Jenny Applesseed, famed for her Apple Brown Betty and Mountain High Apple Pies, was hunted across the Ohio Valley by bears, I knew my



**...and we  
worried  
about  
BeARs!**

time was coming. If it is my Wild fate to one day come face-to-face with *Ursus americanus*, a.k.a. the black bear, I hoped it wouldn't happen until I'm 25 or 30, really old and worn out. So the mere mention of non-sleeping bears makes me wiggly.

"But she's *sleeping*, right?" I asked again. Aunt Kitty giggled.

"Actually, she's still moving. Every year the dune erodes and gets smaller. Every day the winds and storms remove more of her sand."

"Oooh, Holly, the bear walks at midnight," Sie said, grinning, and making claw hands.

The thought of the dunes moving was disturbing. My stomach turned. Not at the loss of habitat or sand. But what would happen if Misha-Makwa were completely uncovered? Would she wake up? Would she stalk the dunes as a ghost bear? I didn't want to think about that.

"See that wooded dune over there? That's Alligator Hill," Gram shouted to us, pointing at a tall hill overlooking Sleeping Bear Bay.