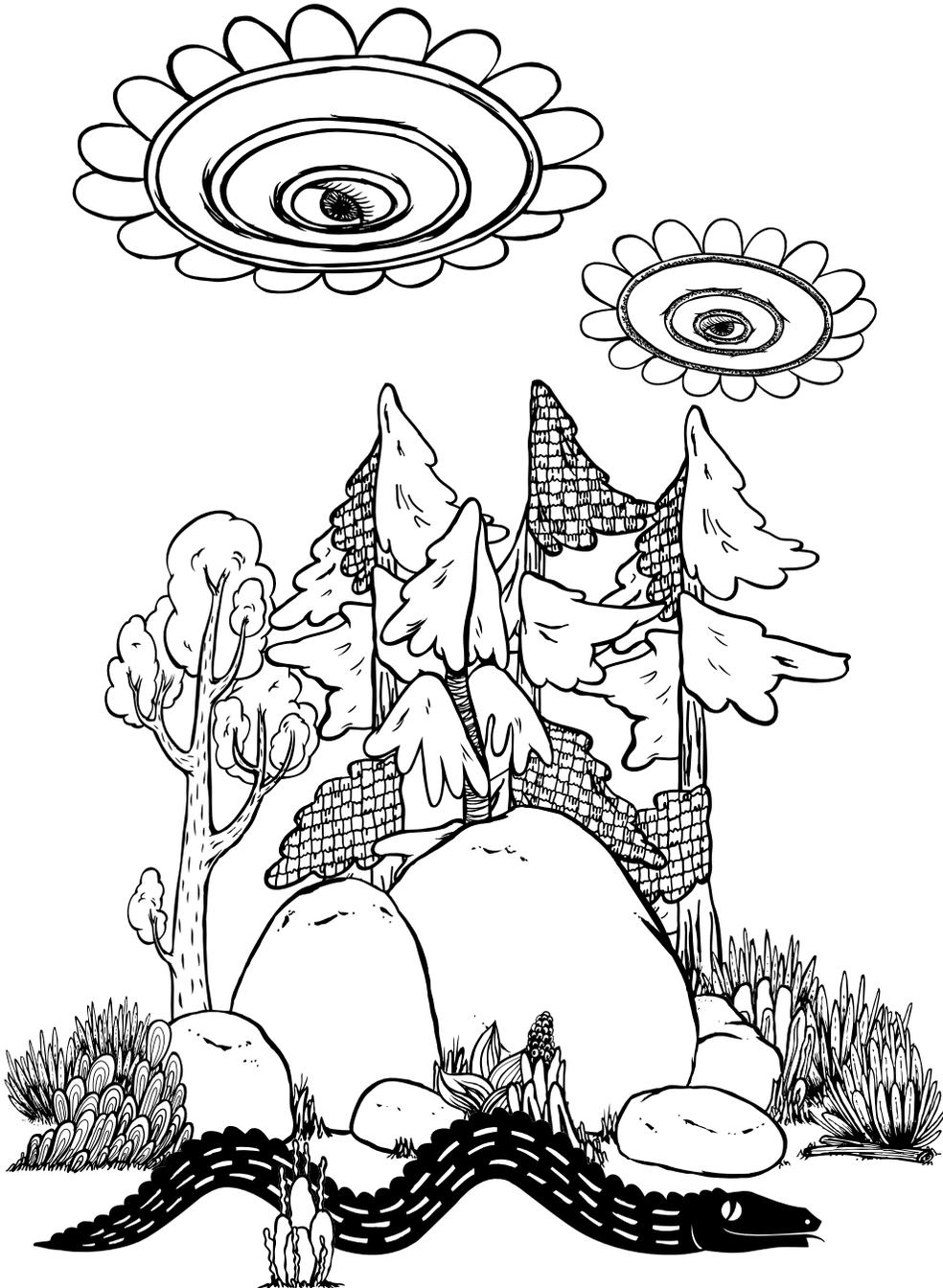


EVAN AND IZIMBRA

A History

This is not the original Camp Dreamtree. The true Dreamhouses are located in a universe that's not always easy to get to. Our founder, Evan Stevens, was one of the first to traverse the Fireweather Forest in the land of Crystal Burn, and he ended up there by mistake!



It all happened on a cold, wet, rainy night while Evan was out camping. He was 23 years old, and he had not quite figured out what he was going to do with his life. He had finished school, and yet was still lost, looking for direction and answers. His parents encouraged him to go and spend some time outdoors, he had always been so happy camping as a child, and had somehow forgotten to continue camping as a young man.

So, he took their advice, and began to travel the world, camping and living off the land in hopes of finding a purpose. He did enjoy it, he had forgotten how wonderful it felt to start a fire, cook his eggs over the open flame, hear the chirps of the birds and the gentle sniffs of a rabbit looking for greens. He had forgotten how many stars there were, how the moon lit up the forest at night, and how bats were both magical and terrifying as they flew overhead. He forgot what it was like to be truly alone, to not talk for days and to lose himself to his thoughts.

On the night he found himself in the Fireweather Forest, Evan had experienced a beautiful day alone. He had seen a butterfly drink the dew off a freshly opened flower, he had successfully skipped a rock 20 times across a serene lake, and he had fallen asleep, sprawled on the grass in the middle of the afternoon. It was at this time, asleep and dreaming, he had not witnessed a huge storm rolling in. By the time he woke, it was too late. He had not set up camp, he had no fire, and the first drops of rain had stirred him awake. He was frantic, rushing for the tree line in hopes of some shelter. The wind scowled at him, growled against his cheek, pushed him away from the trees, and forced him to stumble over a sharp rock. Evan was nervous, he hadn't seen weather like this in years, let alone out camping. He dropped his things as he fell over the rock, and his hands plunged into the mud, that was now becoming the ground. He scrambled to his feet, and pressed his body against the closest tree. He sheltered his face in the warmth of the bark, and held on for dear life. His clothes were soaked, his socks were wet, he could barely see through the steam of his breath building on his glasses. He took a deep breath, pushed even closer to the skin of the tree, and dreamt of the sun he slept under only minutes ago.

Then, he could feel the sun, but he could no longer feel the tree. He opened his eyes, and found himself hugging the air, he spun around, and there was no tree, no rain, no wind, no mud, only the most beautiful forest he had ever seen. He blinked. Removed his glasses, cleaned them, and returned them to their rightful spot. He could not believe his eyes. Was the storm a dream? No, his clothes were soaked. His socks were wet. He had mud on his hands, and a small cut on his knee from his fall. It had not been a dream, but where was the storm now? He glanced around, where was the grass he had napped in earlier? Where was the lake he had skipped his stone at? Was he dreaming now? Had he passed out?

“You are awake,” said a voice.

“What? Who said that?” said Evan.

“You are awake, you are not dreaming, the storm was real”, said this unknown voice.

“Seriously, who is talking to me?” Evan glanced around, and saw only the beautiful forest, and the largest, strangest trees he had ever seen. Then, one of the trees opened an eye, and looked directly at him.

“I am not a tree. I am a Dreamhouse. My name is, Izimbra.”

Evan knew that trees or houses, or whatever, don't talk so he must be crazy if he's not dreaming.

“You are not crazy. You were in need. I have met your kind before, but none so desperate as you. You were scared and cold and wet and lost in every sense of the word. You did not get frustrated, you only dreamt of the sun, of the most powerful thing in all of the worlds. You dreamt of the warmest thing you could think of, and that thought brought you here. Welcome to Crystal Burn, or should I say, welcome to the Fireweather Forest.”

“You must really think I'm crazy, or stupid to believe that you exist, and that somehow I dreamt my way here. I know that cyclops houses or trees or whatever don't exist, and that if they did, they definitely wouldn't be able to speak. I must have been knocked unconscious when I fell.”

“No. You are here,” the voice said gently. “You passed through one of the folds, our worlds are wrapped around one another, and every now and again, someone's need will create a small fold. It's just a tiny bit of cosmic friction, really, the intense emotion mixed with a respect and wonder for the natural world will just pull one world closer to the next, creating the fold. We are next door to your Earth, one world over, we are like a bed made with two sets of sheets. Usually you stay on your side of the sheets, but every now and again, you get tangled, and find yourself here. I know you are nervous about this being real, but I can assure you, I am very real. I have been here, in the forest for over 300 years. I grow slowly, like a tree, but I am not a tree. Dreamhouses are sentient, even when we are young, and as we grow we become more and more aware of our surroundings. We are extremely small when we come into being.

I was no more than the size of the rock you're standing next to, when I made my first memory."

Evan glanced down, and a rock about the size of a cantaloupe was almost leaning on his left leg. He looked at it, then looked at Izimbra. She was at least 20 feet tall, and for the first time he believed that she indeed could have been small. He thought of being small.

Evan said, "We are small when we are born, too. Slightly bigger than this rock, but not much. I don't remember being that small, but I do remember "making" my first memory, as you say. I was lying on my stomach, and I saw a snake in the grass, but I didn't know it was a snake. It had a gorgeous long tongue that it stuck out at me, and so I stuck my tongue out at it. It made a soft hissing noise and moved like water through the grass towards me. I was mesmerized by its movements, and as it came closer, I picked it up. It looked directly at me as I held it up, and I took it to show my mother, sure that she would be just as mesmerized. When I showed it to her, her eyes got wide, but she did not move. She just looked at me, and I tried to hand her the snake, so she could see it better, but she didn't move. Then, my father walked up, calmly snatched the snake from my hands and set back down in the grass, as far from my mother as possible. I remember being confused that he had taken the snake so far away, but my mother had grabbed me tight, as quickly as dad had snatched the snake away. I guess my second memory would be that hug, it was so warm. Only later did I learn the snake was dangerous, and that my mother was motionless in shock. She thought I was going to be hurt, she tells the story often, but she never mentions how beautiful the snake was, or how smoothly it moved through the grass. She just makes a big a fuss about how scary it all was."

Evan stopped for a moment and glanced down at the grass, in hopes of seeing a snake, but there was only the cantaloupe-sized rock. He shook the thought of the snake, and glanced up at Izimbra, she was just listening, waiting for more of the story. "That's all really, that's my first memory. I guess I must have been 3 or 4 years old."

"What?!? Only three or four? We don't start making memories until we are at least 20, and they're blurry until you're almost 50! You must be fascinating creatures!", said Izimbra.

Evan replied, "Humans? Hah! We are fascinating, but we are also very silly, and we don't live very long, 75 years if we're lucky!" Evan chuckled, he couldn't imagine being 20 before he had his first memory, heck, he was only 23 now.

"Well, that must be why you start your memories so young, and why you can think of such powerful things like the sun at such a young age." Izimbra was shocked,

all the humans she had seen in this world were too scared of her to talk this much, this one was different somehow. He had just shared his first memory. He had looked her right in the eye.

“My first memory is also of a snake!” Izimbra stated with glee, “I was either 21 or 22, and I had spent all my years just growing. I had felt the sun and the moon, the rain, and the snow, and the wind. I had felt ground change and the sky shift, but I had never remembered anything concrete. Then, I heard something. something strange. I looked around, but I couldn’t see anything strange, everything looked just like it had always looked, I think.” Izimbra, questioned that last bit, but kept going, “This tree next to me was not here, only a small stream that was lined with even smaller rocks, maybe you wouldn’t even call it a stream, it was so small. It was had just become spring, and there were tiny bunches of flowers starting to bloom along the edge of the stream, breaking into colors in-between the grey of the rocks. I looked at the flowers, and I heard the strange noise again, it was the same sound as the nut makes as the creatures are prying them from their shells, but there were no little creatures around. Then, it was slightly louder, and I could tell it was coming from this long brown-grey rock, that was wrapped right against the edge of the stream. I stared at the rock, wishing I could move, wishing I could get closer, but that is not my way. Then, the rock shook. It shook again, and this time I could tell it was not a rock, but something else entirely. It shook one more time, and the front of the rock broke open, like a dry leaf. It cracked, and the peeling sound became more clear. The rock was a snake, shedding its old skin. It wriggled one way, and then the next, I could hear the suction give as the snake broke loose, and shed its old skin. Then it slipped away from the stream, looked up at me, touched my base with its tongue, and off it went.” Izimbra sighed a deep heavy sigh, “I never saw that snake again, but I have met so many of its children, one even became a close friend. Snakes are good friends, they can go places a Dreamhouse cannot, and they move, just like you said, like water in the grass. Sometimes, I think of that first memory, and I wish I could have a new skin.”

Evan looked up at Izimbra and wondered why he had never thought of his own skin in this way. Then he thought how rare it was to find anyone who’s first memory was of a snake. He had met hundreds if not thousands of people in his life, and no one had cared or shared in his snake memory.

“Izimbra, thank you for telling me about your snake memory. We must have more in common, even though you are a giant Dreamhouse and I am just a human man, if we both have first memories of snakes.”

Just then Izimbra let out what can only be thought of as the most joyful sound Evan had ever heard, it was a laugh, but it was as if all the forest was laughing, as if a mountain had chuckled. It came from deep within the ground and tickled his feet. He could feel the laugh on the hairs of his neck. It was so beautiful that he even forgot his socks were wet.

Evan smiled.

Izimbra smiled.

She asked him if he would like to stay,

“Evan, would you be interested in staying with me? I could tell you about the Fireweather Forest.” She hesitated “If not, I understand. You humans seem to be busy. If you need to get home, I will understand. I can explain the way back, and I could even have one of my snake friends show you.

Evan replied with a resounding,

“NO. I don’t think that will be necessary. I think I would like to stay!. I think if I leave, I may never come back and that would be a shame. Is there somewhere I could build camp?”

Izimbra laughed for the second time, and Evan joined her although he didn’t know why. He hadn’t said anything funny this time. Then she opened her mouth, and knew what had been funny, she was, quite literally, a house. She was like a hollow tree. Her outside, her skin, was alive, but the forest grew in the hollow as well. Izimbra was a shelter better than any he could have dreamed of.

Evan stayed the whole summer. He and Izimbra fell into a routine of waking, she would watch him eat, and then they would talk. She was fascinated by his eating. She gathered all of her strength from the ground and the sun, and had never “eaten” anything before. She loved it when he got things stuck in his teeth, or spit something out that tasted wrong. She would laugh and laugh, and he too, thought it was pretty funny. He told her about how much humans loved food, how they ate all the time, and had restaurants and parties dedicated to food. He told her about the market and farmers, and how fruits and vegetable grew much like her, but did not have memories in the same way, and did not live nearly as long. He did tell her about the olive trees in Israel, though, the ones that were thought to be the oldest living things in the world. One scientist thought that they could even be over 4,000 years old! She loved this, there were trees and Dreamhouses and creatures in Crystal Burn much older than that. She loved how precious time must be in Evan’s world, and how fast things must move. He told her about automobiles and flying machines and trains, and how quickly you could

move from one place to the next. This was even more fascinating for Izimbra, she thought the snakes had it good! She couldn't even imagine flying further than the birds, and racing across the ground, passing all of the creatures.

In return for Evan's stories, Izimbra shared the history of the land with him. She told him of the creatures in her world, and of the plants that surrounded her. She explained that when you are incapable of moving, you understand your purpose in your location much sooner. She had many jobs. Her skin was nourishment to many small creatures, and home to even smaller ones. She provided shade for the small trees that could not grow in full sun, and in return, they fed water to her roots. She talked with all of the animals in her area, and there were at least 100 different Dreamhouses in the land of Crystal Burn.

She really did rely on the snakes, as they traveled everywhere. They carried messages to and from Izimbra, and they always brought small gifts. She had an amazing collection of small shiny rocks, tiny pieces of ore, shells, and the chrysalis' of thousands of butterflies. The snakes knew how much she loved butterflies, she even had a chrysalis that looked like it was of lava, lumpy and shiny and black. It was the size of a bowling ball, and Evan was just as fascinated as she was. It was her favorite object.

After the summer, Evan decided it was probably time to go home. He was sure that his parents would like to know if he was alive, and he was longing for pasta. He informed Izimbra of his plan.

"Young lady", (that was their little joke) he said, "I need to be going home. I have thought about this, and I would like to tell you something, and I would like to ask you something." He waited for her response.

"Go on," she replied, after a long silence.

"You are the most amazing friend I have ever made. You have shown me over the past three months that my world is beautiful and full of wonder. You have also shown me that your world is beautiful and full of wonder, but most of all you have shown me that I am beautiful and full of wonder. I would like to tell you, thank you."

Izimbra looked away. She had never made a friend like Evan, and no one had ever actually said, "Thank you" to her. The snakes, they had their own ways, but it wasn't the same. She felt strange. She wasn't sure if she wanted to hear the question, but she didn't want Evan to know how odd this all was for her. So, she replied,

"And the question?", with a small smirk at the corner of her mouth.

“May I come back next summer?” he said.

It was the best question he could have asked.

One tear fell from the corner of her eye. “Yes. You may come back next summer. You may come back the summer after that, and the summer after that. You are always welcome here. You are my finest friend. You have shown me that I, too, am beautiful and full of wonder. So, I am thankful and you are welcome.”

A second, and a third, and a fourth tear began to fall. Evan laid his hand on her skin, then he pressed his face into her bark, and when he opened his eyes, he was back in his forest. He had fallen through a fold and onto the grass where he had napped so many months ago. There was not a cloud in the sky, no rain, no mud. There was, though, at his feet one perfect skipping stone and a small green snake. He smiled, lifted the snake, kissed it on its nose, and placed it back in the grass. He held the stone in the palm of his hand and ran his pointer finger and thumb along its edge.

“Maybe this one will go for 21!”

Evan, of course, returned the following summer, and the summer after that. It was not until that third summer that he asked Izimbra about the prospect of bringing other people to meet her. He had not told anyone about her yet, and she was unsure. She agreed, though, and the following summer he brought his two cousins, David and Jim, and his favorite Aunt Paloma.

Together, they built four houses in the image of Izimbra (just a little smaller!) The following summer, three more guests came with them, and so on and so on.



Camp Dreamtree, an installation at The Gallery@Scottsdale Public Library
Scottsdale Public Art

Created by Roy Wasson Valle and Koryn Woodward Wasson
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