

# *The Talking Earth*

JEAN CRAIGHEAD GEORGE



## *Lost Dog Slough*



Billie Wind could see the orange tree through the open walls of the council house. A white bird floated down upon it, and she wondered if it had a nest nearby.

"Billie Wind." The medicine man was speaking. "May I have your attention?" She was standing beside her sister Mary in the dim light of the house. Outside the sunlight was white and hot. Inside a soft trade wind blew under the palm-thatched roof, cooling the air pleasantly. Charlie Wind, the medicine man, who was also her uncle and friend, cleared his throat.

"Billie Wind," he repeated. "May I have your atten-



tion?" She promptly looked from the bird to the dark eyes of the elderly man.

"It is told that you do not believe in the animal gods who talk." He frowned.

"It is told that you do not believe that there is a great serpent who lives in the Everglades and punishes bad Seminoles." He shook his head, then cast a sober glance at the councilmen, who were seated on the hard earth around him.

"And it is told that you doubt that there are little people who live underground and play tricks on our people." He pulled his white Seminole cape closer around his lean shoulders, forcing Billie Wind to notice that it was too long. It almost touched the black-and-white border of his skirt.

"Are you listening to me?"

"Yes," she answered and smiled, tightening her lips so she would not giggle.

"The council has met. We are disturbed by your doubts."

Billie Wind caught her breath. She knew perfectly well these men did not believe in the serpent and the talking animals and the dwarfs. They were educated and wise men. She knew them well. Several were her uncles, others were the fathers of her best friends. She waited for them to laugh understandingly as they usually did when the old legends and beliefs were discussed.

But they did not even smile. Charlie Wind crossed his arms on his chest.

"We are a tribe of the Seminole Indians," he said in a solemn voice. "We believe that each person is part of the Great Spirit who is the wind and the rain and the sun and the earth, and the air above the earth. Therefore we can not order or command anyone." He paused. "But we do agree that you should be punished for being a doubter."

Billie Wind glanced from face to face, searching for the good humor that would soon end this to-do about serpents and dwarfs. No one smiled, not even her comical uncle, Three-Hands-on-the-Saddle.

"What do you think would be a suitable punishment for you, Billie Wind?"

She let her mind wander, waiting for someone to break the silence and send her off to play. When it became apparent that this would not happen, she concentrated on a punishment: something ridiculous, something they would not let her do, it would be so dangerous.

"I think," she said with dignity, "that I should go into the pa-hay-okee, the Everglades, where these spirits dwell, and stay until I hear the animals talk, see the serpent and meet the little people who live underground."

She waited for Charlie Wind to shake his head "no."

"Good," he said, much to her surprise. Promptly he turned to Mary Wind, who was two years older than she.

"Mary Wind," he said to the sturdy fifteen-year-old, who had been the one to tell the medicine man about Billie Wind's doubts, "go with your sister in the tribal



By the author of **Julie of the Wolves**,  
winner of the 1973 Newbery Medal

Billie Wind lives with her Seminole tribe. She follows their customs, but the dangers of pollution and nuclear war she's learned about in school seem much more real to her. How can she believe the Seminole legends about talking animals and earth spirits? She wants answers, not legends.

"You are a doubter," say the men of the Seminole Council, and so Billie goes out into the Everglades alone, to stay until she can believe. In the wilderness, she discovers that she *must* listen to the land and animals in order to survive. With an otter, a panther cub, and a turtle as companions and guides, she begins to understand that the world of her people *can* give her the answers she seeks.

"[Jean Craighead] George is superb at chronicling the intricacies of nature, which she incorporates admirably into Billie's quest.... There is much for readers to absorb; the story's message that the earth is precious and we are all part of it will be well taken."  
—ALA Booklist

"The conservation message grows naturally out of the excitement and concrete detail of the survival adventure story."  
—The New York Times

**Jean Craighead George** is the author of *THE CRY OF THE CROW*, *THE SUMMER OF THE FALCON*, and the Newbery Medal-winning *JULIE OF THE WOLVES*, all available in Harper Trophy editions.

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