

Odyssey's Adventure



Hey there! I'm Bee, and I'm excited to share a wonderful story with you. My full name is Carpenter Bee, or if you like scientific names, *Xylocopa virginica*, but you can just call me Bee. I'm often mistaken for a bumblebee, but I'm different! I have a big, smooth black body without hairy yellow stripes and no stinger. My wings are really buzzy, which sometimes scares people, but I promise I won't hurt you. I'm just curious and love making new friends. Today, I'm here to tell you about my friend Odyssey. Do you know what an odyssey is?

Once upon a time, there was a young river otter named Odyssey who loved to splash and play along the edge of a deep, beautiful lake called Jocassee. This lake is nestled in a magical place known as the Jocassee Gorges, surrounded by some of the oldest mountains in the world. These mountains used to be enormous, but over time, rain and wind wore them down, turning them into the smaller peaks we see today. Rivers carried the mountain rocks down to the beach, grain by grain, so when you're standing on a beach, you're standing on what used to be part of a mountain! Amazing, right?

The Jocassee Gorges were carved by rivers with names like the Whitewater, Thompson, Horsepasture, and Toxaway. These rivers cut deep channels through solid mountain rock over many years. The Gorges are part of a real live rainforest, which makes Odyssey's home very special.

I've watched Odyssey play on Lake Jocassee since he was a little pup. A few months ago, before the leaves grew back on the trees, it was time for him to leave his family den. He had lived there with his mother and siblings for almost a year. Now, his mother told him it was time to explore the world and have new adventures.

"Odyssey, you're almost grown," his mother said. "It's time for you to discover the world and have new adventures. You live in the Jocassee Gorges, one of the most unique and important places on Earth. You play in Lake Jocassee, one of the cleanest, most beautiful lakes in the world. You have good friends like Kingfisher and Bee who will look out for you. You'll make new friends along the way because you have a kind heart and a playful spirit. I love you. Now go."

Odyssey swam away, slowly at first, then faster as he imagined the exciting adventures ahead. He explored new coves, little caves, and big warm rocks. His first night alone was a bit scary, but he slept safely under the cover of rhododendron and mountain laurel. The next morning, he stretched, yawned, and slipped into the water to fish, just like his mother taught him. He had a great day, eating bass for breakfast, catfish for

lunch, and herring and shad for snacks. Swimming in the clear, clean water was even better! And he wasn't lonely because I, Bee, was always nearby, browsing flowers while Odyssey fished and played.

We have another friend, Kingfisher, a beautiful blue bird with a white collar and a crown of feathers. Kingfisher is a great fisher, though I think Odyssey is better! Kingfisher's call is a rattling sound, which is quite funny. So, one day, as I was browsing flowers and Odyssey and Kingfisher were fishing, we heard a deep, echoing sound like a drum.

Kingfisher told us a story about how, long ago, tribes called The Real People lived in the Jocassee Valley. They drummed and danced around fires. Kingfisher's father said The Real People left before the valley was flooded to create Lake Jocassee.

The drum sound grew louder, and we heard voices shouting, "I'm a Jocassee Wild Child!" followed by giggles and laughter. Odyssey, Kingfisher, and I looked at each other, curious. What's a Jocassee Wild Child?

Kingfisher explained that a child is a young human, and since we were at Lake Jocassee, it must be a child here. But what makes them wild?

A wild child is curious. A wild child notices things, like whether it's sunny or cloudy, whether an insect flies or crawls, and all sorts of little details. Wild children ask lots of questions and sometimes stay very quiet to observe the world around them.

Odyssey decided to embark on a long and adventurous journey to discover what makes a human child at Jocassee a Jocassee Wild Child.

The Jocassee Gorges are home to many different plants and animals, each living in their preferred habitat. Some like hot, dry, and sunny spots, while others prefer cool, damp, and shady places. There's a suitable habitat for almost everyone here, making it a wonderful place for adventures.

So, the next time you're at Lake Jocassee, remember to be curious, notice the little things, and maybe you'll discover what it means to be a Jocassee Wild Child too!