

Saguaros are people, too

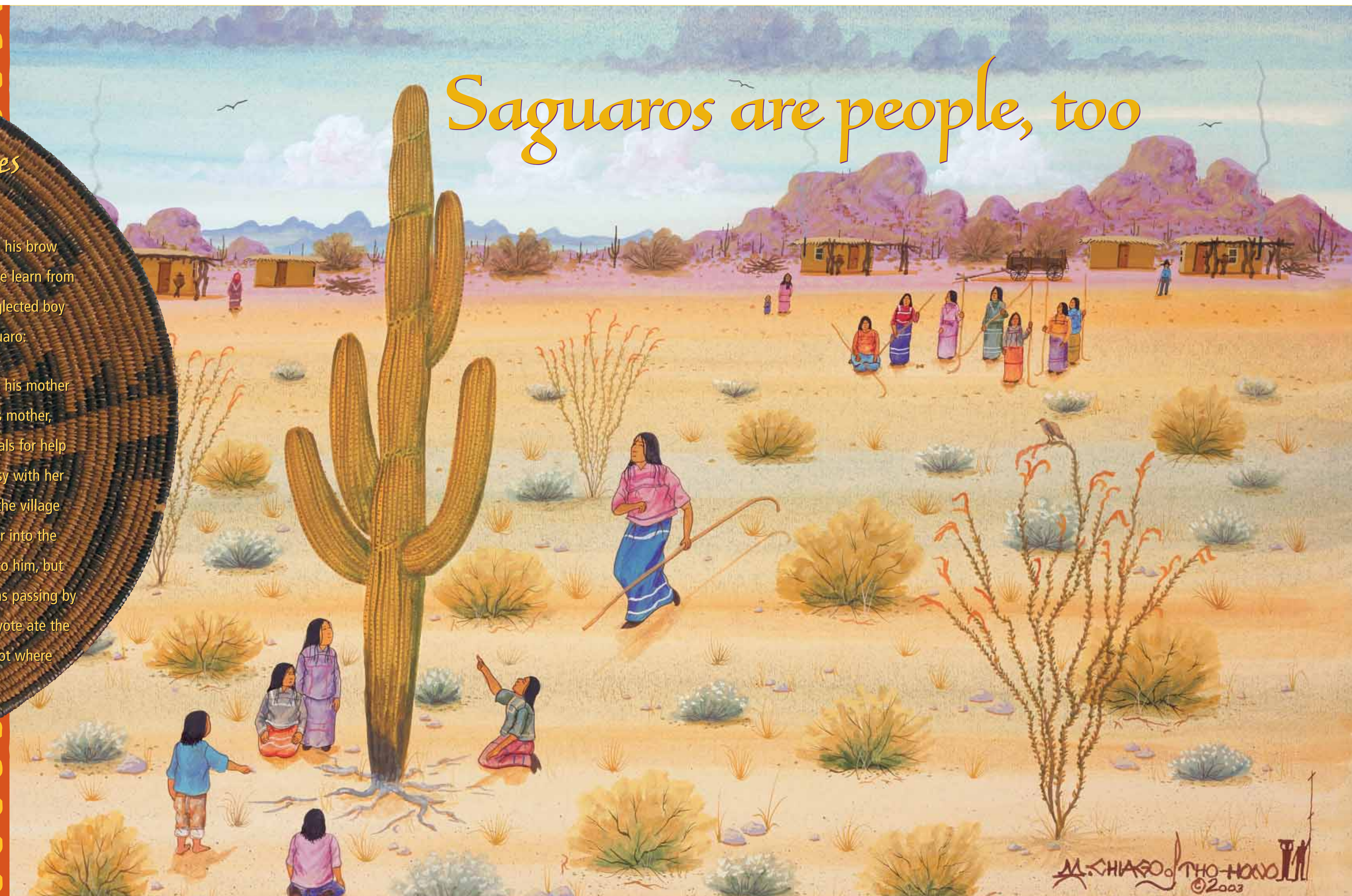
Tohono O'odham creation stories tell of the saguaros' origin

I'toi, Creator of the Desert People, placed beads of sweat from his brow on the ground and from them created the saguaro people—so we learn from one Tohono O'odham creation story. Another story tells of a neglected boy who sank into the ground, then emerged as the first saguaro:

Long ago, a young boy was left to grow up alone as his mother played *toka* (field hockey). One day the boy went to find his mother, traveling to many villages, crossing the mountains, asking animals for help along the way. When, at last, he found her and she was too busy with her game to come to him, he stood in a tarantula hole and asked the village children to help him sing. With each song, the boy sank deeper into the ground. His mother, having been warned of her son's fate, ran to him, but arrived too late. He was gone. As it happened, Coyote (**Ban**) was passing by and told the mother he would rescue her son. Instead, tricky Coyote ate the child and presented the mother with bare bones. From the spot where those bones were buried, the first *hasañ* grew.

From a very young age, Tohono O'odham children

are taught that they must never harm a saguaro; they must not throw rocks to knock the sweet fruit free, or do anything that could hurt *hasañ* (saguaro). They are reminded that saguaros are people, too, created by I'toi.



M. CHIAGO THO-HONO ©2003

*A saguaro cactus stands by my house
It is long and has thorns.
It is our plant and also our friend
Did you hear that the saguaro cactus is also 'O'odham?
I heard, and I truly respect it.*

—Angelina Saraficio from *When it Rains*

Basket from Tohono Chul Park Collection, Gift of Agnes T. and Don L. Smith
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Angelina Saraficio from When It Rains, Poopoo and Pima Poetry, Ofelia Zepeda, ed.,
Sun Tracks Vol. 2, University of Arizona Press, 1982
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