

Long ago when the world was young, there were not many stars in the sky. In those days the Cherokee People depended on corn for their food. After gathering the corn from the fields, some of that corn was dried. Dried corn could be made into corn meal by placing the corn inside a large hollowed stump and pounding it with a long wooden pestle. Then the cornmeal was stored in large baskets. During the cold winter, the ground meal would be made into bread and mush. One morning an elder man and his wife went to their storage basket for some cornmeal. They discovered that someone or something had gotten into the cornmeal during the night! This upset them very much for no one in a Cherokee village stole from someone else. Then they noticed that the cornmeal was scattered over the ground. In the middle of the spilled meal were giant dog prints!

These dog prints were so large that they knew this was no ordinary dog. The elderly couple immediately alerted the people of the village. The village held council. It was decided that this must be a spirit dog from another world! The people did not want the spirit dog coming to their village, so they decided to get rid of the dog by frightening it so bad it would never return. They gathered their drums and turtle shell rattles and later that night they hid around the area where the cornmeal was kept. Late into the night, they heard a whirring sound like many bird wings. They looked up to see the form of a giant dog swooping down from the sky. It landed near the basket and then began to eat great mouthfuls of cornmeal. Suddenly the people jumped up beating and shaking their noisemakers.

The noise was so loud it sounded like thunder! The giant dog turned and began to run down the path. The people chased after him making the loudest noises they could. That dog ran to the top of a hill and leaped into the sky, the cornmeal spilling out the sides of its mouth. The giant dog ran across the black night sky until it disappeared from sight...but the cornmeal that had spilled from its mouth made a pathway across the sky. Each grain of cornmeal became a star. The Cherokees call that pattern of stars, gil-LEE-oot-soon stan-UNH-yee, "the place where the dog ran." And that is how the Milky Way came to be.