An illustration of two Indigenous women sitting on a riverbank. They are surrounded by large, cylindrical scrolls made of birch bark. The scene is framed by a blue sky and a brown, textured background at the top and bottom. The title 'Legends and Stories from the Past' is written in a blue, serif font in the center.

# *Legends and Stories from the Past*

*by George Blondin*



Education, Culture & Employment





# *Legends and Stories from the Past* *by George Blondin*

*A Teaching Resource for Dene Kede Grades K-9*

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## *Medicine Power Legend*

When the world was new, the Creator sent two individuals, Yamoria and Yamoza, who had gifts of medicine power, to help the aboriginal people to survive. The twin brothers were born unlike any other newborn. A young girl found them, in a hole, in the bush. The two babies were crying, so the girl took them home to her parents.

The young girl's parents were experienced in medicine power. They lived according to the laws of medicine power. The parents advised their daughter to raise the babies in the best way that she could. They believed that babies were special and, because they had a lot of medicine power, that people should never interfere with the babies

if they act differently than their peers. They might use their medicine power at a very young age. The parents of the young girl acted as grandparents and the young lady became their mother.

They lived alone in isolation in the bush because they believed that the babies were special and thus had to be raised in such an environment. If they had power from a spirit being, they became partners with this spirit and they could talk to the spirit being even if the being was an animal, a bird, the moon, the sun, the wind or another thing. They had the ability to talk to and communicate with anything.



## *Acknowledgement*

The stories in this book are very old stories that have been handed down from generation to generation from when the world was new. I am proud to dedicate this book to those Storytellers. I am grateful that they have shared their stories with me since I was a child. We tell these stories as First Nations People from the North because we are proud of who we are and where we have come from.

The stories in this book are very different from other books that are normally found in schools. I am pleased to provide these stories so that many students can learn about our culture. It is my wish that these stories from the past will be an inspiration to all northern aboriginal students, as a reflection of their parents' way of life and culture. I am pleased to make these stories available to the Department of Education, Culture and Employment so that they can be widely used in the schools for everyone to learn and enjoy.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "George Blondin". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping 'G' at the beginning.

George Blondin

## HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

# *Teacher Background Information*

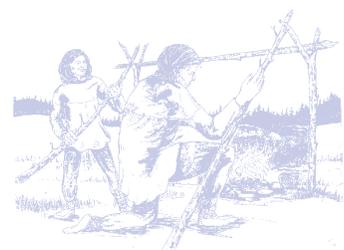
It is suggested for the lower grades K-6, the teacher should read the legends and stories to the students as most of the legends will be above their reading levels and understanding. Grade 7-9 students should be able to read the legends without too much difficulty. The legends have been cross-referenced with their related thematic units K-9 to support lesson planning and classroom discussions. Colour illustrations have been included in the resource book to help illustrate the legends visually.

The main theme of this resource book is Medicine Power. Elder legends and stories can go back in time up to 50,000 years. The legends relate how a person with medicine power for an animal or bird can talk to a specific animal or bird with no problem.

It is important that teachers teach about Dene Spirituality, the receiving of Medicine Power and its implications, thus allowing the children to comprehend the legends more easily. A short narrative and legend explaining 'Medicine Power' is on page ii.

Medicine power was a gift from God/Creator to the early aboriginal people. The legends and stories will explain how communication occurs between a person with medicine power and an ordinary person. It is necessary to have medicine power from a certain spirit, being, item, material or element; then one is able to communicate with their particular medicine power source. For example, a medicine person who has the spirit of a caribou will have no difficulty speaking to the caribou.

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## *An Elder, Children's Teacher*

**A**round 1910, in the Fort Norman area, the country was very poor. There were two stores but they did not sell food, and there were no freezers at that time to preserve meat for bad times. It was a poor time of year for fishing and rabbits were scarce that summer, so people couldn't stay in Fort Norman for the usual length of time. There was a priest in the community, so they were able to have mass everyday. In those days, the Dene were very religious.

A good person and Elder by the name of Saul Blondin lived in the community. He was the Chief. During that summer, getting food and enough to eat was not easy. Saul had a big canvas canoe. He would invite about twelve children, eight- to

twelve-year-olds, and take them down the river to set fishnets. He carried four short fishnets that could be set in the eddies of the river. He also carried a fairly large tent for shelter, in case of rain.

At that time, there were no outboard motors and no leisure travelling like we do today. The people had to paddle or track their canoes and boats if they wanted to go somewhere. To get back to the story, Saul was one of the best moose hunters in the area, as he had hunted all his life.

Saul and the children paddled down the river. It was easy, because the current pushed them along. As the group drifted along at a leisurely pace, they constantly looked at the riverbanks, searching for good rabbit country. They wanted

to set some snares, but before doing that, they set all their fishnets in the eddies. Later, Saul and the bigger boys went in the bush to set the rabbit snares.

When they returned to camp, Saul told the children to wash their clothes on the bank of the river, as they were muddy. When the children had done all their evening chores, he began to tell them stories. Saul was a very religious person and when in Fort Norman, he attended church everyday.

As a method of teaching, he told the children religious and biblical stories every night. He explained that the Creator had created everything for them. He told the children, "If we are good, we will go to heaven. If we are bad, we will be punished for it." He also taught the children about the benefits of being a good person. "If you are a good person, everybody will be proud of you and it will help you when you get bigger and older if you continue that way."

Saul led praying with the rosary every night before they went to bed. The next morning, they said their prayers again before starting the day's work, but first they checked all their fishnets.

Saul had brought four dogs with him in case they were needed for packing. The dogs could also help pull the canoe upstream when they were tracking. It was useful to have dogs around. The group visited all the rabbit snares. Sometimes Saul had to double-check the snares to make sure the bigger boys had set them right.

When they returned to camp, Saul taught the children how to clean fish and make dry fish in preparation for smoking. He showed them how smoke keeps flies away from the hanging dryfish.

*"If you are a good person, everybody will be proud of you and it will help you when you get bigger and older if you continue that way."*



The children also smoked the rabbits that they had snared and cleaned. He instructed the bigger children to have the smoke going at all times and to turn the drying fish and rabbits over and around so they would be evenly smoked. Later, Saul made sure that the children ate all they wanted.

After awhile, Saul decided he wanted to go hunting and told the older children to take care of the smaller children. He hunted, but did not see any moose tracks. Since there weren't any moose around, the next morning they took out their fishnets and rabbit snares, and moved downriver to another location.

At this new camp, they set the fishnets and a few snares. Saul was in a hurry because he wanted to hunt moose. He went moose hunting in the evening. When he got back, his pack was full of

moose meat. He had shot a moose in the bush about four miles from camp. Now, there was a lot of teaching and demonstrating to be done with the moose and all its parts.

Saul sent the boys out to pick up all the snares, since they wouldn't be needed now. After the evening prayers, everyone went to sleep. In the morning, they went to visit the fishnets and then walked to the place where Saul had shot the moose to collect the rest of the meat. They made camp and Saul built a rafter over the fire so they could hang the meat to smoke it. He did most of the butchering while the bigger boys hung the meat on the rafters. The other children helped by gathering wood. All the children enjoyed eating the fresh moose meat. They eat that way in Fort Norman.



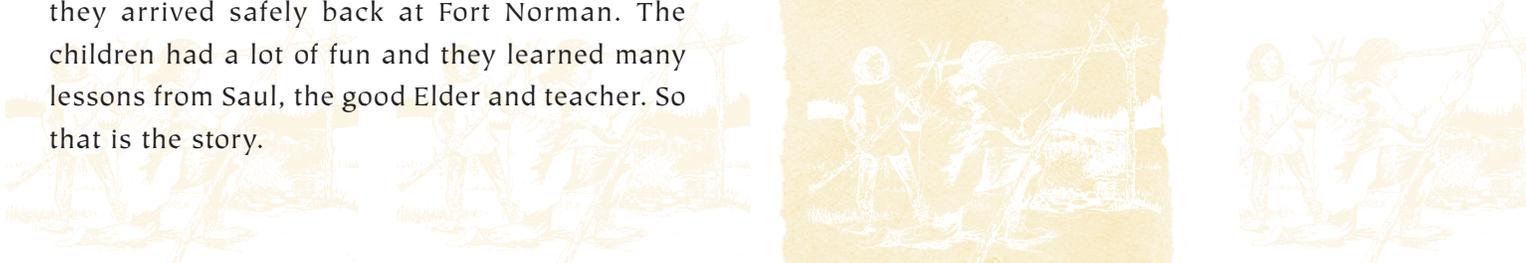
*Saul and the children camped at that location and smoked meat all night. They did not waste any meat or throw away essential parts of the moose.*

Saul and the children camped at that location and smoked meat all night. When they were ready to leave, they had four dogs and ten boys to pack out the meat. They did not waste any meat or throw away essential parts of the moose. They packed everything out to the canoe in one trip.

When they camped on the return journey, they smoked the meat again. The next day, they went further upriver and Saul figured they would be home by nightfall. With the help of the big boys, he prepared individual parcels of dryfish, rabbit and moose meat for each of the children to take back to their parents.

The big boys did useful work on that trip. When the river current was swift and strong, they would run ashore, grab a rope line and track the canoe. In some places, they could paddle. At nightfall, they arrived safely back at Fort Norman. The children had a lot of fun and they learned many lessons from Saul, the good Elder and teacher. So that is the story.

*The children  
had a lot of  
fun and they  
learned many  
lessons from  
Saul, the  
good Elder  
and teacher.*





## STORY NUMBER 2

# Regarding a Blind Man

**T**here was a man who might be described as a small-time medicine power person. Big and powerful medicine power people are quite safe from harm because it takes powerful medicine or a combination of different medicine powers to hurt them in any way. Some medicine powers are weak. A person's power can be damaged if the recipient of that power does not look after it.

There was a family where the man had medicine power from a few things, but the power was not very strong. If someone with medicine power wanted to do harm to this man, it could be done. This man had a bad wife. She fooled around with young men and she wanted to get rid of her husband.

The wife had a dirty and evil mind. She thought that if she walked over her husband's body while he was asleep and over his hunting gear, including his cap, his medicine power would kill him. Then she would be free, she thought. So this is what the woman did.

The husband did not know what his wife was up to and ended up having trouble from his medicine power, but did not die. He went completely blind instead. The family was now living with a blind man. They started to have a lot of problems and became very poor. They were living on a fish lake. One night, the woman decided to leave her husband. She got all her children and took off into the country, leaving the blind man by himself.

When the blind man woke up, he called out for his wife and children to get up because he was hungry. Nobody answered. The blind man could not stand it anymore, so he started crawling around. He found out that no one was in the tent.

The blind man crawled down the hill to the lake shore for a drink of water. He sat on the shore feeling really bad, abandoned and very alone. He wondered why so much misfortune was happening to him. The man then heard a loon calling not far away.

The blind man had loon medicine power, therefore he could talk to the loon. He yelled at the loon, "Come here! Why do you say you are my partner if you won't help me?" The man crawled to the water again and drank. Then he sat.

A loon swam towards him and asked, "What is the matter stranger? I heard you yelling."

"Yes," said the man. "A long time ago, you told me we were partners. If that is the case, maybe you could help me now." "What is the problem?" the loon asked. "Somehow I became completely blind. I can't see anything. On top of that, my family abandoned me. I think I will die," the man said. The loon told him, "Get on top of my back. I will swim a bit with you. I might be able to help you."

The blind man crawled on top of the loon's back. They swam around a bit. The loon said, "Hold on to my neck hard. I will dive with you and see what happens."

The loon dove with the man on his back.

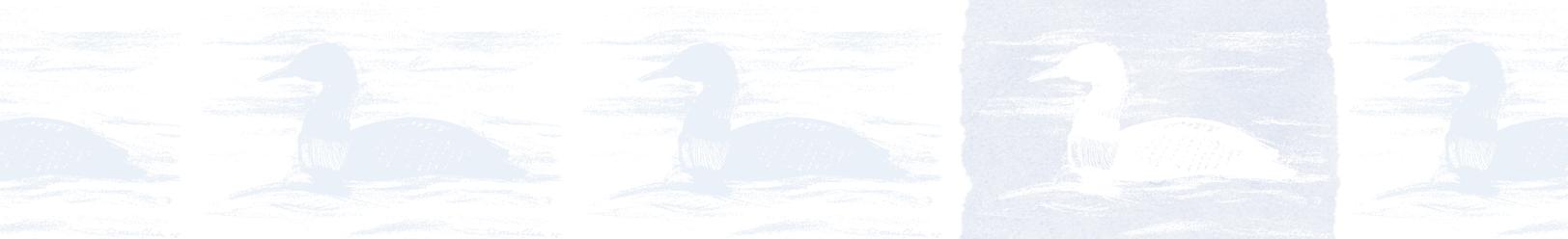
After awhile, the loon came up to the surface. "How do you see?" he asked the blind man. "It's different now," the man replied. "I will dive with you again," the loon said.

The loon took the man underwater and then resurfaced. "How do you see now?" the loon asked. "I can see better. I can see the shore, but it's kind of a blur," the man replied. The loon said, "I will take you down one more time."

This time, the loon spent more time underwater than previously. Then he took the man back up to the surface. "How do you see now?" the loon asked. The man yelled, "I see perfect now! I can see everything good!" The loon told him, "I will take you back to where I picked you up."

The man was so happy that he got all his sight back. The loon did that for him. So that is the story.

*"A long  
time ago,  
you told me we  
were partners.  
If that is  
the case,  
maybe you  
could help  
me now."*





### STORY NUMBER 3

## *The Sheep Boy*

**W**e have already said that if a person has medicine power from an animal, that person will have no problem communicating with that animal. The other matter is that of parents and grandparents watching carefully over a child at all times for signs that the child might be a medicine power person. If a child behaves or acts strangely or out of the norm, that child is checked out to see if he or she possesses medicine power.

This is a story about a Mountain Indian family that had a child who acted and behaved strangely. The family was advised to find a strong medicine person who would find out if the child had any medicine power. So this was done. The medicine power person reported back, “The child has a very

strong medicine power from an animal. We think it is that of a sheep.”

The parents were advised to look after the boy very carefully. “Don’t interfere. Don’t get mad at him if he acts and behaves strangely. It is not the child’s fault that he is this way. Later on, he may grow out of it. Who knows? People might benefit from this boy. Try to stay alone on the land. Having too many other children around may affect the boy. That is why you have to be careful.” The parents were also advised that when the boy got older, he might wander away a little, but they were not to worry. “Be careful,” they were advised.

The family stayed alone in the mountain country. It was a beautiful land where one could see mountain peaks everywhere. There were not

too many lakes, but there were a lot of river valleys.

The child got bigger, being eight years old. He acted and behaved strangely, but the parents did not interfere. They truly loved the boy. He played by himself quite a bit. The parents noticed that he would wander away on his own for short periods of time.

One day, the parents said, "We will sneak up and spy on him to find out where he goes. We will observe the boy, but take care not to show ourselves, as that might have an effect on him." So, as they spied on the boy, he wandered out alone. Not far away, there was a small pond with a creek nearby. The boy arrived there. He played with stones and started yelling.

Soon a small sheep appeared and went up to the boy. The boy hugged the sheep. They squawked at each other. They seemed to understand each other well. The small sheep jumped into the small pond of water. The boy took his clothes off and joined the sheep. They both tried to swim. They squawked a lot. A small bird, like a spruce grouse, joined them. Robins, whiskey jacks and other birds were making a lot of noise too. Everybody seemed to be having a lot of fun.

*He grew up to be a good man and the people really benefited from him.*

The parents observed them from their hiding place. The parents were really happy because now they knew that the boy had medicine power from the sheep. They were proud of their son. Later in life, the boy outgrew his strange behaviour. He grew up to be a good man and the people really benefited from him. When he got older, he became a leader for a large group of people. He was a well respected Elder until the day of his death. So this is the story of the boy.





#### STORY NUMBER 4

## *Yamoria*

**W**hen the world was new, a lot of strange things happened. A lot of people possessed medicine power. Some possessed a lot and some very little. The majority of the people had no medicine power. They were normal people, just like you and I, but they were able to hear and see what medicine power could do. That is why the aboriginal people believed in medicine power when the world was new.

We believed that medicine power is a creation of the Creator. Some individuals have too much. There must be a reason for that, but we don't know. It's a mystery. When the world was new, there was one individual who had too much medicine power. His name was Yamoria.

Yamoria was perhaps the most powerful medicine power person throughout history. Because of that, his legendary feats are hard to understand sometimes. He was able to fly anywhere with the spirits. He was able to go from place to place very quickly. He could talk to any animal or bird with no problem. He could make himself into an animal if he wanted to.

This story is about Yamoria turning himself into a beaver. He was interested in the beaver because he thought the beaver was a smart animal. So at one time, he turned himself into a beaver and wandered around beaver country.

Yamoria came to a big beaver lake. It was late fall and the beavers were busy. He went to a beaver house and there he met the male and female heads

of the beaver family. Playing his role as a beaver, Yamoria told the other beavers about his problem. He related to them how he had lost his beaver wife and that he got so lonesome that he just took to wandering around. "It's getting late in the season now. That is my problem," Yamoria said to the beaver family.

The head beaver told Yamoria, "You can stay with us for the winter. There is still a lot of work to do yet." Yamoria thanked the beavers for their hospitality. He stayed with them and began to study them.

Beavers are very busy animals and smart. Like human beings, they plan far ahead for the future. They know that winter is approaching and that they are going to be frozen over. They also know that they can save food and survive under the ice.

They start by building a house. They make their house so that animals like bears and wolverines cannot break it up and kill them. The beavers pile a lot of mud, stones and dry wood, and then mix this with wet mud. It then freezes, making it hard for any predatory animal to break. The beavers are quite safe in there and that is where they sleep and eat. They also have a place where they can sit.

This particular beaver family had three kits. All together, there were six beavers, including Yamoria. To store up food, they would go into nearby bushes to chew down willows and birch, aspen and poplar trees. They would pull these to the vicinity of their house. They cut bigger timber into smaller pieces with their teeth and hauled them to the front of the house. Here they stored them underwater, far down from the ice. This was their food storage and all winter long they could eat from here. The lake also provides other beaver foods that grow underwater.

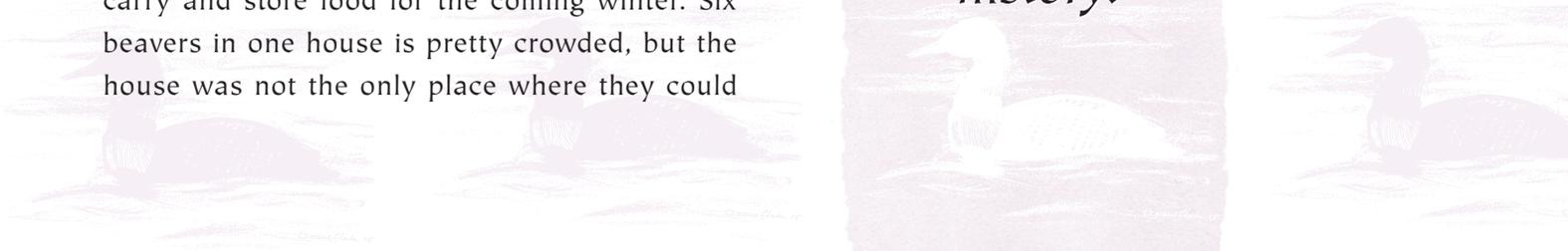
So Yamoria worked like a beaver, helping to carry and store food for the coming winter. Six beavers in one house is pretty crowded, but the house was not the only place where they could

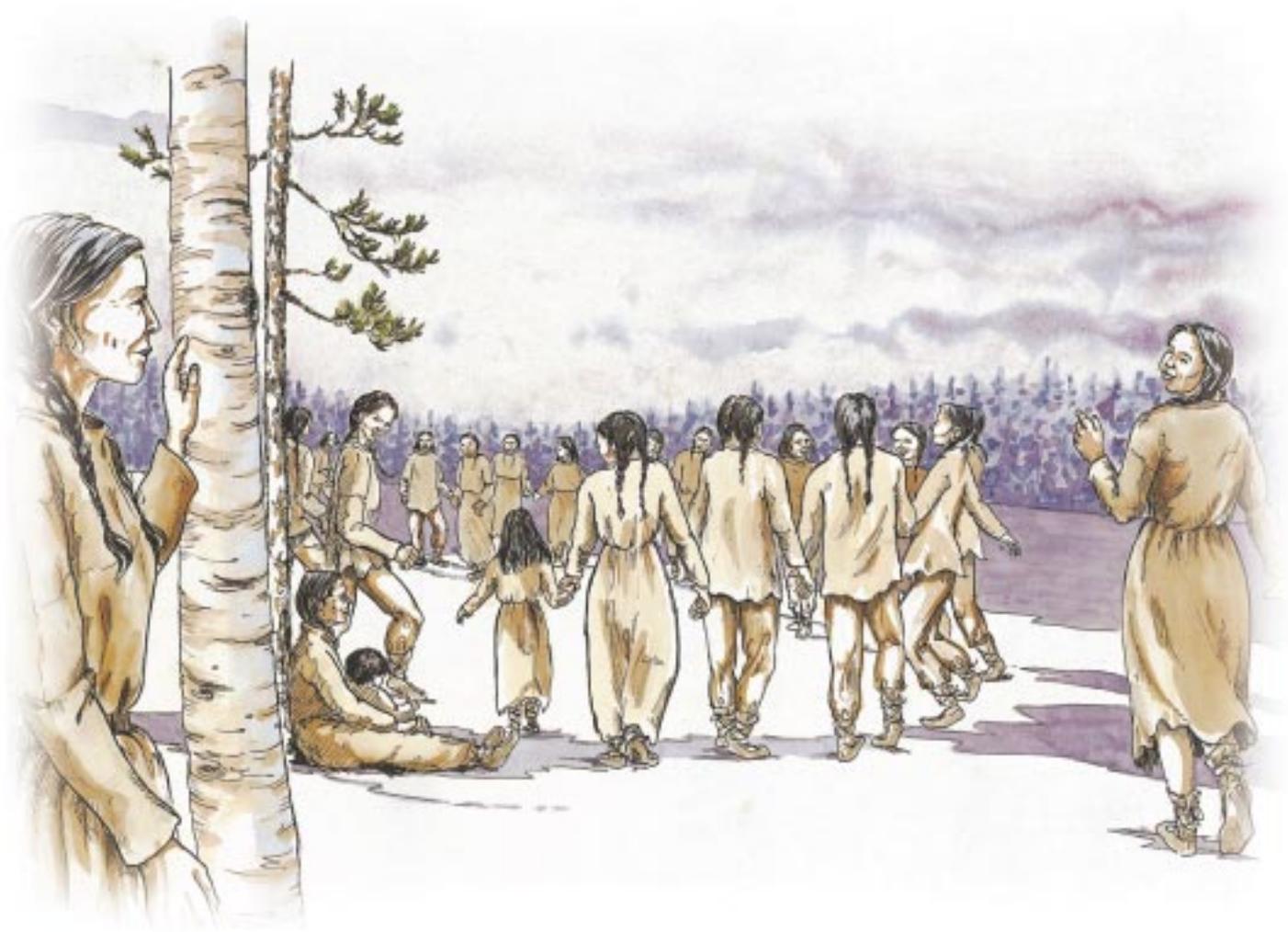
eat and rest. All around the nearby lakeshore were dens that the beavers had made. They were dugout passages leading from the lake to under the banks of the lakeshore. The beavers had chewed and clawed places where they could eat foods from the bottom of the lake and also rest.

Small, young beavers are like human kids – they get into mischief. Their mother spansks them a lot with the flat of her tail. The beavers, like humans, will also ration their food if it is going to be a long winter and springtime is far away. The mother beaver will even chew off a short length of willow and tell the baby beavers to eat only that for today because they are short of food. Beavers watch carefully over their food to make sure they have enough under the ice until it thaws and the shores are ice-free. Then they can go on land to the bushes and eat there.

This was the life of the beavers that Yamoria studied. He also found out that the beavers have an agreement with the robins, sparrows and loons. They will squawk a lot to warn the beavers if there are animals or someone around who might harm the beavers. If this happens, the beavers rush to their hiding places and stay there all day. They are safe. So this is the story.

*Yamoria  
was perhaps  
the  
most powerful  
medicine  
power person  
throughout  
history.*





## STORY NUMBER 5

# *A Child Lost*

**I**t was springtime in an area close to Rae in the Northwest Territories. A large group of people had a spring hunting camp along a river. The spring hunt was over. The leaves were turning green. The bushes were all green. As usual, the kids played all the time while the adults visited their rabbit snares and fishnets. Everyone lived off the land.

An incident happened involving a boy named Joe, who was ten years old. Joe was playing by himself in the bush one evening. He spotted a butterfly and he wanted to catch it. He was just about to catch it when it flew away. Joe kept on chasing the butterfly. Possibly Joe was receiving some kind of medicine power. Therefore, he was not normal. He was in a trance-like state,

appearing not to know what he was doing. He kept running and chasing the butterfly. He became completely lost.

Joe became very tired and fell asleep under a tree. That is where he had a vision which revealed to him that he would have medicine power for dancing. Three birds – a ptarmigan, a spruce grouse and a robin – appeared in the vision. They all wanted to give Joe medicine power for dancing. All three birds urged Joe to dance with them, so he danced with the birds.

The spruce grouse is the best dancer amongst the birds. Joe danced with that bird for a long time. All three birds gave Joe medicine power for dancing. That was part of the vision. Joe slept for a long time under that tree.

*As life went  
on, Joe  
became  
famous as  
the best  
dancer in  
the country.*

In the meantime, Joe's relatives were worried. They could not find him anywhere. Everybody was out looking for him and calling his name. Joe woke up and sat up. He did not know where he was. He thought he heard some yelling. It was people calling his name. He was found.

Joe said nothing about what he had experienced or how he became lost. He had received medicine power for dancing, but he kept that information to himself. He never talked about it. He thought that it was not a good or useful power for hunting or fishing, so he just kept on living as he was and said nothing about the power that he had.

As life went on, Joe became famous as the best dancer in the country. He could dance any kind of dance and do it well. It did not matter what kind of dance. He could jig to a fiddle very well. He could dance all kinds of dances because he was given medicine power for dancing. That was his gift. This gift came in handy for him during times of celebration like Christmas, New Years, Easter and during Treaty time.

When the Dogrib people celebrated, there was usually a lot of drum dancing. Sometimes, people danced for a long time without taking a break. It is known that a drum dance might last for up to two or three nights. People get tired towards the end. The drummers hit the drum but nobody gets up to dance.

Joe is old now, but when he gives a yell and begins to sing his own drum song, the people get re-energized and start to dance. Joe does not do that a lot, but people recognize that he has medicine power for dancing. The end.

*Three birds –  
a ptarmigan,  
a spruce  
grouse  
and a robin –  
appeared  
in the vision.*





## STORY NUMBER 6

# *Andrew from the Mountain: a Prophet*

**A**ndrew was a Chief of the Mountain people. He was a good man. When Andrew was a child, he saw a vision, in a way similar to the vision that Ayah saw. Similarly, he was advised to be a good man. Andrew was about sixty years old when the vision appeared to him again. In the vision, a holy man told him, “I will come more often now and tell you what to preach.”

Andrew was a good, loud speaker and he preached a good message. He preached about God, just like a priest. Andrew was a big help to the church. He helped to make people who were good all the time. Nobody ever drank whiskey while he was alive.

Andrew was very fond of children, and parents

would take their children to his tent to listen to him preach. His method was about the same as that of Ayah, in that he could see into the future and talk about it.

At one time, the vision offered Andrew some songs. The vision said, “Make yourself a drum and I will offer you holy songs. Sing these holy songs to your people from now on. From time to time, a drum will appear to you and the new holy songs will come from the drum. We will give you the power to sing these holy songs. You will sing these songs that you hear to your people right away. When you sing, all your people will become more focused on the true God in heaven. The people will pray to the Creator as they wish and ask the Creator for whatever they need. And that

*It's a miracle  
that Andrew  
did not have to  
practice to  
sing the new  
songs.*

is the way your people will pray.”

From then on, Andrew came out with new drum songs the people had never heard before. The songs came out in visions to Andrew more often. There were no set times or schedule for the visions and songs to be revealed. They just occurred anytime and anywhere.

The Mountain people travelled a lot to different areas to find big game animals. The year that Chief Andrew received holy songs was a great year for the people of the Mountain group. Legend has it that sometimes, as the people travelled along in the cold of winter, Andrew would yell to the people, “A holy song is coming to me.” They would stop right there, with no time to make a proper fire. They would gather some dry leaves, set fire to it and heat the drums over it for Andrew. Right away, Andrew would start singing the new song that was being revealed to him – right there on the land in the intense cold of winter.

It's a miracle that Andrew did not have to practice to sing the new songs. He immediately went ahead and began singing the new song that was revealed to him. When he received a new song, the drummers practiced the new song that very night. Almost everybody would begin to sing the new song right away.

That particular winter, a great religious movement began amongst the Mountain people because many new songs were revealed to Andrew. That winter, Andrew received fifty-three new holy songs. And all of Andrew's family and drummers sang the holy songs that summer in Fort Norman.

Many visitors came from far away to hear and listen to the holy songs. Some came from Fort Simpson, Wrigley and Good Hope. All Dene people were moved deeply when they listened to these holy songs. The people became more religious and behaved better. This movement showed that the people really benefited from the true church. Because Andrew was a good prophet, the people have never forgotten his good deeds and work on the path to a true religion.

*Andrew  
would start  
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new song that  
was being  
revealed to  
him – right  
there on the  
land in the  
intense cold  
of winter.*





## STORY NUMBER 7

# *A Time of Two Winters Together*

**T**here is a story that two winters came together at one time and resulted in a lot of hardship for human beings and all animals. At that time, as usual, springtime came to the land and the snow started to melt. Even the ducks returned. Then the north wind began to blow fiercely and the weather turned cold again. It snowed a lot. The season turned into another winter.

It continued to snow for a period of two months. The snow got so deep that it was impossible to walk around without snowshoes. It was not only humans who had problems, but the animals endured hardships too. They could not walk around and feed themselves anymore.

Prior to this occurrence, the Dene people were

poor, but now the advantage was with the Dene people. It became easy to kill big game, because the animals had a hard time moving in the deep snow. All the hunters had to do was walk right up to the animal and kill it.

Some groups did too much killing. Across the country, the Elders began to worry about the fate of big game animals if this continued. “If we keep on hunting in this way, we will end up killing off all the animals. We will have nothing for the future,” the Elders said. All the Elders got together and they started to make a policy. They advised the people to obey the policy for the good of the people and the animals. The Elders said, “We should save the animals instead of killing them off.”

*“If we keep on hunting in this way, we will end up killing off all the animals. We will have nothing for the future.”*

In time, they were able to get together and were also able to come to a good decision and a good policy. The Elders cautioned the Dene, “Only kill animals when you absolutely need to. You have to think about the future and of the children in the future. If you kill everything now, you will surely die in the future. On top of everything else, go all together and feed the caribou, the moose, the sheep and other animals whatever it is that they eat.”

All winter long, the people did that – carrying out the advice of the Elders. They tried their best to save the animals from extinction. In time, the two winters were over and it was springtime again, but the problem was not over. Because there was a lot of snow all over the country, the spring melt caused a great flood over the land.

It was a terrible flood and the people really suffered. The Elders advised the Dene to move to high grounds to save themselves. The people started to travel all over the country in search of high grounds. It was a very bad spring. Human beings are smarter than animals so they were able to save themselves, but a lot of animals died during this terrible flood.

An incident occurred during this time where two beavers were swimming on the great Mackenzie River. As they swam, they spotted a porcupine stranded on a small island. The beavers came to the island and asked, “What is the matter with you?” The porcupine said, “I am stuck on this island. I will drown and die because I cannot swim. Please help me somehow. I will reward you in some way.”

One beaver responded, “Get on top of me, on my back. I will swim with you to the mainland.” It was a long distance to swim, but the beaver was a good swimmer, so they succeeded in getting the porcupine to the mainland. The beavers advised the porcupine to stay on the east side of the river at all times and to keep away from the west side of the Mackenzie River. It is still that way today.

The beavers asked the porcupine, “What are you going to give us now that we have saved you?” The porcupine said, “With the power that I have, I will put all your fat on your stomach side so that you can float and swim better.” That is why the beaver has no fat on its back. The porcupine did that. That is the end of the story.

*“You have to think about the future and of the children in the future.”*





## STORY NUMBER 8

# *The Story about Survival of a Baby*

**W**hen the world was new, a lot of strange things happened. These strange things happened because of the medicine power that existed at that time. There are a lot of mysteries surrounding people receiving medicine power that we don't fully understand. Medicine power is the creation of the Creator. Therefore, the Creator is responsible for giving certain individuals medicine power. Some are given a lot of powerful medicine, some very little.

Because medicine power is the property of the Creator, the Creator handles it. If a promise based on such power is made, it will never fail. If a promise is made to an individual that he or she will live a long and healthy life, that will happen. It would not fail.

This story is about the Mountain people who made their living between the Yukon Territory and the Great Mackenzie River. In the springtime, these people built mooseskin boats and travelled down the tributary rivers to get to the Mackenzie River and the trading post. The rivers were dangerous to travel due to rapids and deep canyons.

One time, a group of Mountain people built a mooseskin boat to travel to the main big river. The water was low that spring, making travel on the rivers more dangerous. At a junction where one river joins another big river, two large families began to build a mooseskin boat to travel down the river to join another family at the fork of two other rivers further down.

When the big group got to the fork of the rivers, they waited for the other mooseskin boat to arrive. They had planned to go from there down the river together. The bigger group waited for two days, but the other boat did not arrive. The people began to worry because the river waters were low.

The bigger group prepared to conduct a search upriver for the other boat. They emptied the boat and went in search of the missing boat and people. They knew about a dangerous spot on the river where there was a deep canyon and turbulent rapids.

What had happened was that the mooseskin boat had hit a sharp rock on the river bottom and then banged against the canyon walls and broke up. All the people in that boat except one had drowned. We have information from a baby who was the lone survivor. When the baby got bigger, he was able to explain what had happened – that everybody else had drowned in the powerful turbulence of the river.

Back to our story... the searchers, pulling the boat up the river, saw a baby standing and crying on a sandbar. They picked up the baby, made a fire and took care of the baby. When they looked around, they found pieces of the broken-up mooseskin boat and also some bodies. They knew that everybody else had drowned. That is the first part of the story.

Much later, the baby explained, “Two beavers made me swim between them and took me to a rocky ledge. They held onto my clothes with their teeth and they swam through the rapids with me. They placed me on the sandbar. In no time, a she-wolf with a lot of pups came and took me in the bush where she had a den. I slept and sucked the wolf’s teat for milk and nourishment. I played with the pups and we understood each other.”

One time, a grizzly bear brought a fat caribou rib and left it in front of the wolf den. The pups started to eat it and the baby sucked the juice from the fat meat and also ate some of it. The

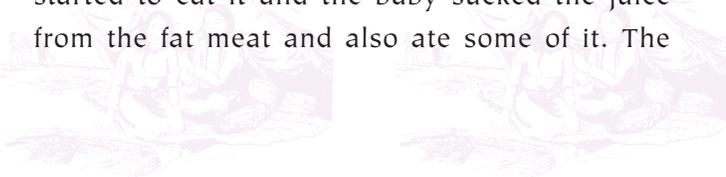
grizzly bear knew the baby was there because the baby had grizzly bear medicine power and they could communicate easily.

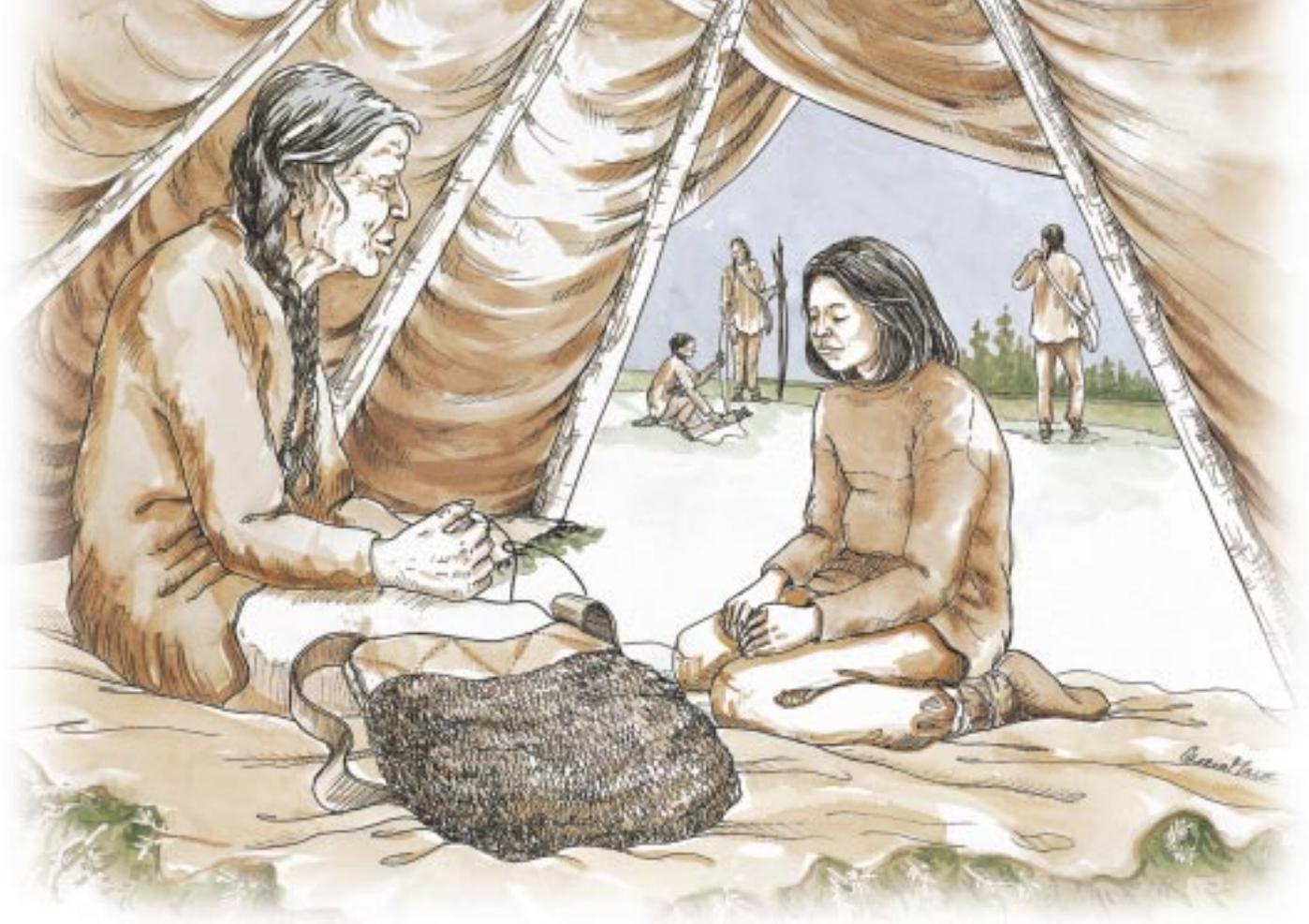
After about five days, the wolf took the baby to the sandbar on the river. The wolf went into the bushes close by. In the meantime, a lot of animals and birds came to visit the baby. He was not at all alone or lonely. Beavers, muskrats, otters and minks all sat on the shore. Small animals like squirrels, martens and mice all came to the baby.

Before long, the people who were travelling up the river and searching arrived. All the animals and birds took off. The people came and picked the baby up. They knew that the others had drowned. The searchers returned home with the baby.

Almost immediately, two strong medicine people conducted an investigation on the baby. When they had finished, they reported that the baby is a strong medicine power being and that he is alive because the beavers had come to his rescue quickly. He was promised by his medicine power that he would live very long. That promise cannot be broken. So good foster parents were needed to raise the boy. Later in life, everybody benefited from the boy. He helped a lot of people. So we have to do the best to raise the baby boy.

*If a promise is  
made to an  
individual that  
he or she will  
live a long and  
healthy life,  
that will  
happen. It  
would not fail.*





## STORY NUMBER 9

# *The Making of a Prophet when the World was New*

**T**here was a man whose name was Lewis Ayah. His regional village was Fort Deline in the Northwest Territories. He died in September 1940. Ayah was one of the greatest men who preached about the true church. He helped the early missionaries a great deal with his preaching. Ayah was also responsible for helping the Dene people to be good citizens and to be religious. The people behaved because of Ayah's teachings.

Even in his old age, Ayah continued to teach and preach everyday. Parents and Elders went to his tent continually. The parents brought their children so they could listen to Ayah preaching.

The children grew up with this kind of teaching and that is why the people stayed in Ayah's neighbourhood. He helped to keep them in line.

It is not hard to understand Ayah's position as a prophet. We are all religious people. We learned that there is only one God and that he helps all the people on mother earth. Nothing is difficult for God. He is the highest power on earth and in the universe. He even helped the poor Dene people here long before the arrival of the white man. He created prophets so that they could teach.

We will focus on Ayah because the story is short. When Ayah was a child, he had a vision. A person dressed in white appeared to him. The

*“You have  
been picked to  
be a preacher  
when you  
are older.  
I want you to  
be a good  
person.”*



being in the vision told young Ayah, “You have been picked to be a preacher when you are older. I want you to be a good person. Do not sin. Be a good person as much as possible. Then I will come back and talk to you again.” That was the vision Ayah saw when he was a child. He wished with all his heart to see that man again.

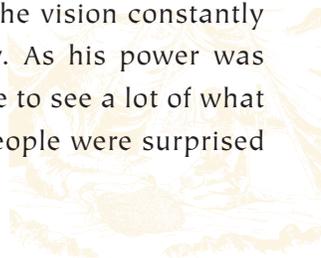
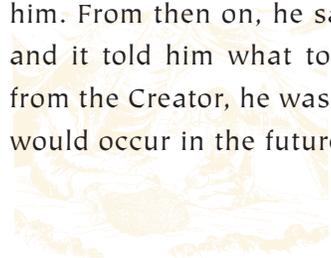
Ayah tried all his life to be a good person, but he did not have any more visions. Because of this, Ayah thought he was not living right. Years and years went by. Ayah waited for forty years. At long last, the vision that he had waited for so ardently appeared.

Ayah was about sixty years old by then. He started to preach and all the people listened to him. From then on, he saw the vision constantly and it told him what to say. As his power was from the Creator, he was able to see a lot of what would occur in the future. People were surprised

by the knowledge that Ayah had in regards to what would happen in the future. He had this knowledge because the vision instructed him about everything.

Ayah was a great man. He explained everything about God the Creator like an educated priest. He preached a lot. The people soon began to bring their children to hear Ayah preaching. Elder Dene storytellers understood what Ayah was saying and began to retell his words. Because of Ayah’s preaching, many Dene people became good citizens and behaved well. There was no drinking in Deline while Ayah was alive. It was much later that people started to drink.

*“Remember  
that doing  
work for a  
living  
is part of the  
Creator’s plan.  
Therefore,  
if you work,  
do not  
complain.”*



*Ayah was one of the greatest prophets of our time and people benefited from his predictions while he was alive.*



Ayah predicted a lot of events and issues that would come about in the future Dene movement and they all happened. He said the Creator has a plan for the kind of lifestyle that the people should live. He told the people that, but they did not listen. At that time there was no school or education, as we know it today. The Dene people knew only about hunting and fishing, and life on the land. They did not read about other nations, so they had no knowledge of the events of their day. They probably did not really believe Ayah and his predictions.

Ayah said, “The Creator planned for you people to live that way. There is everything that you need on mother earth – food, hide for clothing, brush to sit on, wood to keep you warm. You could

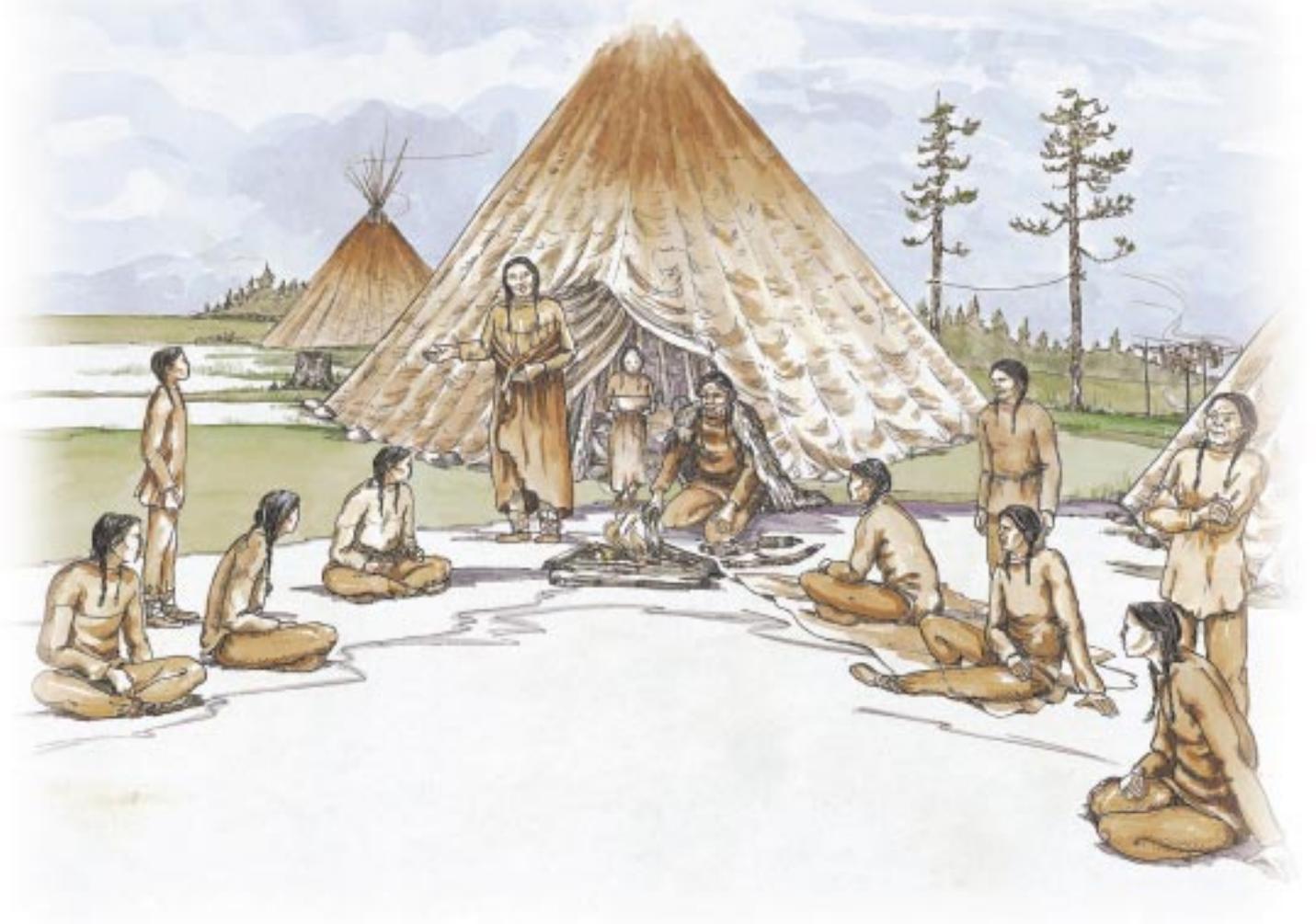
harvest the land and eat well. All you have to do is work hard to get what you want. Remember that doing work for a living is part of the Creator’s plan. Therefore, if you work, do not complain. Don’t get mad, don’t get mad. If you live that way, God will reward you when you die, but if you get mad and complain, you will never receive a reward from the Creator.”

Another event that Ayah predicted was that the Dene way of life would change. Some kind of power would come from somewhere and people would listen to it. Their lifestyle would change and they would be affected by the change. “I see that in the future,” said Ayah. “Whatever you do, do not change your lifestyle. If you do, you will be sorry later.” He said that to the people, but the people did not listen.

In 1940, the federal government started to develop the Northwest Territories. They began to improve government services in the North by introducing education, health care and welfare. These services really altered the Dene way of life. Dene children learned to speak English and there was a change in languages spoken by the children. Kids did not listen to their parents anymore. Adults spent less time trapping and hunting. Pretty soon, nobody used the land anymore.

Everything changed. People just stayed in town, being idle and dependent upon welfare for their needs. That is what Ayah had seen. The big land was out there with nobody to work on it. Another thing that he predicted was that far into the future – maybe three generations – there would be a great starvation. Everybody will have a hard time obtaining food. A heat wave will come and nothing will grow. There will be starvation all over the world. Many people will suffer. Anyway, that prediction has yet to come.

Ayah was one of the greatest prophets of our time and people benefited from his predictions while he was alive.



## STORY NUMBER 10

### *Starvation*

**W**hen the world was new, the aboriginal people had hard times surviving the cold winters. The best way was to stay at a good fish lake and make a lot of dry fish in the fall when there was plenty of fish. When cold winter came, the fish seemed to disappear. Elders would say the fish had a hole in deep water. When it got really cold, they would go into that hole. That is why fish disappeared on small fish lakes.

In the mountain areas, it was worse because there are no fish lakes. It was harder for Mountain people to survive. They lived on big game only, and did not have guns at that time. They set snares for big game. If there were a lot of hunters, they chased the animal into a snare. If the people

stayed in one spot for too long, they either chased all the animals away or killed them off. They were always in search of big game and tried to kill as many animals as they could. Today, it is easier because we have good guns. But a long time ago, they did not have guns. They had spears and bow and arrows. They had to get really close to the animal to kill it.

When the world was new, it was really cold. They said it was thirty below zero a lot of times, and that is really cold if you want to kill something. It was almost impossible. That is why, when the world was new in the mountain country, people had a hard time and there was a lot of starvation.

*When the world was new, it was really cold. They said it was thirty below zero a lot of times... in the mountain country, people had a hard time and there was a lot of starvation.*

There is a story about a large group of people who were starving, freezing and dying. This happened more than once. The story is about this group seeking food, but they could not find any. They were starving, but they kept on travelling. The people who were not eating got weak and could not go on. It was too cold and there was nothing to eat. Travelling and starving, it was hard for people to stay together as a group. The strong ones went on ahead and the weaker ones fell behind. When they could not go any further, some of them just made a fire and died there.

There was a widow travelling with her son. She loved her son, but what could she do? The woman thought that if she and her son followed the group they would surely die. "I will detour and make a fire and camp," she thought. That was what she did.

She began looking for a branch with a root that bears like to eat in the summer. People eat it too, with meat and fish. She found the branch. She thought that it was the right one. She told the boy to make a fire at that spot. They were so weak because they had not eaten. Both of them began to bring deadfall wood to make a fire to thaw out the ground and try to get some roots out.

Later that night, the mother began poking around with a stick and succeeded in lifting a root with a knife. She cut a piece. She kept the fire going to thaw the ground so she could get more roots. She boiled the root and the boy drank the broth. They ate the rest of the root. She kept the fire going all night so she could dig out more roots to eat.

In the morning, daylight came. The weather was a bit mild, so she got up and dug for more roots. The mother had saved about four inches of meat. She cut it in half, saving two inches for travel. She boiled the root and meat together. There was not much meat, just a mouthful. They also drank the broth. The mother said, "Son, we cannot stay here. We will die of starvation. We have to keep going."

The boy was only twelve years old and did not know how to hunt or work. The two started walking, pulling their small toboggan. There was not much on it – only a blanket, a small tent and pieces of cloth. That was all. They had a small kettle to boil food in.

The widow and her son walked into a mountain valley late in the afternoon. They saw a large willow patch on the mountain side. They made a fire in the valley. After she got warm, the mother told the boy, "Wait here. I will walk up and check that willow patch. Maybe there are rabbit tracks there." She went and checked. When she came back she said, "I found some rabbit tracks. I will boil the last bit of meat for you." So the mother boiled the last bit of meat, a mouthful, that was all.

The mother had rabbit snares in her pack. She prepared four snares and then she and the boy went to the willow patch. They found a rabbit trail from maybe one or two rabbits. The mother carefully set the snares on the rabbit trail and told the boy, "We will go up the mountainside and reach the willow patch up there. We will come down towards our snares. If we are lucky, we might catch one rabbit."

That is what they did. They snared two rabbits. They were so happy that they could eat now. But the mother was very careful not to eat everything at the fire. She skinned the rabbit, being very careful not to waste even the blood. The mother made a soup with rabbit livers, blood and roots. For the first time in a long time, the widow and her son ate well. She watched the boy carefully, making him eat more. They rested for one day and the mother made more soup, adding a small piece of rabbit meat.

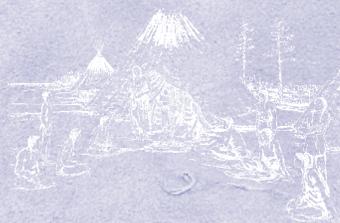
The boy had gained strength, so he steadily got wood to keep warm. They camped and the next day they travelled on the same route. The next day, after they had made camp, they again found a big willow patch on the side of a mountain. They found rabbit tracks. They did the same as before. They snared two rabbits again. The mother fed the boy more and he broke trail, while the mother pulled the toboggan behind him. They camped again.

They were going out of the mountains, in the general direction of the Mackenzie River. That was their plan. They continued travelling. Soon, they found more rabbit trails. They also found a lot of ptarmigan tracks, so they made camp and worked on their snares. It seemed they would survive. They were eating well now, and the days were getting longer and warmer.

As they travelled, they got out of the mountains and into bush country. They were still going towards the Mackenzie River. It was springtime now, and they were eating well. The boy managed to kill ptarmigans and muskrats with his bow and arrow. They kept travelling and finally got to the Mackenzie River, where they found a large group of people staying at a fish camp.

The mother had survived the terrible starvation that occurred in the middle of winter in the mountain country. The boy, now twelve years of age, became a good hunter. And that is the story.

*The mother  
had survived  
the terrible  
starvation  
that occurred  
in the middle  
of winter in  
the mountain  
country.*





## STORY NUMBER 11

# *The Boy Gets Caribou Medicine Power*

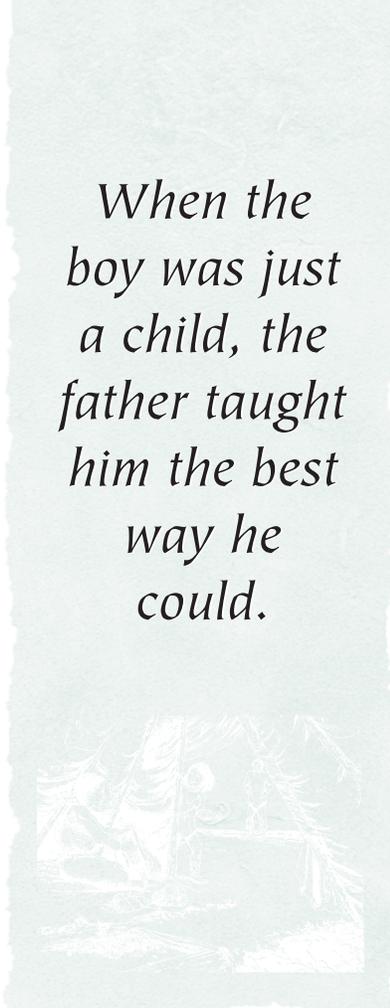
**T**here was a family with a boy to raise. As usual, all Dene people craved to have medicine power in their family. The parents wanted the boy to own some medicine power, but the boy did not receive any. The parents did their best, using whatever knowledge they had, so their boy could receive medicine power. But no luck.

When the boy was just a child, the father taught him the best way he could. “Look,” he would say. “We have a very powerful spirit. He is the Holy Spirit that has made everything for us. He made this earth, so that we could live on it. He made daytime, so we could work and play. He also made night, so that we could rest and sleep. He is a very kind Holy Spirit. We have only to pray and

ask him to give us what we need. We pray this way. Some people have visions that enable them to sing holy songs. That comes from the Holy Spirit. People like your mother and I learn to sing these holy songs so we can pray to the holy Creator,” said the father.

He continued to speak. “I have my dream and pray to the Creator to give you some medicine power, but you are not receiving it. When I have my dream and sing, you should pray very hard and talk in your own way to the Holy Spirit. He is very kind and if he wants to, he may give you medicine power, which we need badly. The Creator wants us to be good people on earth. The Creator knows everything that we do, think, say or talk. If you think or talk in a bad way, or do

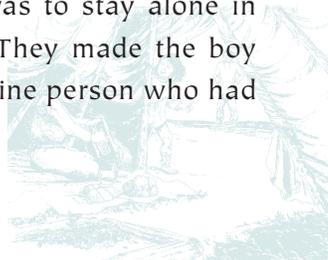
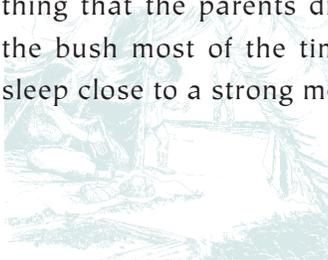
*When the boy was just a child, the father taught him the best way he could.*



bad things in your actions, the Holy Spirit will not give you medicine power. The power comes from the Holy Spirit, it's holy. It is not easy to get medicine power. You have to be good. That's all there is to it."

"Like I said," continued the father, "the Holy Creator is our friend and we can ask of him whatever we need. My boy, if you sin, that will prevent you from receiving medicine power from the Creator. But our friend, the Holy Creator, is a kind person. Right now you are a teenager, not quite knowing what you are doing. When you pray to the Holy Spirit, you should beg him to forgive you for the bad things you have done. Maybe he will forgive and give you medicine power. Your mother and I will also pray for you."

The boy's father preached to him a lot. Another thing that the parents did was to stay alone in the bush most of the time. They made the boy sleep close to a strong medicine person who had



died a long time ago. If the Holy Spirit is present there, he may appear to the boy and give him medicine power. But there was no such luck for the boy.

In the past, another thing that powerful medicine people did was to make a mask. On the land, in the country, there is a lot of that. What they would do is make the boy sleep alone for two or three nights. If the boy was lucky, he would see a vision and receive medicine power.

The parents did everything possible for the boy, but nothing happened. When the boy became an adult, about twenty years old, he began to hunt a lot. During one of those times in May, the caribou were heading north. The hunters waited on the caribou trail. The boy went hunting. There was a long lake where he saw a lot of caribou coming. He ran to the lake and waited. There was a caribou, the leader of the herd, walking far ahead of the others. The boy waited behind a willow patch. The leader was walking close by. The boy sat down and did not move. The caribou stopped and looked towards him. The boy was confused.

*The boy sat down and did not move. The caribou stopped and looked towards him. The boy was confused.*





The caribou walked right up to him and began to talk. "I came here to give you a medicine power pipe. If you wish to talk to caribou, fill your pipe, light it and smoke it. Then you will be able to talk to the caribou about anything you want. It's a medicine power pipe. You will be able to pull caribou herds to your people. In that way, the people will benefit from you. Keep the pipe on your person at all times. It will protect you as well. If you want caribou, you can kill some. Maybe the last three or four. If you talk to caribou, I will answer you in the future," said the caribou.

That is the way it happened for the boy. He now had medicine power from the caribou. From that time on, the people benefited from the boy, as he was able to talk to the caribou when caribou were needed.

*"Keep the pipe on your person at all times. It will protect you as well."*





## STORY NUMBER 12

### *The Ape*

**W**hen the world was new, there were a lot of things around that you don't see today. For example, there was a gorilla. It was like an ape – built on the image of a human being – but a lot stronger. It possessed a lot more strength than man. This ape had medicine power of its own and it was also a dangerous being. It was mean, killing human beings and eating them. That ape roamed all over the countryside, hunting for himself. He hunted better than a human being. He had his own axe, a bow and arrow, and a spear. He walked much faster than a human being and he was much stronger. He was a wicked being. All the people knew about the ape. They kept away from him. They were scared of him.

Into the Mackenzie River area, where the

dangerous ape lived, came a great and powerful medicine man. Yamoria came to visit the people. They complained to him about the ape that lived in the area, so Yamoria made it his business to deal with the ape. He travelled to the area where the ape was living. He arrived on the bank of the river and heard singing further up. Yamoria knew that it was the ape. The ape was paddling along the shore, singing his song and mumbling to himself. He acted stupid – not smart at all – but he was dangerous. The ape was paddling close to the shore on a nice day with lots of sunshine.

Where Yamoria sat, there was a tree leaning over the river. The sun cast a shadow of the tree on the river where the ape was heading. Yamoria climbed from the tree and his shadow was on the water also. The ape saw the shadows, but he

*Yamoria  
climbed from  
the tree  
and  
his shadow  
was on  
the water  
also.*



wasn't very smart. Yamoria waved his arms. The ape grabbed his axe and started hitting at Yamoria's shadow in the water. Yamoria yelled at him, "Your moose is up here!" "Oh!" said the ape. "Up there?"

Yamoria could have killed the ape quickly, but he wanted to play with him to see what would happen. Since Yamoria's medicine power was stronger than any one power, he was not scared of the ape. The ape walked to the foot of the tree. There he talked to himself. "How can I get my moose down?" he wondered.

Yamoria said, "If you kill your moose up the tree, he will fall into the river and you will have a hard time getting him ashore. I will help you. I'll walk right up to you and then you can kill me." So that is what Yamoria did. The ape took his spear and

spearred Yamoria. Thinking quickly, Yamoria ducked away from the spear, but hit his nose, splashing blood all over. The spear only went through his clothing. Yamoria was not hurt at all.

The ape mumbled, "It's a good moose. It must be fat." He mumbled. He took Yamoria a short ways away where he could cook him and eat him. The ape owned an object, a guarding object. It was a medicine power object. It was soft. He put it down so it would be on guard. It would puff up if it sensed danger and would send a signal back to the ape, who would run back to see what was wrong. "Mondah," called the ape. He put the object beside Yamoria and went to cut several wooden hooks for cooking purposes. He talked to himself, saying things like, "This hook is for the ribs and leg and arm."

In the meantime, back where Yamoria was, the Mondah puffed up. Yamoria put his hand on it and it stopped. It couldn't send any more signals. Yamoria got up and put a big, rotten piece of wood in his place. He then went to observe what the ape was up to. The ape came back to where he had put Yamoria and was surprised that there was only a piece of rotten wood there. The ape was really mad. He yelled at Mondah. "I thought you were supposed to guard the moose!" There was nothing for the ape to do but to keep on travelling on the river.

A short distance away, the ape saw a bear and spearred it. He took it ashore to cook it. As usual, he put Mondah on guard to watch the bear and then started to cut wooden hooks for cooking purposes. When Yamoria saw that, he ran to the body of the bear and took it into the bush where he hid it. In its place, he piled a lot of moss. When the ape got back and saw the bear was gone, he was really mad. He was getting hungry, because everything was going wrong. He slapped Mondah a couple of times. "You are no good anymore!" he yelled. The ape was mad. He piled everything into the canoe and kept going.

The ape was a good hunter. He met a whole flock of young geese and killed all of them. He piled up the geese and put Mondah on guard again. As usual, he went to cut wooden hooks for cooking. Yamoria watched him from a hiding place. As soon as he saw the ape start cutting wooden hooks, he ran down and pushed the Mondah so he couldn't puff up. Yamoria then took all the geese and hid them in the bush. In their place, he made a pile of driftwood so it looked like a pile of geese. The ape came back. He was roaring mad! He took his axe and chopped Mondah to pieces. He was really mad this time. He jumped into his canoe and took off. "What is the matter?" he said to himself. "Everything is happening the wrong way. Why is that?"

Of course, it was Yamoria doing things to the ape to get him really mad. Yamoria could control people's minds and he also controlled the ape's mind. The ape yelled, "I am going to leave this country forever." The ape travelled to the Arctic Ocean and kept on going across the ocean. All the apes followed their leader. From then on, there were no more apes in this country. That is how Yamoria got rid of the ape. And that is the story.

*"I thought  
you were  
supposed  
to guard  
the moose!"*





### STORY NUMBER 13

## *When the River People First Found White Man in the North*

**A** lot of things have happened in northern history. There is a resident around the Arctic River area who camps on the river all summer to make dry fish. Kids, as usual, play all over and swim along the shore.

About three hundred years ago, there were no white people yet – just Indians travelling all over this big land. During that time, a lot of individuals had medicine power that was very useful for that period.

One day, the children were swimming and found a wood chip. It was just a simple wood chip from a chopping axe. In that period, there were no axes

like the ones you see today. The Indians used only sharp rock axes, which were like sharp picks. They chipped off wood around the standing tree and it fell. That is how they got wood for their fires.

This fish camp, though, was on the shore of the Mackenzie River and there was a lot of driftwood to use for fires. A wood chip cut by a modern axe is different from a wood chip cut by a rock axe. It is sort of a long chip and the kids found a wood chip. They took it while it was floating by. It surprised them because they had never seen a wood chip like that.

The kids took the wood chip to their parents. The people passed it around and were surprised

*The kids took the wood chip to their parents. The people passed it around and were surprised because the Indians had never seen a chip like that.*



because the Indians had never seen a chip like that. It looked like it was cut with a sharp object and it was also freshly cut. The village people started to talk about it. They said that it was a fresh chip found floating on the river. So whoever cut this chip was up the river. "Maybe they are enemies. Maybe they will kill us in war," said the people. They thought these things because the river people and the Inuit were at war all the time during that period.

When Dene have something they cannot figure out, they usually go to their medicine power people to look into it. A group of Elders took the wood chip to a strong medicine person and begged him to look into where the chip came from because they were worried. The medicine power person agreed to do that. He said that he would make

medicine power to observe things around him. "I will go to the shore of the river. I will do it there," he said. So the crowd of people followed him to the river. "First, I want to observe long distance what I see," said the medicine power person. He said that and then sat on a piece of driftwood and started to sing.

After a long period, he stopped and started to talk to the people. He said that there are strange people up the river. "I want to look into it in a different way," he said. The medicine man once again started to sing and talk in queer language. He talked a lot. When he got up, a small mouse came up to him. They started to talk to each other. Soon the man got up to take a piece of driftwood about one foot long and put it in the water. The mouse climbed onto the driftwood. The man pronounced words and clapped his hands. The driftwood and the mouse shot up the river like a small speedboat. The medicine man talked to the group and said, "Let us wait. The mouse should be back in no time." He was right. The mouse came back on the speeding driftwood and came ashore.

The medicine man and the mouse talked for a long period. "We have finished the investigation, so I will tell you everything," said the man. "Not far up the river, there are three canoes with strangers in them. They are possibly from the head of the big river. Four of them are white-skinned people and they carry a lot of equipment we have never seen. I know that they will not harm us. They are not violent people. They just travel, that's all. Don't be afraid of these people. They are not far up the river. They will be here tonight. Don't be afraid," the man kept saying. He was right.

By nightfall, four canoes were coming. The village tried to be brave. The canoes landed ashore. The Elders approached the visitors and tried to communicate by making hand signs since they could not understand each other's language. The visitors offered small presents to the village

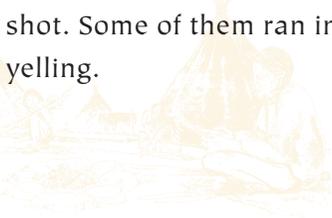
*“Not far up the river, there are three canoes with strangers in them. They are possibly from the head of the big river.”*



people to make friends. They were things like lumps of sugar, small pocketknives and small handkerchiefs. The village people were grateful, but they were still afraid of them.

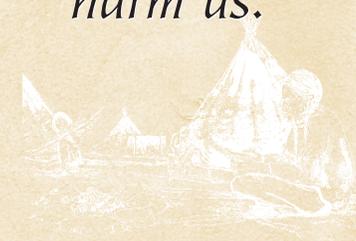
One white worker was planting a big, flat driftwood, maybe fifty yards away. They were planning to show the village people how a gun was fired. The people did not know what the strangers were doing. The crowd, including all women and children, were watching. The worker loaded the muzzle gun and fired at the sign. The people had not expected the loud bang, because they had never seen a gun before. This was the first time.

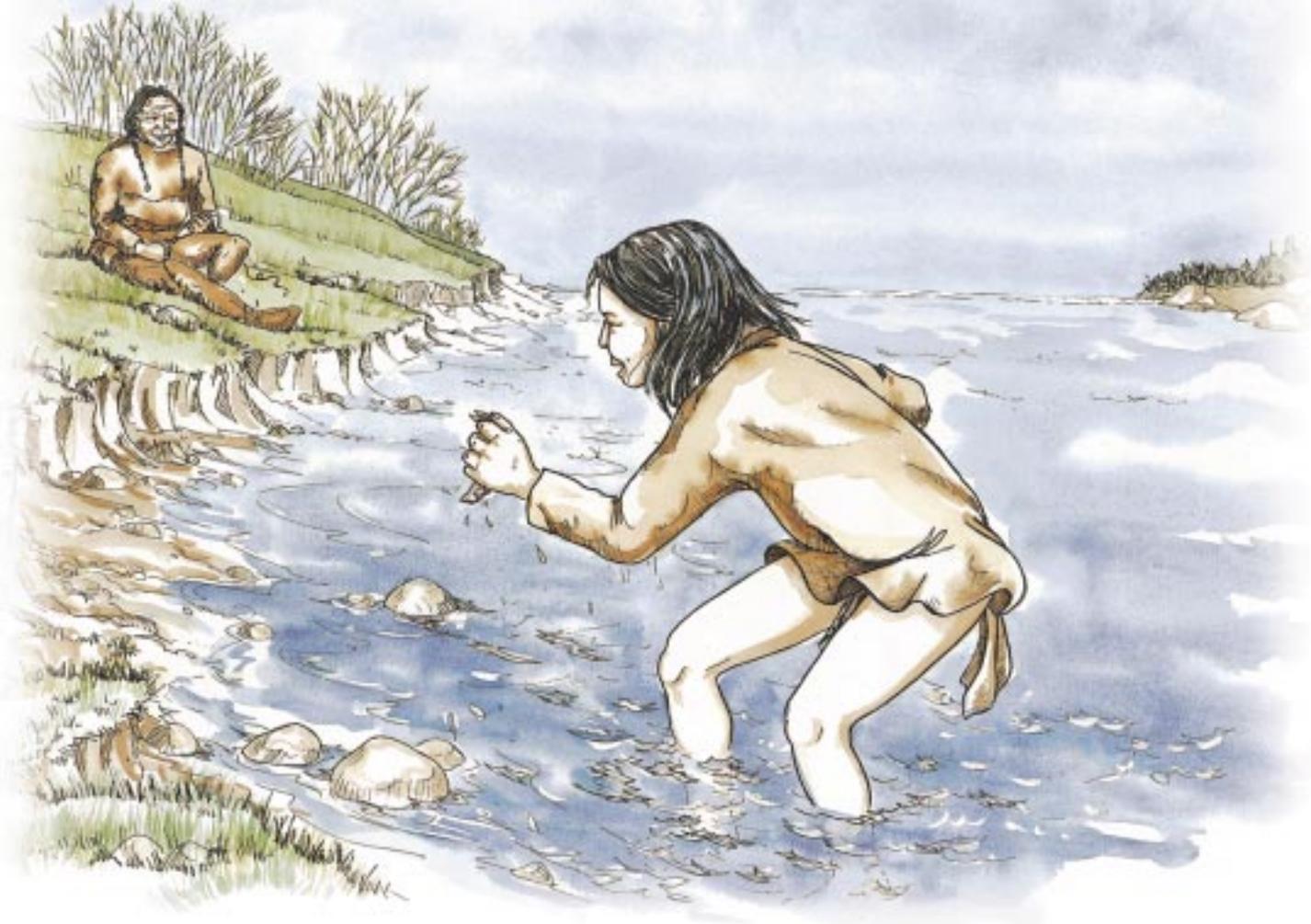
When the gun was fired, it made a big “bang”. The people got very excited and frightened. Some of them yelled loudly, as though they had been shot. Some of them ran into the bush and started yelling.



That was the excitement when the village first heard a gun fired. After the excitement was over, things quieted down. The visitors tried to explain by making signs that in the future they would bring a lot of the things that people need in the bush. “You can have the gun if you give us a lot of fur,” they said. “You can have not only the gun, but other material as well.” So this is the story of the river people when they first saw the first white man.

*“Four of them are white-skinned people and they carry a lot of equipment we have never seen. I know that they will not harm us.”*





#### STORY NUMBER 14

## *The Teachings of Paul Blondin*

**I**n the time around 1926, the Dene people hunted beavers and muskrats on the east side of Great Bear Lake River. There were three families. Even though it was spring, there was still ice on the big lake.

George was only six years old. He was around his mother all the time, in the tent and outside the tent. No one explained to him that the lovely land with the animals and the birds existed. One night, George's mother told him that he was going camping with his grandfather, Paul. George was really excited about this camping trip, but he knew nothing about the beautiful land, and the animals and birds that were out there.

Paul had a birchbark canoe. He sat in the middle of the canoe and George sat right in front of him.

The trip began along the shoreline of the big lake. There was ice in the middle, but there was open water along the shore. Paul talked to George as he paddled along. For George, it was an exciting time on this beautiful land. He heard all kinds of ducks squawking in different tunes and it was music to his ears. George asked many questions and his grandfather answered them.

George asked about the Dene name for duck – which was “chu” – meaning mallard. All duck species have their own name in Dene. In his replies, Paul provided all the information that George needed to know. It was a beautiful night, with not a stir of wind and the lake was calm. The sun was just setting behind the hills.

Paul beached the canoe on a beautiful point of



*George was only six years old. He was around his mother all the time, in the tent and outside the tent. No one explained to him that the lovely land with the animals and the birds existed.*

land to prepare a meal. George was excited and happy. Paul started a fire and told George to do everything that he did. For a six-year-old youngster, it was exciting to be taught such tasks. Paul and George made preparations to start a fire. "You gather dry twigs from the base of a spruce tree and push them together," explained Paul. "Then you hold a lighted match to the twigs until they catch fire. Once they start burning, you add more twigs. As the fire gets bigger, you add bigger pieces of wood to it." A six-year-old who learns to make a fire for the first time is really proud of himself.

In the winter, one usually starts a fire in the same way, but sometimes it is more difficult due to ice on the twigs and bushes. If that happens, you have to use another method to start a fire. You start by first shaving dry wood with an axe.

Once the fire was started, Paul started to cook. He taught George how to hold a knife, then showed him how to clean a fish and set it by the fire to cook. George also learned the proper way

to cook a duck. First he had to pluck its feathers. George's grandpa helped him pull some feathers from the duck. He held George's hand with the knife and steered his hand to cut the duck in preparation for cooking. In the end, they had a good meal.

Paul continued to teach George about nature. "Everything you see here is the creation of the Creator," he explained. "The Creator made mother earth and everything in space, including man and woman. As God is a spirit we cannot see him, but he is close by. He looks after us. Every night we pray to him and thank him because he protects us as well. If we have a problem or if we need help, we pray to him. If we are good, clean in mind and a good citizen, the Creator may give us a gift of medicine power to use as our own.

Paul and George left that area and continued along the shore. Paul talked to George as they moved along. The sun was just coming up from behind the hills. It was a lovely, beautiful morning. It was a great day and a good time to be alive.

The ducks were quacking and making their own music, because when the sun rises the ducks are happy. Paul and George heard a loon call out loudly. "What is that call?" George asked. "It's a loon calling others," said Paul. "We call them "tootsi". Loons have different calls. One is high-pitched, which the aboriginal people recognize as a warning of a windy day to come. In low-pitched tones, the loons are talking to each other."

After a meal, Paul and George kept paddling along the shore of the big lake. Paul continued to talk to George about nature. George was excited to find out that nature was beautiful. He was lucky to have a teacher who was willing and ready to teach him all he needed to know about nature.

They saw a muskrat in a willow thicket by the shore. Paul began to call the muskrat by pursing his lips together and making a high-pitched squealing sound. The muskrat started to swim towards them. Paul shot the muskrat. He let George pick it out of the water.

Every time they approached a shoreline that was thick with reeds and grasses, Paul looked around as if he was looking for something. Eventually, he thought he had found what he was looking for – duck eggs. He was right. They were mallard eggs, eight of them. Paul showed them to George. George almost jumped out of the canoe in an attempt to grab the eggs. Paul grabbed George saying, "Go easy. Don't touch the eggs. If you do, the mother will never come back to the eggs." Paul tried to explain to George that all ducks

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nature.*

have eggs. That's where the baby ducks come from. So for the first time, George saw eggs and realized that they were the babies of ducks.

Paul and George made camp. Paul kept on teaching George how to start a fire, as well as how to prepare and cook meals. Even when he was resting, Paul continued to teach George about the land and nature.

It was morning and the sun was just coming up from behind the hills. "There is no reason why you should be unhappy," said Paul. "Be happy at all times because the Creator wants you to be that way. You see all these ducks quacking and making a lot of noise. They are doing it to make you happy. There is a robin singing for you. He will do that all his life. God made everything that you will need for life. All you have to do is work for it.

That is why the Creator wants you to work for a living, and to be happy and pleased that you are working for a living. Don't sleep during the daytime. Get a lot of exercise by doing small tasks like chopping wood, paddling a canoe, running down a caribou or moose, walking and running. They are good for your health." So Paul preached one night to six year old George. These teachings should also be good and useful for the children of these modern times.

Paul also explained one of the Dene laws. "Love one another as much as possible. Share your food with the poor. Don't harm anyone. Don't quarrel with each other. Be very kind. If you do this, you will live long. Do not worry. The land will provide everything that you need. Be a good person."



## STORY NUMBER 15

# *The Twin Brothers – Yamoria and Yamoza*

**T**he Yamoria family lived on an inland fish lake. All attention was on the twin babies. They were cute, but almost right away the babies acted differently from their peers. The Elder recognized that, so looked for two strong medicine power persons he knew. In time, he brought them over. The men conducted an investigation on the twin babies. At the end, they reported that the babies were very strong medicine beings. That is why they acted differently. “We think the twins can communicate with animals,” they reported. The medicine power persons advised the parents to raise the twins in a good way and not to interfere if they acted or behaved differently. Eventually, the boys might outgrow this phase and begin to

act and behave normally. “Look after them well,” advised the medicine power people.

The parents now knew they had two very powerful medicine babies. Life went on for the family, who lived in an isolated place. Soon the babies were starting to walk. The parents searched for a lovely spot where the twins could play by themselves. They found a large beach on a fairly big sandbar, with a creek flowing out to the lake. The parents pitched their tent in a thick bush, because they did not want animals or birds to watch them. They built a platform, hidden by thick willows, so the mother could observe the babies while they played on the sandbar.

One day, the Elder and the mother prepared the babies to play on the sandbar by themselves.

*So on that special day, the mother took the babies to the sandbar close to the shore of the lake. She left the babies there and then all of them watched from the platform.*

The mother planned to observe them from the platform. Sometimes both parents and the Elder observed the babies because they did not see that kind of show everyday. The Elder said, "We cannot do this everyday. Just sometimes." So on that special day, the mother took the babies to the sandbar close to the shore of the lake. She left the babies there and then all of them watched from the platform.

In no time at all, all kinds of animals started to visit the babies. Beavers, otters, muskrats, small birds, robins, rabbits and squirrels all came around them. On the lake-shore, there were also all kinds of ducks, swans and loons. They were all squawking and making a lot of noise. All this activity took place and different species of animals, especially the young of the various species, visited the babies. It was not a surprise to see certain animals perform strange magical

actions using medicine power. In that period, there were a lot of activities and occurrences that took place with the use of medicine power.

Yamoria and Yamoza were not afraid of the animals and birds that came to visit them. They were related to these animals and birds, and they were also in partnership with them in medicine power. All these activities and events happened and the babies had no problem communicating with all the animals and birds that came to visit them. This was not a surprise to the parents, since they knew what was happening. As parents, they just had to be careful in how they dealt with the twin babies they were raising.

So life went on. It was half a day of a great show when the birds and animals came to visit the babies. As the babies grew, the parents found it was more of a problem to look after the twins. They got into a lot of mischief, so the mother had to constantly hold onto them. It was a lot of work because as the babies grew bigger, they ran around a lot. The parents were afraid that the twins could possibly get lost or be gone forever, since they were also part of the animal and bird kingdom. They were in partnership with the animals and birds, so it would be easy for the twins to turn themselves into one of the animals or birds if they wanted to.

That is one of the reasons the Elder spoke so much about loving the babies and looking after them well, even if it took all three adults all day to look after them. "We will have to please them and agree with them at all times," said the Elder. "We will not interfere with what they are doing, because if they don't like us, they might disappear forever, and we don't want that. We love them so much. They are unruly babies, but they are lovable."

As the babies grew up and got bigger, they got into even more mischief. They would yell and talk in a strange language. Their mother took them to the sandbar to play and went inside to do some

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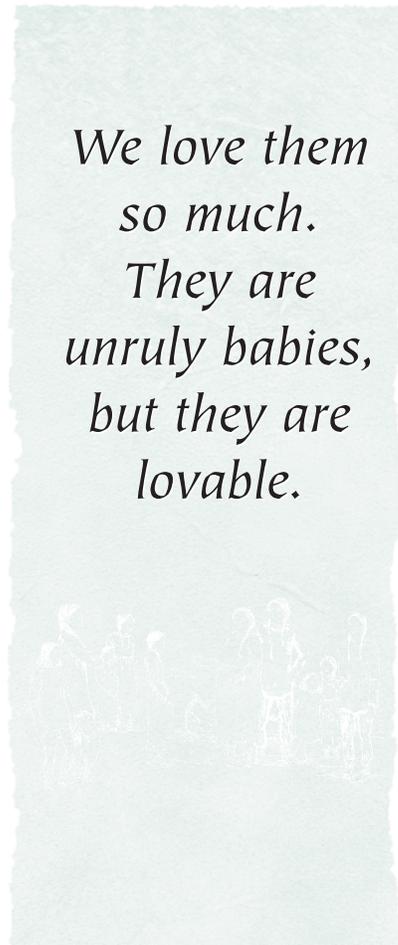
treated them with care and love. Sometimes it was hard for the mother to do housework, because it took so much work to look after the boys. One time they were fighting inside the tent. They grabbed a big water pail made of strong birchbark and tore it to pieces. From then on, their mother put everything out of their reach, otherwise they would have broken everything.

housework. She heard her kids yelling. She ran to the platform and saw two bear cubs playing and fighting with her boys. Since she was not supposed to interfere, she just watched. The bear cubs were much stronger. The boys put up a good fight, but the bear cubs got the boys into the sand and mud. The mother didn't know what to do.

Then a big she-bear came to the sandbar. She grabbed her cubs and took them away, but before she went, she talked to the boys and stroked their faces. When the bears had gone, the mother ran down and took her boys into the tent. Their clothes were all torn by the bear cubs' claws. They were all wet and covered with sand and mud. The mother cleaned them up and put dry clothes on them. She fed them and they were ready for more mischief again.

For small children, they had unusual strength. The parents knew that the boys used medicine power, but they were careful not to interfere. They

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## STORY NUMBER 16

# General Meeting of Humans and Animals

**W**hen the world was new – in the very beginning of life for animals, birds and humans – life was not the same as it is today. Communication between the species was no problem because there was a lot of medicine power. We were able to talk to each other easily.

At that time, it was decided to have a big assembly to make an agreement, similar to one between policy makers. The raven was recognized as the most powerful in regards to possession of medicine power. So it was decided that the raven would coordinate the assembly. All the birds and animals were called to come to this particular place for the assembly. Everything proceeded quickly because of the use of medicine power.

When everyone had arrived, the raven got to work. He rubbed each animal and bird to give them the colour they wanted for their fur or plumage. When he finished with each animal or bird, he gave a law and advice to each. For example, to the moose he gave the colour brown, just like moss, and told him to “feed in the bush so that hunters will have a hard time finding you”. The raven coloured every animal and bird, and gave each one advice on how to live on this earth.

It was a lot of work, but because the raven was using medicine power, the work proceeded along very quickly. He gave colours to every duck and all land birds, and advised them on how to live and behave. The job took the raven all day to complete, even though he had great medicine

power. He finally finished late in the afternoon.

He talked to the human beings, saying, "You are very lucky to be human beings as you are smarter than the animals and birds. You will have great knowledge and you will live long. So try to be good people. I, myself, don't trust you human beings. You think you are smart, so you will probably cheat each other. You will possibly commit crimes too."

The Elders asked, "How can we eat in the future? On this earth, we know that we have to use animals and fish and ducks for food. But we need an agreement so that there are no bad feelings." So the raven made a big speech to the animals and birds, asking them, "Is it okay for the human beings to use you for food?"

All the animals answered, "It is okay, provided they treat us with respect." So an agreement was made. Everything was okay. Now everybody was ready to depart, but the raven yelled to the ducks, "Wait, wait! I painted you so very lovely. Now it's your turn to paint me the loveliest bird in all the world." So the ducks decided to paint the raven. They also decided to fool the raven. "All the ducks are lovely," they said, "but we promise that you will be the most lovely bird in the world. We will blindfold you first, so that when you see yourself later you will be surprised."

The ducks blindfolded the raven and went to work. They took black coal from the fireplace and rubbed it all over the bird until he was completely black. Only his eyes showed as white spots. When they were finished, all the ducks took to the air making a lot of noise as they flew off together. The general meeting was over too, so all the other animals and birds left, running off in different directions.

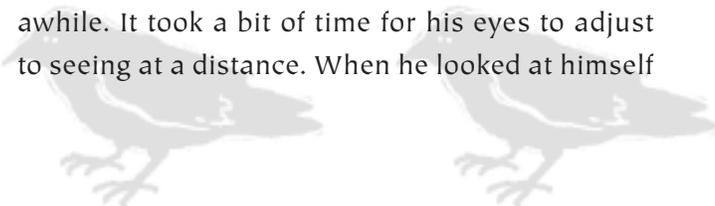
The raven was left alone. He tore off the blindfold and yelled for help because some black coal dust got into his eyes. He could not see for awhile. It took a bit of time for his eyes to adjust to seeing at a distance. When he looked at himself

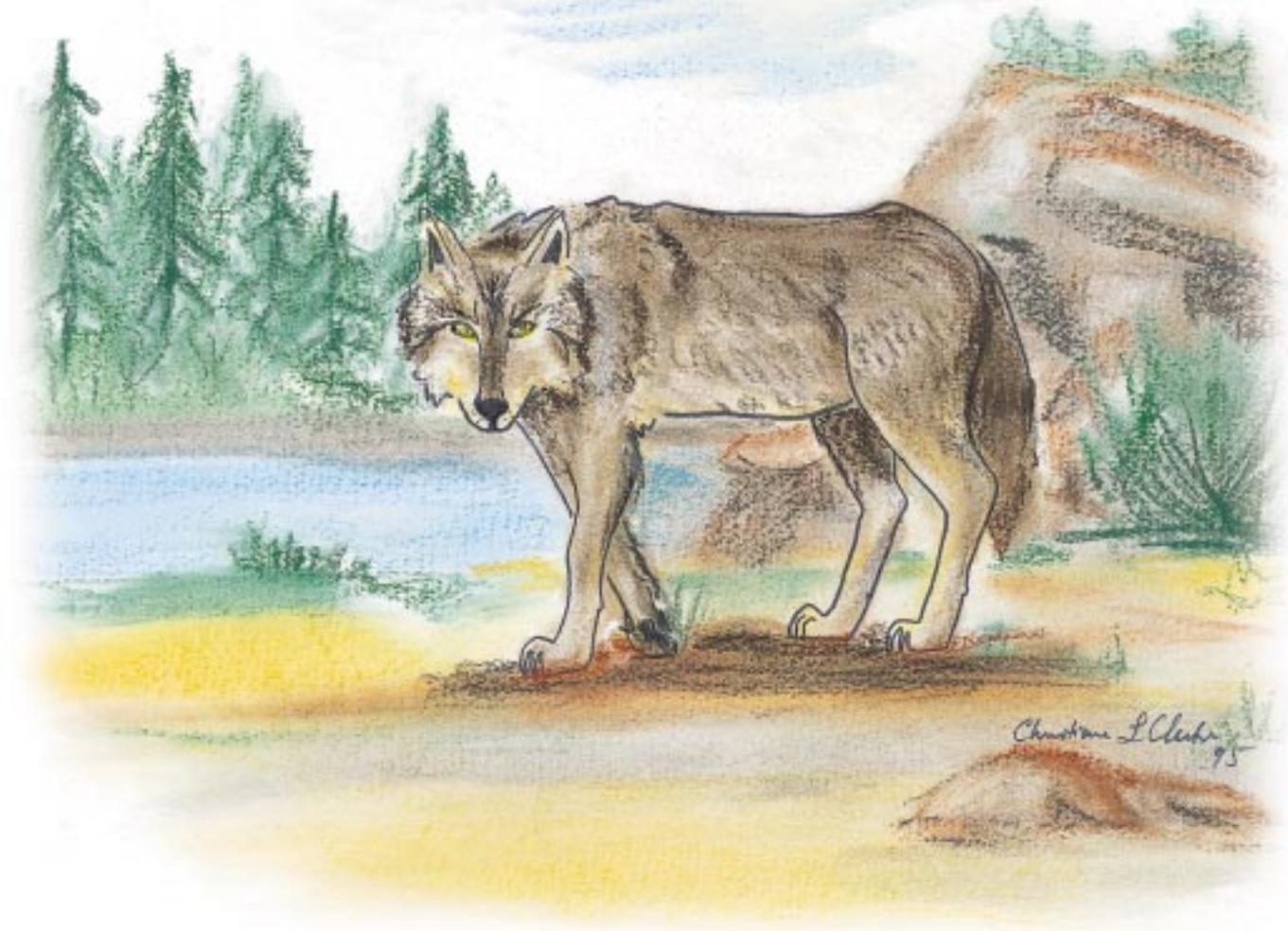
he was completely black. He was roaring mad. He wanted to vent his anger at someone, but everyone was gone. There was no one around. Then, above in the tree, he saw a stupid little owl looking down at him with its big eyes. The raven yelled at him to help clean his eyes.

The owl in the tree answered, "When you were fixing everybody, I was the last. You told me there was a shortage of brains. That is why I don't know what goes on. That is why I just sit here." The raven yelled at the owl, "Get lost!"

There was a loon swimming not far away. The raven took some gray clay and hit the loon in the head with it. The loon's head became gray. That is why the loon's head is gray today. The raven continued venting his anger. He still wanted to get mad at someone. He saw a moose standing a short distance away. "I thought I told you to hide in the bush all the times! Get lost!" he yelled at the moose. So that is the story about the general meeting and what happened to the raven.

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## STORY NUMBER 17

### Part 2:

## *The Twin Brothers – Yamoria and Yamoza*

**A**nd now, the twin brothers reached their teenage years. They were harder to handle, but one thing the boys had were kind parents. The parents had to go to an annual gathering every summer, where the people came together. There were aboriginal Dene from all over at these gatherings and there were a lot of different Dene cultural activities taking place.

Two of those activities were Dene hand games and a lot of drum dances. Everyday at these gatherings, different people told stories. Leaders of different tribes talked about leading a good life and how people should behave towards each

other. They talked about loving one another as much as possible. They also spoke about sharing and helping each other as much as possible.

Yamoria's grandfather went to the gathering place everyday and talked about his two grandsons, Yamoria and Yamoza. He talked about how they came into the world. They were not born by a woman, but were found in a hole in the earth by his daughter, who was out visiting rabbit snares. "As a family, we recognize medicine power and believe in it strongly. We believe that these two babies that came to us were given as a great gift by the Creator."

It's possible for the aboriginal people to

understand the nature of our two boys, Yamoria and Yamoza. We had a strong medicine person investigate the boys when they were babies. They claimed that the boys were very strong medicine beings. Some Elders said, "We thank the Creator. It's possible that the two boys will help us when they get older." The prediction came true.

The two boys became adults and really helped their people in many ways. At that time, when the world was really new, aboriginal people did not act like the human beings of today, because everybody depended on medicine power. There was a lot of medicine power then. A lot of people engaged in magical activities by working with medicine power, so a lot of strange and queer things happened in public.

The brothers came around. The public recognized that they were special because of their medicine power. The public appreciated it when someone with medicine power came along. They liked it, because at that time, medicine power was the only effective power that they depended on. This was made possible in that period, when the world was new.

At that time, throughout the northern country, the two brothers were very special – they who were picked up by a girl from a hole in the earth. That is how Yamoria and Yamoza came to be. Some Elders have said that the Creator sent the two boys to assist the aboriginal people to survive. It could be true.

One morning, the weather was perfect, with no wind. The fish lake was calm, with not a ripple on it. An event that is hard to believe – a magical event – was about to happen. Nobody knew of it. The mother took the boys to the sandbar. It was a big area with lots of room. She told the boys, "Play



*One morning, the weather was perfect, with no wind. The fish lake was calm, with not a ripple on it. An event that is hard to believe – a magical event – was about to happen.*

here and don't fight too much. I will keep an eye on you and come back later to pick you up." The mother, still a girl, went home.

The whole family decided to watch the boys play. They sat on the platform, which was hidden by a screen of willows so that they could not be seen from the sandbar. As the family watched, four ravens landed by the boys. The ravens squawked a lot. They seemed to be having a meeting. A big show was taking place. All the ducks started to fly in and land on the shoreline. They were making a lot of noise too. Big swans, all the ducks, beavers and muskrats were also on the shoreline.

From the bush came all kinds of big game animals – moose, caribou, bears, wolves and foxes. Only the young calves and bear cubs approached the brothers.

*"We believe that these two babies that came to us were given as a great gift by the Creator."*





*From the bush came all kinds of big game animals – moose, caribou, bears, wolves and foxes.*

Their mothers would just lie down at the edge of the sandbar and watch. All these animals and birds had come to show their respect to the twin brothers. Lovely birds, the robins, bounded lightly around the teenage boys. They made a lot of noise. Spruce grouse came. They are renowned as the best dancers because they dance all the time. Four spruce grouse started to dance around the two boys as they sat on the sandbar.

The four ravens were busy coordinating the gathering of animals and birds in honour of the two boys. They flew and circled around the crowd steadily, squawking all the while. We have to understand that if a person has medicine power from any animal or bird, they have no problem communicating. They are relatives. That is how it is.

When the spruce grouse started to dance, the two boys got up and also started to dance. The boys had the same power as the spruce grouse. So, four chickens and two boys were dancing, and the boys danced just as well as the spruce grouse. This started a great commotion in the gathering

area. The swans took off and circled overhead. The eagle circled overhead and flew like a plane. All the birds got excited, squawking and making a lot of noise. Even big moose, the bears and the wolves approached the dancing area. Other waterfowl also put on a show.

Other animals, including the beavers and otters, played in the water in their own comical way. A moose calf gave a ride to the two boys, just like on a wild horse. The calf ran along the shore in the shallow water and then it bucked the boys off in the water. There was great excitement, fun activities and celebration all day. This took place near the annual Dene gathering.

The animals and birds showed their respect to the powerful medicine power beings. Every animal and bird was there. The two brothers had medicine power and they were related to all these animals and birds. Later in their lives, which is another story, the brothers helped all aboriginal people. So this is the story of the two boys in their teenage years. A great thing happened to them when the world was new.

*The four  
ravens were  
busy  
coordinating  
the gathering  
of animals  
and birds in  
honour of the  
two boys.*



## STORY NUMBER 18

# *Waiting to Be a Medicine Man*

**W**hen the world was new, every Dene in the country wanted very much to be a medicine power person. But it was not easy to obtain or receive medicine power and become a medicine person. It is too complex of a topic to explain. It cannot be explained simply and easily. I believe that even a careful well-thought-out explanation will leave unanswered questions. For instance, why are certain individuals favoured with the gift of medicine power and not others who have the same attributes as the select few who receive medicine power? We will try to answer such questions.

Because medicine power comes from the Creator, you have to be a special person to receive

medicine power. It is the Creator's plan for you to have such power, such special power. All the aboriginal people yearn for medicine power for their children. This yearning, in turn, imparts a strong willpower to the parents to educate their children to be good and upright citizens so their goodness might be rewarded with medicine power. Parents, grandparents, relatives and Elders try their best to be good, kind and useful people for the sake of their children.

So this desire or yearning for medicine power consciously and/or subconsciously seemed to have a positive effect on the minds, attitudes and behaviour of the Dene. So the desire and search for medicine power seems to have made the Dene people good citizens all around. It might be called

an impetus or an incentive to be good, though this explanation is simplistic and crude.

Again, we encounter the complexities of medicine power, especially when considered in the context of the human mind. I believe the human mind governs, to an extent, an individual's kindness or selfishness among other good and bad human qualities. So that is what it is.

There is a story, which may shed some light on the definition of medicine power. There lived a good family of four – the parents, one boy and one girl. The Elder was a small-time medicine person, but he was knowledgeable about medicine power education. The couple wished with all their hearts for their children to receive medicine power, but no medicine powers were received. This broke the hearts of the parents. There is a lot of mysterious, surreal and strange work that you do and you have to teach a lot other than just plain teaching.

You have to live in an isolated and out-of-the-way place while your children are small to get away from bad people. Another aspect to consider when pursuing medicine power is the sacredness of the ground in which a formerly powerful medicine power person is buried. The parents will have their child sleep close to that sacred ground, which some people will say is just a grave, but it may be a strong source of power.

Sometimes, medicine power will come to the child sleeping alone nearby. Sometimes, too, a seemingly abnormal landmark or special feature on the land has been made by medicine power. Parents will seek out such places and have their children sleep on or nearby such places. So,

*Parents,  
grandparents,  
relatives and  
Elders try  
their best to  
be good, kind  
and useful  
people for the  
sake of their  
children.*

sometimes the work, sacrifices and rituals involved in the making of a medicine power person can be demanding and hard. It can be frustrating, even heartbreaking, but it can help to make an all-round good citizen. The work is not for nothing.

These parents tried their very best to raise their children in what they believed to be the right way, but no luck. Years went by and the boy was now a man of thirty. Nothing resembling medicine power had come around. The father kept saying to the boy, "You must have done something wrong that prevents you from receiving your medicine power. You have to think carefully about your past. If you recognize the sin that you committed, you must pray to the Creator and ask for forgiveness. Then he might give you medicine power." The father never gave up

teaching.

The parents were getting old and their children still had no medicine power. The father said to the son, "I will make you a canoe." So he made a canoe for the adult son who was thirty years old. He told the boy, "Go on the lakeshore. If you are tired, sleep." So the boy paddled the canoe.

There were a lot of islands. He spotted a woodland caribou swimming. He chased the caribou and speared it. He towed the caribou to a small island and skinned the animal there. He decided to cook the caribou head, but he became very sleepy, so he put his head on the ground.

He fell asleep and that is when a vision appeared to him. Here came an old man with white hair sitting on a flat leaf, paddling to the shore. "What are you doing here?" he asked the

old man. The old man replied, "Some very bad boys stole my wife and they took her across the ocean with them. I am going across the ocean to get my wife back and I want you to go with me. First, you have to confess your sin to me. Then we will go."

The boy was dumbstruck. He did not know what to say. "Grandpa," the boy said, "I am thirty years old. I don't remember committing one sin. I have nothing to confess," he said. The old man said, "You committed one sin that is preventing you from receiving medicine power. Think very hard and try again." The boy could not think of one sin to confess.

The old man said, "All right. I will try to help you. One morning you got up to make a fire. It was becoming spring. There was still snow outside, but it had frozen during the night. Early in the morning it was cold, but there was no wind. You have a good ear. You were young and could hear a long way. While getting ready to make a fire, your sister is becoming a woman. She ran outside past you and you heard your sister pee outside. You had bad thoughts about your sister. You are not supposed to think like that. Am I right about what you did?"

The boy said, "Grandpa, you are right. I did think dirty about my sister, but I didn't think that was a sin." The old man said, "That incident prevented you from having medicine power all these years. I came here to help you, since you have confessed your sin. You can come. Just jump on behind me."

The boy said, "Grandpa, it is too small." "Don't worry. I have travelled across three oceans and

nothing drastic has happened to me yet," the old man replied. So the boy jumped on behind the old man. With three strokes of the paddle, they were across the ocean. There were a lot of people there. The people called the boy by name to come. The old man said, "Go, I will wait here."

The boy received medicine power from all kinds of sources for killing animals and fishing. He received a lot of medicine power from the people. The old man was waiting. He said, "Come with me. I will get my wife. In the future, if someone has taken your wife, you will do the same thing as me," the old man said.

They came to a tent where two young men faced the old man. The old man threw one boy in the air. The boy landed on a forked tree and stayed there. He grabbed the other boy and threw him to the ground. His body stuck in the ground. The old man took his wife out and they went across the ocean to the land where the boy's camp was. The old man told the boy, "When you go home, jump on your blanket. I will come to assist you to sing and I will give you more medicine power."

The boy woke up. The caribou he was cooking was still turning. That was how quick all the action in his vision took place. He packed his belongings, went home and jumped on the blanket. He started to sing and the old man appeared to him and gave him all the medicine power that he needed.

The people of that village were very happy to have a new medicine power person living among them. All the people living close by have benefited from the man with power. So that is the end of the story. It is not easy to become a medicine power person.

*He fell asleep  
and that is  
when a  
vision  
appeared  
to him.*





## STORY NUMBER 19

# *Story about Kenny of Fort Norman*

**A**round the start of the century, 1900, the northern country was very poor. All the Dene had was the fur trader, who tried to get as much fur as possible so he could get rich quickly. The Dene people were so poor that they had to work to survive. In that period, there was still a lot of medicine power around. Most Dene people travelled a lot on this big land in search of areas rich in fur and game. Once they found such an area, they would stay there for the winter to hunt, fish and trap. In the summers, the Dene used birchbark canoes to travel and in the winter they used dog teams.

The two people involved in this story are Paul Blondin and Mr. Kenny. They were about the same age. They grew up together as children, so they

shared secrets. One time in the bush, they decided they would play a hand game. Kenny said, "I will use medicine power to play a hand game against you. See if you can get me."

So they played the hand game. Kenny started. Paul tried to guess in which hand Kenny had the token or object. Paul had the medicine power to use against people who used medicine in a hand game. So Paul used the medicine power in this hand game against Kenny, but it did not work. He could not get Kenny. Paul gave up and said, "I quit." All his life, Paul never forgot that incident.

Now, we go back to Kenny and Paul when they are older. They made a trip to the Yukon Territory to see a fur trader there who was selling repeating rifles, the first ones in the North. In the Yukon,

*“Since you  
beg me,  
I will tell you.  
I have never  
told anyone  
this secret,  
but since we  
are old, it’s no  
use to die with  
this secret.”*

they got involved in a hand game. Yukon people used medicine power in the hand game. Paul begged his friend Kenny to play with them. He asked him this because Kenny never played hand games with his own people.

Paul said, “If we play for one more hour, we will not have even one dog to go home with.” So Kenny agreed, but he did not play. He got a young boy of twelve years old to play in his place. The kid started to play. The kid was good. The Yukon players never got the kid, so his side started to win. Paul used medicine power and made it work so that Fort Norman won the hand game.

Later, they started back on the return trip to Fort Norman. It’s a long trip of 750 miles. At one place they shot two moose. They rested there and feasted on fat meat. In the night, Paul begged his friend to tell him what kind of medicine he used to win the hand game. Kenny said, “Since you beg me, I will tell you. I have never told anyone this

secret, but since we are old it’s no use to die with this secret.

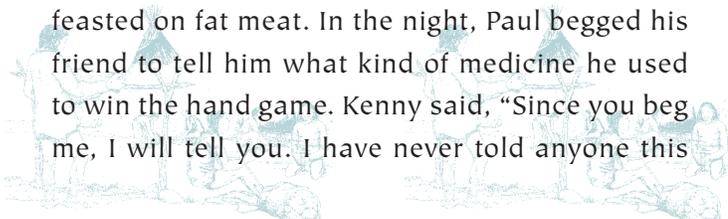
When I was a baby, I had a vision about the mysteries of space. Representatives who looked like human beings came to visit me to tell me that I would have medicine power. They explained everything about the sun, the moon, the stars and the planets, including mother earth. It is possible that, at that time, only Kenny had true news and information about space.

There were about fifteen people in a large tent listening to Kenny talk about space. He started talking about seven o’clock in the evening and spoke all through the night until daylight the next morning. Everybody fell asleep, possibly because they were not interested since no one had heard about space in those days.

Kenny explained, “I had a visit from the sun, in person. He told me that I had medicine power from him so we were partners and that we would work together in the future. Anytime that I needed him, I was to call him. The moon, too, said the same thing.” So it was night when Mr. Kenny explained everything about space.

“Regarding the hand game, I just picked up an

*“I was talking  
to the sun.  
He agreed that  
he will send us  
heat and that  
the weather  
will change.”*



object, a token, and gave it to my grandson to use in playing against the Yukon people. They could never guess the kid because they had no power from the moon. That is why I picked up the object and gave it to the kid to play with,” explained Mr. Kenny.

All his life, Mr. Kenny loved children. He kept food for them to go on picnics on the land, where he also told them stories. The small children loved Elder Kenny. They followed him wherever he went. On one occasion in January, it was really cold in the mountain country – too cold to travel and hunt. The people moved around a lot in their area to find plenty of big game for food.

On one of those travels in search of big game, the people stopped in the middle of the day to make a fire and a meal. It was so cold that there was frost around the fire. Kids were crying because it was too cold for them. Since the people were poor, they did not have proper clothing. Kenny was really sorry for the children. They suffered a lot. They were not eating well because they were short of food.

Kenny yelled at the people to be quiet. “I am going to talk to the sun,” he said. He started yelling

*How could a normal person talk to the sun and change the weather? He did it because he had the power of the sun.*



and talking in a strange language that no one understood. When he finished, he told the people “I was talking to the sun. He agreed that he will send us heat and that the weather will change. Just go a little ways. Find a good campsite and make camp. Tomorrow, it’s going to be hot, so you should be able to get close to big game.”

So this is what they did. Kenny was right. The next day everybody went hunting. The sun was so hot that the snow started to melt. Frozen trees and willows began to get soft, just like in spring. How could a normal person talk to the sun and change the weather? He did it because he had the power of the sun.

The hunters killed two moose that day. The people were really happy because it was warm. Kenny took the kids on a picnic, made a campfire, cooked fat meat for them

and told them traditional stories. The kids really liked Elder Kenny. The kids started yelling and playing in the snow. Kenny was happy because the kids were happy, and because the weather was really hot. So this is the story of a wonderful person, Mr. Kenny.



## STORY NUMBER 20

# *The Man with Master Medicine Power for Caribou*

**T**here was a man from Colville Lake. His name was Mr. Chilley. He was reincarnated to live on mother earth. He claimed to have been a caribou in his first life on the earth. Chilley remembers when he was a caribou and he talked a lot about it.

When he was about to die as a caribou, he told his friend that he would be reincarnated to live once again on earth. But this time, he would be reincarnated as a human being. That is what happened. He was not afraid to talk about caribou lifestyle.

He said that caribou are like human beings. They listen to their leader. Caribou travel long

distances. For instance, they have to travel north to their calving grounds every spring. It is estimated that they travel at least one thousand miles annually one way to reach the calving grounds where their calves are born.

They also return south, covering about the same distance, to their choice feeding areas for the winter. They make this round trip once a year. That indeed is a lot of travelling for four-footed animals that depend upon their bodily energy to move. It's hard for a normal human being to comprehend why the caribou travel such long distances annually. The caribou have their own reasons and purpose for undertaking such journeys.

We see the caribou and we think that it is only an animal with no intelligence or purpose for its existence. They definitely have their own way of life. Chilley said, "Caribou are medicine power beings too, like human beings." He said there is a whole range of medicine power among the animal, bird and human species. A body of medicine power exists. It is the same for all species, elements, animate and inanimate objects, and organisms – in fact, for all life forms on earth and the universe. That is why, with medicine power, communication is no problem between different species and between species that are far removed from each other, for instance. Medicine power people have no difficulty talking to whatever it is they have their medicine power from. No problem at all. So Chilley had medicine power from the caribou.

Mr. Chilley claimed that all caribou have a telepathic system by which they can communicate with each other over long distances. It is logical that Mr. Chilley also had this system, since he possessed caribou medicine power. Therefore, he does not have any problem communicating with caribou anywhere, especially with the herd in his area.

Mr. Chilley also said that some caribou – not all – have full medicine power, similar to human beings. The select group of caribou that are leaders are all medicine power beings and they also form the government for the caribou nation. The caribou have their own laws that they live by.

Since they cover a very large tract of land in their travels, the caribou attend a lot of meetings

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long  
distances.*

to plan for each year's journey. They travel to different places and destinations each year. The reason for that is because the caribou do not want to deplete the food resources. Therefore, they avoid going to the same spot all the time.

Since caribou use medicine power, they have good knowledge of people who inhabit or frequent their migratory routes. They know the migratory routes of the people. They even know their names and they are able to read their human minds. Good caribou also know how certain groups of people treated the caribou the year before.

In their meetings before their journey south to their winter feeding grounds, they discuss humans who live along their routes. They know some groups who didn't treat the caribou well

the previous year. They make decisions to avoid these people the following year. They bypass those particular groups. These groups will not see caribou in a designated year. Chilley explained all these activities and behaviour of caribou because he was once a caribou.

Chilley was a wonderful person. He willingly helped the people a lot with his caribou medicine power. He also liked children. He gathered them together and talked to them about the creation of medicine power by the true Creator, who is the highest spirit that looks after us all the time. He sees whatever we do. He knows if we do bad things and he punishes us for it, so you have to be good at all times. All animals are made for us to use as food.

A very long time ago, there was a general meeting between human beings, animals and birds. At that meeting, there was an agreement



*The people started to kill the caribou. They were happy that the caribou stayed with them until springtime.*

reached that human beings shall have great respect for all animals and birds that they kill for food. And that is the law that we obey. So he talked to the children about having great respect for the animals and birds.

Chilley did not like to see children suffer or go hungry. If he could do something to alleviate such hunger and suffering, he usually did it. In the Colville Lake area, Chilley helped the people not only once, but several times with his caribou medicine power. One winter, a group of Elders pleaded with Chilley if they could have caribou. "We are tired of eating fish. It would be good for the children to eat meat. They are so pitiful," they said.

Chilley answered that he would try to see what he could do. He sang a short song and talked in a strange language. The people hadn't seen caribou for many years, but in two days caribou came very close to their community.

The people started to kill the caribou. They were happy that the caribou stayed with them until springtime. On another occasion, a group of people stayed at a lake expecting the caribou to come. They waited, but no caribou came to them. As the weather got colder and colder, fewer and fewer fish were caught. The people were in bad shape.

*Human beings  
shall have  
great respect  
for all animals  
and birds  
that they kill  
for food.*

*“The caribou have agreed to return to the timberline. If you go over that ridge, you will more than likely see caribou coming towards you.”*

Some Elders said, “Maybe there are caribou on the barrenlands. Maybe we should pack and go there. It will take three days to get there.” They were in bad shape, but they decided to go there. After two days of travel, they were in very bad shape, having had nothing to eat. The kids were hungry and the weather was intensely cold. Some dogs died because there was no food for them.

Travelling under such conditions was bad. Everybody had to walk. They were undernourished. A group of Elders went up to Chilley and asked him if there were any caribou in the area to which they were going. “If not, all of us could die of starvation. Please do something for us. We need to eat meat,” they begged.

Chilley’s answer was that if they started early and travelled all day into the night, they might reach a big lake on the timberline. He said that there he would try to talk to the caribou to see what would happen. The people were a bit pleased.

Early in the morning, they started to travel. They had to camp so they could not reach the big lake that night. Most people had nothing to eat. They were starving, but they started to travel by noon and were able to reach the big lake. They pitched their tents and a group of people begged Chilley to talk to the caribou. He asked the people to make him a drum, which they made in haste and gave to him.

All the Elders and other people went to Chilley. He started to hit the drum and sang. He talked in a strange language that nobody could understand. After a long period, children and young people outside started to talk with excitement. Some older people went out to see what was going on.

Caribou were coming from the barrenlands straight to where they were. People ran out to get their rifles. In no time at all, the caribou were really close. People started to shoot them. That night, they had many a good meal, well-deserved rest and some contentment. In time, they regained their health and worked with energy. The caribou stayed with them until spring.

When the weather started to get warm, the caribou began to move north. The people were worried that the caribou would soon be all gone. “Let us hunt and kill as much as we can. Let us not wait,” they said. So all the people in the village went hunting. They were late. The caribou had already moved north.

Some hunters found some fresh tracks. They followed the tracks. Other caribou joined the first group, so there were about one hundred caribou in the herd going north. The hunters started to run after the caribou, but the caribou would not stop. They kept going. Soon the caribou reached the barrenlands and kept going. The hunters were tired and hungry, so they decided to make a fire. The people were in a bad mood. The caribou had reached the barrenlands and the people would never catch up now.

One Elder yelled at Chilley, “Can’t you help us? See your children? They have been running all day. They are tired and have nothing to show for it. Our plan was to get as many caribou as we could and then make drymeat for the coming summer, but now we cannot do any such thing. We will all go home empty-handed. Please help us!” they pleaded.

Chilley said to them, “Be quiet and I will try to sing.” So Chilley sang a bit and talked in a strange language. When he finished, he said, “I’ve got some good news for you. I have negotiated with

the caribou leaders. Because of an agreement, anytime that I need help, the caribou will help me. The caribou have agreed to return to the timberline. If you go over that ridge, you will more than likely see caribou coming towards you.”

The hunters were so happy that they started to run over the ridge. A great herd was coming towards them. The hunters got as much caribou as they wanted. So that was Chilley again helping his people. Chilley was one of the greatest men who was always ready to help the poor and those in need.





## STORY NUMBER 21

# *The Raven Story*

**T**he raven was a powerful medicine power being among the traditional people when the world was new. He travelled all over the country. One time, he was paddling his ugly canoe near the shore of Great Bear Lake, at a place where a lot of people were fishing. Back then, the raven was considered something of a dignitary – a big shot – so to speak. He would visit the people and talk to them, often regaling them with stories.

One time, the village people he visited had a problem and they wanted the raven to help them. It was at a time when the world was really new, and there were a lot of mysteries and events occurring that were hard to believe. A lot of animals and humans were confused and a bit

mixed up, but communication between all species was not a problem.

It had so happened that a bear and his daughter had passed through the area not long before the arrival of the raven. The fox family was staying in the village also. The bear was also visiting the people. The bear came over to the fox's place. Whatever they were doing is not known, but they began to quarrel and got into a fight. The bear had a terrible temper. He completely tore the fox's front leg out and took off with it in his canoe.

The village residents pleaded with the raven to help them solve the fox's problem – to retrieve his leg. The raven agreed to try his best to be of assistance and gave the fox something to relieve his pain while he was gone. The raven followed

*The bear had a terrible temper. He completely tore the fox's front leg out and took off with it in his canoe.*



the bear wherever he went and found the bear's camp across the lake.

The raven beached his canoe on the shore by the bear's tent. The bear invited him to a good meal and they started talking. The raven noticed that the bear had placed the fox's leg on the wall of the tent. The bear begged the raven to entertain him with some stories, because the raven is a renowned storyteller. So the raven began to regale the bear with story after story. The storytelling went on and on, seemingly with no end. Outside the tent, there was no wind and the lake was calm. Inside, the bear's daughter was lying down, but not sleeping.

The storytelling continued and by morning, the bear was falling asleep. Soon he was snoring. The raven got up very quickly, took the fox's leg from the wall and ran outside to his canoe. The bear's daughter got up quickly and tried to wake her father, but the poor girl had a bad stuttering problem. She had a hard time explaining to her

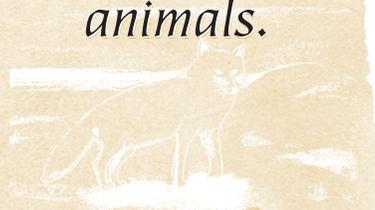
father that the raven had taken off with the fox's leg. By that time, the raven was far out on the lake in his canoe.

The raven paddled across the lake to the Dene fish camp where the fox was waiting in great pain. He paddled his canoe straight to the fish camp, singing his song as he paddled. The raven's wording of the song was, "Put the fox on the shore and place the open wound toward me." The people understood the message, so they placed the fox as instructed by the raven's song.

When the raven got close to shore, he observed that the fox was sleeping. He took out the missing leg, threw it on the fox and yelled, "Run away quickly!" So the fox ran away, but his gait was not smooth. He had a bit of a limp.

This is why to this day, foxes don't run in a straight line like other animals. Part of the problem is that the raven, in his haste, did not reattach the fox's leg properly. So that is the story.

*So the fox ran away, but his gait was not smooth. He had a bit of a limp. This is why to this day, foxes don't run in a straight line like other animals.*





## STORY NUMBER 22

# *The Owl*

**A** long time ago, one of the first things Dene parents taught their children, especially very small children, was how to listen. They had a culture where they scared children to make them listen. One of the things they used to frighten the children was the owl. The owl squawks and can be very scary.

In the evening, after sunset, an owl usually sits on top of a tree and starts to squawk with his deep voice. It is pretty loud. You can hear it from a long distance. Sometimes, the owl comes close to a tent, sits on a tree and makes a loud squawk. It sounds like, “Teacsow, teacsow, moh, moh.” With a loud thunder of squawking, you know it is close.

Sometimes, you can see the owl sitting in a tree and sometimes, a mother would make her child look at the owl. The owl looks ugly with his unusual bright eyes. When the owl sensed the child, the mother would say, “Now, if you don’t listen to me when I say go to sleep, that owl will get mad at you and come and scream just outside your bed.” So Dene children were scared of owls when they were small. The Dene parents would use their culture to scare a wild child who did not listen to them.

We say Dene lifestyle depends on medicine power. All Dene laws or policies come from medicine power. A long time ago, when the world was new, an individual medicine power person had the power of an owl. He and the owl had a

conversation about people. The man said that humans have a hard time listening to each other, especially children to their parents. The owl said, "I know all about human beings. I read people's minds. That is how I know. I can't help adults who don't listen, but maybe I can scare the children if they don't listen." That is how a

*A long time ago, one of the first things Dene parents taught their children, especially very small children, was to listen.*

culture policy came about when the world was new.

And that is how Dene parents, through a scare, make their children go to sleep – or they face the owl. Mothers always tell their children about this big bird. The children listen because they are scared of the owl.

