



STORIES BY AN OJIBWAY HEALER

TE BWE WIN

T R U T H

RON GEYSHICK

WITH
JUDITH DOYLE



By turns haunting, humorous, fantastic and powerful, the stories in this collection explore the traditional spiritual world of the Ojibway, as experienced by Ron Greyslick, a healer and guide from the Lac La Croix reserve in a remote part of Northern Ontario. Part of the extraordinary charm of these tales comes from the ease with which Ron Greyslick moves between the world of snowmobiles, outboard motors and All-Star Wrestling on the VCR, and the mysterious and eternal natural symbols that inhabit his people's spiritual heritage. *TE BWA WIN* (Truth) is quite simply, a beautifully written introduction to a world we've barely known.

Judith Doyle, a frequent visitor at Lac La Croix, has added several stories of her own, to illustrate daily life on the reserve and provide additional context for the spiritual concerns that dominate the collection.

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INTRODUCTION

Two hundred and forty people live on the Lac La Croix reserve. There is no road to the village. It is reached by float plane in summertime, ski-plane in winter. From the air, one sees a blue-green puzzle of lakes and islands, white pine, balsam and poplar trees. This is the Quetico/Superior wilderness; Quetico Park in northwestern Ontario, and Superior National Forest in northern Minnesota. Lac La Croix is one of the boundary lakes, divided down the middle by the Canada-US border.

Because of its isolation, Lac La Croix has kept traditions that were repressed in many First Nation communities by missionaries and a government policy of assimilation. Ojibway language is spoken by old and young, and many follow the traditional spirituality, though they have snowmobiles and motorboats. The pictographs on the granite cliffs of Lac La Croix and nearby lakes were painted by ancestors who travelled and dreamed in this area. Some of these rock paintings illustrate this book.

I met Ron about three years ago, when I was working on a documentary film supporting the Lac La Croix Guides in their fight to keep using small motorboats on six lakes in Quetico Park, to guide fishermen. Outboard motors are banned in the parks. In the end, the guides were given a special exemption, in order to continue earning their livelihood. The community is still fighting for motorized access to the US side of Lac La Croix, and to get compensation for land in the park that their ancestors were driven away from. When I met Ron, he had already begun writing, and it was important for me not to change the form of his stories. I'm lucky to have helped with his book, and to learn some of the things the stories tell.

Judith Doyle



TE BWE WIN

Gi chi i, ne tan
e shi wi, gwa chi to ian
ge get go, tan gi tan
chi ga gwe. te bwe wian

Ga gi na, ge go
ni wi to, ga go wis
chi wi chi, i we ian
chi bi mi, ni sha a mang

te bwe win, ngi ge tan
a bi chi, ni wit ma ge
chi bi mi, ni sha a man
i we, te bwe win.

me wi sha, a bi chi
ni bi wi, gwa chi ton
chi wi ta, ma gos si ian
ge i shi, chi ge ian.

T R U T H

I'm happy with the way I'm trying,
really working at it,
to write down the truth.

Everything is helping me
to guide people along,
following the things we do.

This is the truth I know.
This is my own way
of believing the truth.

For a very long time,
I've been trying to learn
through spirits and elders,
asking them to help me do this.

A few years ago, I started to write down stories I've gathered over time, say a little over thirty years. I told them to schoolchildren and people who wanted to know about my own struggling ways. At the school, kids asked me for the same stories year after year, so I started writing things down to help me remember. This is how the book got started. About the title, and the song I wrote: *Te bwe win* means 'truth', based on what I've heard from my Grandmothers, my Dad and Grandfather, and lots of other Elders. In these stories, I can almost hear their voices. I sat around with them for hours, listening, and sometimes I didn't understand much at all. Not until years later did I get the meaning, but I liked to visit them and help out, and they helped me a lot. Some of these stories are my own, things I've discovered myself because I wanted to know.

INSIDE ME

I know living inside me are two moose and two deer, a few butterflies, and the Lord is in my heart.

That albino deer is very strong — she's number one, the leader. She lives in my right shoulder, and the regular deer is in my left shoulder. That's why the albino is number one. I have two moose around my hips, just below the bone — a regular one, and a blue one. I don't know what kind he is. Maybe a timber moose.

The Creator is in my heart and I have four butterflies in each ear, from the size of a moth up to the largest. I don't know where those big ones come from. I guess they live somewhere way up in the top of the sky. These butterflies are from all over the world. One's from as far away as South America, a big blue one.

This is how the butterflies got inside me. One day I was walking in the woods, not far from Snake Falls. I saw a white fog ahead of me and as I got closer, I saw it was a

flock of butterflies, hundreds of them, all shapes and colours. I kept walking but they wouldn't even move aside from my path. As I got closer, the noise got louder, like the sound of helicopters landing all around me. Then, when I was right in the middle, the four crawled into each of my ears, and they stayed there. Now all my messages come from them, just like a radio. When something is happening, I hear their wings fluttering inside my ears, sometimes two or three times in one night. When I hear this sound, I send my regular moose or the albino to find out what is going on.

**WELCOMING BIRTH,
THEN GIVING A NAME**

- A naming ceremony can happen any time, any age.
Some people do not ask for names until middle age.



TO BLESS A CHILD BEFORE THE NAME

A little kid, a boy or a girl, can go places all over the world, from inside a mother's stomach. I know I travelled a lot at that time. Six months before the child is born, the parents should make something. At three months, they should make something else like diapers. Hang them inside where they can be seen. Then the little kid will know she's wanted, accepted.

When I was a kid, I didn't want to come out. There were all kinds of people in the room, different women, and I never have liked crowds. Coming out, I had a hard time trying to breathe. My eyes were burning, and that's why a kid cries.

As soon as I was born, I fasted for four days. Everybody's like that. A kid doesn't want too much, just to sleep and rest. From birth to four years old, you're really bright. That's when you're getting your spirits. An owl or a bird and butterflies will come. Your mom or dad might see

them. These are your spirits, and this is when they first come to you.

We have ceremonies for blessing everything. First you lay out tobacco or a little dish of fruits and wild rice, meat or fish if possible, anything like that. You start off praying for the little girl, welcoming her to the world, then pray to the air, water and Mother Earth: blessing the child so she'll reach the world she's going to walk on, breathe the air, drink the water.

Then we pray for food — fish, ducks, birds — blessing them, giving them offerings of tobacco and different berries and stuff we see growing. Then to the four directions. You can start off with any one of them. Start by talking to the Creator, blessing all these, asking for strength, gain, wisdom, to help this child. For a girl, ask that she'll have a decent husband and be good at skinning, even killing, so she will be a hunter herself.

If you're helping a boy, it's different. Bless him for hunting, thank all the animals he'll shoot, fish he'll eat, birds, berries he'll pick, so that he won't make a mistake, that he'll be greeted by them and will bless everything first before he picks it up. If he's a hunter, ask that he won't kill anything. A moose will give up his meat, but you're not killing anything because everything you see from nature has spirits, even dead trees.

TO GIVE A NAME

The offerings come first, within about four days before the ceremony. When I'm asked I'll smoke my pipe before bed, and I'll open up the different medicines and offerings nearby. Names come in dreams, or if you want to get one more quickly, you can ask the spirits in a shaking tent. In dreams it usually takes four to eight days, but it can take longer. I pray that somebody will come and take the tobacco and offerings. That spirit will give the name of the person. You never give a name yourself. It comes from a spirit, and that spirit will carry the namesake, and talk with her.

If your name comes from an animal, like a moose, then don't kill it, just love it. If you're desperate, it will come to you, and then you can eat it. When you give a name, you pray for all these things, and for acceptance. I am actually giving out powers to the person I give a name to. My spirits will come to them, as I have. You can help by praying to them and saying the spiritual name. You can

tell the name to anyone, it's not bragging. But when you do get dreams, don't brag about these. Keep them in your own mind until you're ready to do something like healing. But it's not bragging to tell your name. It's important that we don't lose this; not just us, the whole nation.

When a child is born, especially an Indian, put him in a *tikanogan*: a cradle board with a *wapigijibizun* — a beaded sheet with ties in front, that goes around the cradle to hold the baby. In my Dad's days, they had moss for something like a diaper, with cotton wrapped around it. This is so the child will be touching the earth. The cradle was made of cedar, but it could be birch. You pick up powers and strength from using it. The child is tied up tight inside, and will try to get away. They get strong that way. All the ones who did that seem to have powers, to make their own medicines. They used to hang things at the top of the cradle — duck heads for a boy, and for girls, little beads, and a ring made from the skin around a beaver's arm, both leather and fur. This should help a girl in her work. I think girls should wear dresses now and then, and men should wear long hair. My Dad brought that up. Everyone knows their colours. From time to time, wear a headband of your favourite colour.

INSIDE MY HEART

I was baptized in 1972 by Wally, the Baptist minister who comes around here for a couple of weeks every summer with a few white kids, to give bible classes and play volleyball. I wanted to go into the religious life before that. I thought I'd go to school to be a preacher. My Grandfather told me not to. He said, "You're an Indian. Don't get mixed up in stuff you don't know anything about." That was pretty good advice, so I took it.

In 1982, I got sick. Drunks were living in the houses on either side of me, so I bolted my door with these knives that I jammed in sideways. I didn't want drunks walking in on me when I was sick like that. For four days and four nights, I just lay on my couch.

On the fourth day, the Lord came in. He had two helpers along with him. They were dressed all in black, with white shirts and black ties. The Lord knelt down in front

of me, and put a little piece of orange paper on my knee. On it was written a chapter and verse number, with words about beholding the Lord. Then he said, "In order for you to believe in me, I am going to give you special powers. These are the power to heal, and an X-ray vision which will let you see the illness in a person." I use this vision in my healing. It comes in four split-second flashes, as fast as I could flick my fingers at you.

He told me that from then on, he would be living inside me, right inside my heart. Then he disappeared, but I could feel him go in there. When I got up the next day, the knives were still in the door, just the way I'd left them.

WOMEN'S MEDICINES

There are medicines for a woman to get her period if it's late, and others we use to keep a baby inside her. There are medicines to make a baby strong, and for cleansing a woman and the child she's carrying.

A lot of the time, I don't know the English names for the plants we use. Last summer we made up that medicine for Diane, because she was late on her period. It's made from the bark of three sticks: the first is *mis gwa bi mug*, meaning 'a stick with red shiny bark'. It's like an antibiotic, and I used this one to help my father when he had leukemia last fall. You'll see the red bushes all over near water. I've even seen them at Wasaga Beach. The second bark comes from chokecherry twigs that grow out behind the high school. The third bark is from a bush with spade-shaped leaves and tiny white flowers. It grows alongside the path to the falls. The fourth thing I use is ginger root. I have to go someplace else, out on the lake, to get that. It can be hard to find here. You put in a few

leaves and the root, add to that four juniper berries from Juneberry Island, and boil a tea. This medicine works really well.

If a woman falls during her pregnancy and starts feeling pains, there's nothing white doctors can do for that. But we have a medicine. Someone should run right into the bush and find a little balsam tree — how big depends on how many months along the woman is. At two months, you should pull out the smallest tree, roots and all. At four months, pick one maybe six inches high. And at six months it should be around a foot. The further due she is, the bigger a tree you pull out. Boil the whole thing, roots and all, and have her drink this. Now in the winter, it can be hard to see these tiny balsam trees under the snow, but you can use a bigger one instead. Break the very top off, about one year's growth, and boil it. Often where there are bigger trees you'll find the little ones, if you dig under the snow.

We also make a drink from balsam that works as a cleanser and gives the mother powers. Some women get really tired when they're pregnant; they're in a lot of pain. If she takes this medicine, the pain should go away, and the woman will walk and work the same as before. Again we use balsam. A year's growth on the end of a balsam branch looks like a little fork or a trident, with three new branchings. Break enough of these forks off to make a small handful. At two months, the woman should boil this into a tea and drink it at least once a week.

By the end of a pregnancy, she can drink this once or twice a day. It will help make the baby strong, and clean out any poisons inside her.

These are important medicines to know, and I want to pass them on. Anyone who picks this medicine should leave some tobacco by the tree and tell the spirits I told them to come and ask for this assistance.

NAMES

This was one night after Judith and I came home from Guelph, October 3rd. We'd given out three names, one to a little girl, two months old, one to a woman, and one to her daughter.

That Sunday night, around twelve or one our time, I started dreaming. Some spirits came and took me with them. We headed east, picked up two more spirits, then reached the shore of the main ocean. We stopped about midway up the north shore, at a place they call *ne ta wa gang*, meaning a long pointed sandbar. Four more great spirits came: two *asini anishinabe* — which means the 'stone Indian people', and two *misabe*, I'd translate that as Bigfoots. Together we travelled west, to the high mountain where my spirits come from, spirits like thunderbirds and butterflies. The deer and moose were waiting for us, and so were the butterflies and many people, all of my namesakes.

We had a feast, with all of the foods I was given as offerings for my ceremony that Sunday morning. There was a lot of discussion. I asked them about my naming ceremonies, whether I should go on with them. They said yes. "You can see there's a lot of us and we all have names. When someone brings an offering to you, one of us will take it and give that person a name. So yes, go on, we love you."

Two spirits came from the north. They picked me up, and the Creator who is in my heart, he was there. After thinking about them, they came from all four directions — the directions I prayed for. They told me I should not leave my pipe anywhere I go, I should always take it with me.

OXYGEN

For the past few nights, I've been watching the kids go in and out of Henry's house, all night until 3 A.M. sometimes. There's a baby in there. Jackie's girl, a newborn. Yet there are ten or more people in that house every night. These people are taking oxygen away from the kid. I know it's a fact that when a person is really ill, and there's lots of people around, it can kill.

This is because extra people take fresh air away from the person who is sick. Fresh air is a medicine that usually works. The same goes for a newborn. It's dangerous to reduce the oxygen. The Indians used to make each baby a wigwam, and only one or two people were allowed inside. If it was really cold, they'd build this little wigwam inside the regular house. I know people who were born in this way, and they've grown up strong and healthy.

YOUNG PEOPLE

In my stories, I try to teach young people respect for everything: other people, trees, water and the spirits. I want them to know that the Creator is in you or me.

As long as we can speak our own language, the spirits and the Creator will listen. Ojibway (Chippewa) is the language the Creator gave us, like the deer and the moose gave us moccasins to use.

We must stay close to our Indian religion: feasts, naming ceremonies, religious dances. Show an interest by helping the Elders to work: cut wood, cook, help out in any way.

Never put out tobacco without a prayer, as tobacco is our most sacred way of communicating with the spirits.

Help old people, and pay for the knowledge and help they give you. If you have a lot of food, share it. What you give you'll receive back.

Don't ask nonsense questions; be sincere when you ask.
Have a feeling for what you know and what you will
never know.

Powers come from the spirits, not from humans. To learn,
go out in the woods, and it may take days and nights of
fasting for you to receive understanding.

They say that the last sound on earth will be the drum.
When young people speak only English and forget the
religion, then we'll be hopeless. Even the world will lose
hope.

FASTINGS



DAD'S VISION QUEST

It was early in the winter when my Dad told me this story, not long ago. It's the story of how he did his fasting. It was late at night, everyone else in the family was sleeping. This is what he said:

"When I was around six or seven years old, we were camped at Three Mile Lake, just on the other side of Ivory Falls. There was my Grandma and Grandpa and a few other families. My Grandma started talking with my Grandpa, and I didn't know what they were saying. All I knew was that I was to go camping on a small island without food or water. All I could take was my Indian blanket. He gave me some kind of medicine for a couple of days, explaining not to go anywhere while I was there, and to sort of hide if any people came around or were portaging.

The first year, I was there for four days and four nights. They told me not to drink water nor chew twigs. I was

really hungry, and I didn't know what I was there for. When four nights were finally up, Grandpa came and got me and gave me more medicine to drink. After that, I got a small meal, a meal no bigger than the palms of my hands. They went on doing that for the next five or six years, there in the same place. I stayed for four, five or six nights at a time. I had lots of dreams mostly, no real visions.

But I remember the last year I was there, the seventh year. It was always around the same time of year, in early spring. They say, 'grow — with the new plants, leaves and grass'.

So the last year I was there, I began to travel, but I don't know how. I got to this place, Bill Lake, at High Falls. And this place they call a well on the other side of High Falls. And to an island there, like the one in Ivory Falls. I guess while I was sleeping, something moved me there, from Ivory Falls to High Falls.

I was there all day, playing around. I had a small knife with me, a jack knife which folds. I cut lots of twigs and peeled them with it. I made a small wigwam about the size of a pot, like a soup pot. I made another, this one a small teepee, before evening came. I went to sleep again, and woke up in Ivory Falls, back where I'd started from. I still don't know how I got there.

Even now, I don't know what took me back. I guess the time had come for me to go home because I saw my

Grandpa paddling over, coming to get me. I went back with him and got some medicine again, and a small meal which followed later. The following morning, my Grandpa and Grandma fetched up their water drum and started singing. They sang there for quite awhile. Then they called me over and said, 'You are ready. You don't have to do this fasting anymore. Only if you insist.'

Anyway, I went back on my fasting for the next three years. I travelled to different places each year, and I will tell you about those. But I think each year is a story in itself."

FRIENDS ON THE HILLSIDE

Now this is a story of my childhood,
from the age of nine to twelve years old,
I went for a walk on a trail I made,
mainly to use this trail to gain wisdom.

We walked along the valleys and hillsides,
and met friends who showed me I was brave
They taught me how to gain wealth and wisdom,
to be proud of my true friends on the hillside.

I watched them, how they ran things day by day,
to be proud of one another's guiding ways.
I wandered off to another place,
and I'm proud to know those friends on the hillside.

VISION QUEST

I went on my vision quest fasting during our trapping days in the late fifties. Every spring, my family would head out around the middle of April on ice and stay for a month, trapping. We'd be back by the first week of May.

I was nine years old when I started my fasting. My Dad told me a story about what to do and how he'd done it. It was exciting to hear, and I was really interested. I wondered if I could do that myself. For at least a couple of days before I started, he gave me medicine, something to drink. Then he took me to an island. The ice had just gone out of Jean Lake a couple of days before, and the weather was nice.

My Dad told me, "Pick up your rabbit-fur blanket and your deer skin mattress, that's all. Nothing else. I'm going to leave you alone on this island for four days and four nights. While I'm gone, don't drink any water or chew twigs. At nighttime, if you get cold, pick up a flat rock

and put it on your chest. Keep it there until you get warm. If you get cold during the day, run around the island a few times until you warm up."

I did exactly what he told me. It was cold in the mornings just before the sun came up. That's when I ran and lifted rocks. The first year, I didn't hear any spirits at all. For four days and four nights, the only sound I heard was from my grumbling tummy.

The next year, I fasted again. This second year, it wasn't too hard for me. I wasn't so hungry. I was full of excitement. On the second night I stayed on the island, I heard strange voices. I almost felt like I was crazy. The trees began to talk, telling stories to each other, about places that they'd been today and other places they'd go to tomorrow. They named a few places I know, so I believed them.

When the third year came, I was looking forward to it. My fasting was full of dreams and visions. I don't want to go into every detail of my vision quest. I'll try to keep the story short and simple, and skip a lot of things.

Finally, my fourth year came. I began to travel with the spirits, around the world in four directions, to see places. Last year, when Brian and I drove to Saskatoon, I recognized a few places I'd seen long before on my vision quest.

So this is the way I learned how to be an Indian; how I

learned medicines, which is what I wanted most. I learned to know different animals and spirits, and I enjoyed them very much. I was more afraid of my own people than I felt about spirits. I don't like to go into crowds, and I also don't like to walk on people's trails. I learned to obey my parents' orders, and respect my elders' stories, for the understanding I received.

BOTTLE PORTAGE

People used to hear a bell ring, almost every time they portaged there. The name of the place is *bi wa big go ni ga mig*, meaning 'clanging iron portage'. It's like the sound when you hit a freezing pan. When I was a small boy, I would play around the shoreline, and often, I'd run over the portage, just to try and hear the bell people talked about. But I never heard such a thing.

I did hear something else. I've met people, seen them and talked to them. It seemed these people were from somewhere else. They began to show me places — places like the Painted Rocks. I guess this was a vision, because I saw many things I hadn't seen before. Things the white man has, such as chickens, horses, cows, sheep... even elephants, lions, all kinds of pigeons. I saw white men and ladies, young and old, and fancy houses.

I saw an Indian village, much like our village here, but in the old way — with leather wigwams and lean-to's,

smoke houses... I guess it had teepees and a place where they dried meat. I saw two small elephants, covered in woolly fur, with long tusks. They are the spirits they call mammoths, who lived here long ago, and can change into very old people, with long white hair.

I even met people who were lost and have never been found. These are the people who've been taken from their own spirits. They got too powerful, and they never die. Instead, they're taken from their own spirits.

I asked why the paintings are on the rocks. One of the great spirits came to me and explained some of the ways this was done. The people were scattered all over, from Basswood Lake, up north as far as White Otter Lake, to Lake of the Woods.

Painted Rock is one of the very secret places for our young girls to fast and receive guidance and wisdom. So this girl came. She stayed there as long as eight or ten days, and received powers. Spirits came to her. They gave her all kinds of berries, some of them non-edible. She was told to mix these with her own blood, and to go and make her one mark on that rock.

When she did as she was asked, then a spirit came and took her back to a special place, where she passed on all that she had learned to her warriors. This is why I believe women are strong, very strong, to be living next to Mother Nature. And they are becoming stronger and stronger.

I heard another thing about this special place. You can get all over the world, by way of underwater tunnels. There are tunnels, about four miles under the ground there, which will get you anywhere in the world, from sea to sea. These tunnels lead in four directions, the same as we pray to our four directions here on earth.

TWO SPIRITS

This is a very old story, a legend I guess, about what we now call cocks and cunts. In the old days, there was a guy who'd do anything just to get inside a woman's cunt. He lost track of everything else he was supposed to be doing. He stopped working. He didn't care what woman he was getting inside of, or when, or what could happen. Anyway, there is a very powerful spirit living inside a woman's cunt. Finally that cunt spirit got mad at this guy and decided to teach him a lesson. So one time when he was inside of some girl, the cunt spirit left her body and went inside the man's back, a spot where he couldn't reach.

As the days went on, he could feel the spirit inside him, but couldn't touch her. From her spot up in his back, the cunt spirit took away all of his powers to enter a woman again. However, this spirit also gave him very strong powers, powers of healing and of vision. He in the end became a very powerful medicine man, though he had

nothing more to do with women.

In the same way, a man has a spirit inside his cock, and this spirit can go into a woman if she plays around with men too much. It will go up and live inside her back, giving her special powers, but taking away her ability to be with a man.

A lot of the lessons we teach around the time of puberty come from this story, so most of our Elders are careful and sensitive about following certain traditions to keep these spirits where they belong. My Dad really is. It is the cunt spirit we're worrying about when we say to a girl never to step over a man or his medicines, nor to dance at pow wows or drink from another's cup when she is on her period. These are the two spirits we're afraid of bothering.

THE STURGEON GIRL

When a girl reaches puberty, we make a small tent for her and she stays alone, away from everyone else, for eight days. During that time, only certain people are allowed to visit her: women who have received a special prayer first. If there isn't a tent, the girl must stay alone in her room, and eat only broth without any meat in it, and no berries. Two of my girls have followed this tradition, and my third girl will when her time comes. At this time, the girl can fast if she wants, but she doesn't have to. We think that if a girl walks around when her puberty comes, she can hurt anyone else who walks in her path. She has a lot of power at this time. I know of one girl who didn't follow these instructions. That year, the blueberries didn't grow here any more though they were growing all over in other places.

My Dad told me this story from long ago. It was springtime, so a family went out to net sturgeon at a small waterfall near Darky Lake. Just after they arrived,

one of the young girls reached her puberty. So her grandmother made a little wigwam not far away from the camp where the girl was to stay for eight days. In her tent, the girl could hear laughing and singing from the camp below, and she could smell the fires, for they were catching a lot of sturgeon and everyone was happy and busy smoking them. A couple of times each day, her grandmother brought a cup of warm tea or a broth from plants for her, but she could eat no meat nor fish.

After four days and four nights, everything turned quiet. The smell of the fires was gone. The girl wondered what was going on down there, but she was afraid to break her solitude by leaving the tent. For two days she waited, then she sneaked quietly down to the camp to investigate.

All the fires were dead and no one was around. It looked like they had all left in a big hurry. Then the girl heard a scratching noise come from the inside of her grandmother's tent. When she had parted the deer-hide flap to look inside, she saw in the shadows that the woman was turning into a great fish.

Her grandmother said, "I'm so glad you came, I have been waiting for you. See this red stripe on my belly? These sturgeon we have been eating are a different kind than we used to get here. And from now on, this is where our family will be staying, inside Darky Lake. So please, help carry me down to the water now. Then go back to our village. Someday, you will come and live here too."

The girl gently lifted her grandmother, who was heavy now, over the rocks to the river. As the old woman touched the water, she turned to a fish and swam away. The girl paddled back alone to her village.

Many years went by. The girl became a woman. She married and had a long and happy life, living to be a hundred and seventeen years old. When she reached the end of her life, she asked her grandchildren and her great-grandchildren to take her up near Darky Lake. Her spirit did not become a sturgeon, but it still lives in the forest nearby.

From her spirit, we learned never to eat a sturgeon with a red stripe on its belly. Sturgeon are people, very much like us. You must be careful which ones you eat, and make offerings and feasts when you catch them. They're one of our Indian foods. When the sturgeon run is the time we have our spring feasts and ceremonies, the time when our boys and girls do their fasting. Everything must be done in the right way.

WHEN A GIRL STARTS PUBERTY

On our reserve, when a girl has her first period, people will call up and say, "well, so and so started her time today". Her family is proud, because it means the girl has grown up and become a woman. There are things she should do as soon as it begins, because she has new powers. A spirit lives inside her, and it can cause a lot of trouble if these traditions aren't kept. For example, not too long ago, there was a girl who didn't do anything at all when her puberty started. She didn't tell anyone, kept it a secret. That girl is gone now, she died. If a girl ignores these teachings, it can also hurt the hunting. That may be why we lost our wild rice this year.

Puberty is the time when our boys and girls do their fasting. My voice changed one spring while I was on my vision quest fast. There's a story that the rock paintings here were made by girls with their own blood while they were on their puberty fasts. Those girls got a lot of powers from fasting out there. They discovered weapons

that our warriors used.

When a girl's first period starts, her mom will use a lump of coal to draw a black mask around her eyes and her nose. This tradition was given by a little Cedar Waxwing. She has a mask just like this, and she gives the girls powers. For four days and four nights, the girl stays home. An Elder comes to teach her things, not lessons really, just storytelling about the things she needs to know. There are stories about how to skin a beaver, how to sew quilts and moccasins, how to keep a fire and take care of a house. Over the next year, the girl will prove her independence, she'll kill a duck and a rabbit, catch a fish, before she's allowed to eat those things again. During her fasting, her girlfriends can visit her at night, but otherwise she keeps away from everyone, especially the boys.

Just as with a boy's fasting, this is the time when a girl seeks her own animal spirits: friends that will be with her all her life. And she learns how to be alone.

In the old days, a girl went out to a little tent in the woods by herself for eight days and nights. Now she'll stay in the basement, or in her own room. She doesn't eat meat or traditional foods. That's the kind of fasting girls do now. Some girls won't eat anything at all. That's the best way, just throw yourself right into sewing.

For a year after her puberty starts, a girl won't swim in the lake or walk on ice, or pick blueberries. She'll never

drink from another person's cup, or walk around alone in the house of a stranger. She should be careful never to step over a man. That happened last year. A girl stepped over a guy during her period and he was sick for a month, hemorrhaging. That will happen to any man with spirits inside him. If anyone stepped over me that way, I'd be really sick. But not if it was a woman in my own family.

After her puberty starts, a girl must be sure not to step over Indian things, medicine, or around a drum, or over a pipe. The spirit living inside her could drain the power out of these sacred things. Blueberries and wild rice should be blessed before they're picked. The girl will get more powers after these blessings; she'll find more berries, and pick them faster. That's why we always bless the first berries that are picked in the spring and leave them as an offering for the spirits. The same goes for wild rice in the fall.

MOSQUITO

In the early 1900s, a little boy went on his vision quest at an early age, at around ten years old. Before fasting, he waited until everything was full grown, so that's mid-June. This is the time when a lot of mosquitoes are here. The first year he was bitten real bad. He fasted for four days and four nights, and all he had was a leather cover that went up to his knees. No shirt or shoes. This is what they had to do. In those days, when they went fasting, they were not to kill an insect nor break a live branch, not even remove a rock from its place during the fasting period.

The first year the boy fasted, he was bitten badly by mosquitoes. The next year, the same thing. The next year was his third season. He had a vision of a large mosquito, about the size of an eagle. He thought that this would be the end of him, because its bite would kill him for sure. But he decided, let them bite all they want, I still won't kill any of them.

This large mosquito started talking to him, teaching him different medicines and curing ways. During his fourth season, this big vision of a mosquito was really powerful, and he gave the boy great powers. He lived to be grey and old.

I guess these mosquitoes work something like *windigos*, the cannibal spirits. They fly south once they get full of blood. Lots of them make it. This boy had set aside his own life, but in return, he got great powers.

RECEIVING GUIDANCE



ON RABBIT ISLAND

Sometimes I half don't believe it myself. Like the first time I went to do the shaking tent. I really didn't think there was anything to it, that it was going to work. But I thought I'd try just to see. My wife was living here at the time, so I took her and a friend of mine over to that little island we call Rabbit Island. This was at night and we didn't tell anyone, because I didn't think anything much would happen.

I set that tent up on the west shore, then I sat outside it and prayed to my spirits for everything to work. Already, before I even went inside, the tent started to shake.

When I got inside, it really shook. The wind was slapping against my arms and legs, it was just like a whirlwind going around me. I could see little sparks, blue and white. It was night, but that tent glowed as white as a roll of toilet paper. I was scared because it was going so fast, so I prayed to the spirits. That calmed it down a little.

A FIREBALL FROM THE SOUTH-WEST

Lately I've been seeing that spirit again, and I think my Dad senses him around too. It's just like a fireball coming, circling round and round. When he flies, he's an owl. At first he cries like a regular owl, but then his voice turns strange. When he's on land, he's a bear — a bear or a badger. I've seen him like that. He was a badger when he came into the first shaking tent I had. That badger is really good at hiding. He can fit right into a little tunnel, into a hole up the centre pole of my tent. But he can't hide anything from the turtles who help me. They saw him right away.

When he came that time, he was questioning my powers. I guess he was asking me, "How come you used those girls to make the tent?" He spread some kind of medicine around the circle. Four times he went around. It was sort of a skunk medicine that smelled really strange. He was trying to get the tent to stop, or to break. I could feel the poles cracking. But that medicine was hurting him more

than it hurt anyone else. He started swaying from side to side and swooning. One of the turtles asked him, "What's wrong with you? What have you been drinking?"

The deer in the tent are really strong. I guess that's because of the girls who build my tent. The deer are their spirits. The fireball couldn't do anything. I thought he'd come back into my second tent. That's why I had my Dad there, in case he showed up again. I don't know what would have happened if he'd won. I'd have had to stop, or it wouldn't have even started shaking at all.

I like those turtles a lot. They're the tough guys. You know Ivan on 'All Star Wrestling'? They look exactly like that — really muscular.

WHAT TO DO WITH AN EAGLE FEATHER

A girl called after her Uncle died. My Dad and I were sitting here on the bed and talking. That's when he told me he'd get her an eagle feather ready. So he tied the end up, and gave it his special blessing. Now, she can dance along with the other girls at pow wows.

When you're not using an eagle feather, you should keep it tied between two flat pieces of cardboard. But you can let it out to breathe sometimes. When you go to a pow wow, take along a package of tobacco and give it to one of the Elders who's sitting around the drum. Say, "This is for my eagle feather." He'll know what you mean. Also, put a few twigs of cedar into your right shoe, which should give you lots of energy to dance.

A TENT FOR MY DAD

In the morning we had a feast and drumming ceremony. Dad was doing this feast. Lots of people came. Around 1:30 P.M., I told my Dad, "I'll do this shaking tent for you." I went to Sandy Beach to cut a small white pine for the main tent pole. I was afraid. I knew someone was coming in: an Indian. I asked my Dad, "What should I do if someone comes?" He said, "Don't let anyone into the tent." I guess not long ago a man was doing his tent and someone came in and starting spreading around bad medicine and arguing at him, and finally he had to chase this spirit out. So I didn't want that to happen again.

A moose spirit told me there was someone getting ready to come here into my tent, getting his medicines out and smudging himself with smoke and saying bad prayers at me. I told my spirits not to let this guy in. He didn't want to force his way in, either. I saw him for a moment before he turned around and went back — this was about midway through. I was in the tent about four hours.

Mesinate chiwebig — the albino deer — appeared in the tent as a very pretty girl, and sang the *te bwe win* song.

A boy here had been asking me why he has nightmares of moose all the time. Sometimes, his eyes swell when he wakes up in the morning. In the tent, the moose spirit explained what was happening. When this boy was a baby, the moose spirits talked to him, teaching him what he should do when he got to be his age right now: 14 or 15. Now, the moose spirits are trying to talk to him again, but he's afraid. He thinks it's a bad dream, but it's not. They say they'll come back again in his middle age, and then he'll be ready for healing or whatever they'll teach him. My moose also told him not to speak of his dreams, or the vision will lose power. Each time you talk about dreams at a young age, this happens.

The rest of the time the spirits talked to me about a sickness coming from the west. We should prepare for it by burning sage at least once every eight days, together with aspen buds. Maybe cold weather will push this sickness to the south, because cold air is greater, they said. But it's coming pretty fast. Somehow, the spirits are working on it, using the cold air or pushing it with east winds, so it will pass over us here. I'm sure they'll do it. It's easy for them to do things like that.

CHANGING THE WEATHER



THE ICE GAMBLERS
(ONE OF JUDITH'S STORIES)

Each thing goes by season. This time of year I hear stories about winter, hunting and trapping in the old days. Families used to go out in the bush and live in a trapping shack for months. Or a man and his son trapped alone for a week or two with nothing but some flour for bannock, a gun, a deerskin for a mattress and a small rabbit fur blanket. People hunted then because they were hungry. They needed to catch something. Ron told me a story about his Grandmother's power to bring the wind. She had a little windmill she used. And my own Mother tells me stories about Saint Christopher and his powerful medals. There are strong medicines for holding the weather off.

The story of the Ice Gamblers is actually about Ron and me. I was up at Lac La Croix in November. Freeze up almost always starts early in the month but this year it came late to the reserve. There was no snow, but it was cold and got colder. I, being the way I am, couldn't help

but worry. So I started asking people, "Do you think it will freeze up tonight?" And the person would answer, "I don't know, what do you think?"

When it freezes up, the ice is too thin for a ski plane, but too thick for the pontoon plane or a boat. There's no way to get in or out. How long this lasts depends upon the weather. It can take from eight to eighteen days. It freezes faster if there's no snow, because snow keeps the ice warm. As it started getting really cold, people said to me, "Well, I guess you'll be staying for freeze up, then." And I'd say, "Well, I hope not." It wouldn't have mattered, but I worried about my teaching and film work back in Toronto. Finally Ron said to me, "I wouldn't even worry about it — at all." That's his attitude to things.

One morning we went out in the boat to pull in our gill net. The sky was dark. The water was choppy with big chunks of ice in it. You could skate on the shallow bays, and the rocks had iced over a blue-black colour. I decided it was time to go. Irene of Rusty Myers Air Base sends the big old Beechcraft back and forth a lot this time of year, hauling lumber, freezers, snowmobiles, groceries, videotapes and so on to the reserve before freeze up. So I got my stuff and hitched a ride on that plane back to Fort Frances.

I went to a coffee shop and wrote down a lot of Ron's stories. I thought about untangling that gill net, and the different fish we'd caught, including a big walleye and a couple of northerns. I called Ron and said, "It was silly

for me to worry because it's getting warmer. I'm coming back tomorrow morning."

So I hitched another ride, this time on a Cessna with the Parole Officer who was coming in for a couple of hours. I left my stuff at the motel, just bringing my 16mm camera and a couple of pairs of underpants. By the time I got back Ron had already given the fish away. I cleaned up Ron's house and sealed the cracks with putty and toilet paper held down with electrical tape, because a cold wind was creeping inside.

Anyway, that night it froze. There was three inches solid of ice over the lake. Ron said it was his fault, and I as usual worried. A few people stopped by the house and made jokes.

But Ron has a special medicine, a round smooth rock, about the size of a fist. It sits in a pot on top of sand and tiny stones. This sand is from all over, and every grain is a spirit. They twinkle and shine. The rock comes from one of Ron's vision quests. It is for many things, it can even be used for going to war. If the time comes, he will lead his warriors with this stone, and they will all be women, because women are stronger.

The rock medicine hung from the wall in an old and rotting brown bag. We took it out, and I sewed a new bag for it by hand from light blue cotton. Blue is Ron's strongest colour. I finished my sewing at about one in the morning. Ron prayed and burned sweetgrass around the

bag, since it was full of my worrying. Then we hung the rock medicine back on its nail in the wall. By the time we did that, a strong east wind came. Within half an hour, it broke all the ice up and the lake was open again.

In the morning, Ron decided to fly in on the Beech to the Fort with me and his daughter Marilyn. He'd do some shopping, and go back the next day. That night it was cold, but again, the east wind came. My plane for Toronto wasn't until Monday, so Ron decided he'd stay on until then. "Don't you think we're pushing our luck?" I asked. All he said was, "My mind's made up." "Here we go," I said, "the ice gamblers."

On Sunday, we drove around town for a while with Ron's old friend, and he told us something about the weather. It seems that all around us was frozen solid and snow. There was a little circle over where we were, and this was staying open.

Ron told me to burn some sage when I got home and say sorry to the ice for holding it back so long. We both promised we wouldn't do it again. I flew out to Toronto on Monday as planned. From the window of my plane over Atikokan, I saw clouds and snowstorms and ice all around, just like we'd heard from a friend.

CHANGING THE WEATHER

Two years ago, I went to pick up Stella and her two kids at Crane Lake. The day started off nice but in the afternoon got cloudy. By the time we got to Vermillion Lake, the rain started pouring down in big drops all the way to Freddy's portage. I used a sheet of plastic to cover the little kids, but they got soaked anyway. I knew they'd have to get off and walk the portage soon. Freddy has a 'turtle' to carry boats over the portage. A turtle is a cart on railroad tracks that go down into the water. You signal Freddy, then he sends the turtle down under the boat. The rope pulls it up out of the water, and across the portage, to the other lake. On the dock, just before we called Freddy to send the turtle down, I put an offering of tobacco in the water. Stella was wondering what I was talking about. She doesn't understand much Indian language. Anyway, after my prayer I told her what I'd been doing.

I told her that good spirits will take that tobacco and it

might stop raining soon. I went ahead and called Freddy. We walked to the other side of the portage, and the rain let up. When we got in the boat and I started the motor, there was a patch of blue overhead, like a round circle forming bigger by the minute. We got all the way home by sunshine.

Another time, I was coming home from a hunting trip with a friend. We went to Wild Goose Creek, then over to Pig Lake. We fished there for croppies and got six to fry for lunch. This was about three years ago.

It was pretty well mid-afternoon. By mid-day, the sun is overhead, so that would be twelve or one. Now the sun was half way from the treetops. So we gathered our spoons and cups and cooking gear and smothered our campfire with water. Then we sat around for a while, waiting for the sun to go down until it was just above the treetops. That would be around six o'clock.

The little canoe had a small 4 horsepower motor on a rack. It took us about an hour and a half to reach Pig Lake. There we shot a moose and skinned it, hurrying, because the wind was blowing hard and the sun had gone down. So we decided to stay out overnight. We arrived at Indian Narrows late in the evening. The wind hadn't let up yet. We had tea that was left over from the lunch we had. Now we were talking of gathering wood to roast some meat.

We didn't have a flashlight to see. We were after dried-up

poplar for roasting meat over a smokeless fire. We struggled, tripping along through the woods, and found some driftwood on the shoreline, enough for a roast.

It was around midnight when we ate. We just had the meat and some tea, we didn't have anything else. It was good. In the morning, the wind was still blowing and it kept up all day. I was thinking, I should go and do something. I wanted to get home, we were supposed to be back the night before.

I got some tobacco ready and went to the tallest white pine I saw. I had my friend sit with me on my prayer. My ears were ringing, and I knew my prayer was answered by the gust of wind and the leaves flying around in circles between us. It took about half an hour. The winds died down but we waited until the waves settled. An hour and a half later, we went home.

BREAKING ICE
(ONE OF JUDITH'S STORIES)

Freeze-up came late. It wasn't until February that the winter ice road to Crane Lake was thick enough for trucks. By then, the pow wow committee held enough bingos to pay gas for the dancers, plus an honorarium for the one-armed Master of Ceremonies. The pow wow would be the ending of our documentary film about how the Lac La Croix Indian Guides Association won their fight to keep using outboard motors on six lakes in Quetico Park. But when my crew showed up with the camera and boom microphone, the MC asked that all filmmakers leave the room. We were off to a bad start. Then the Chief took the MC aside, and quietly explained that we'd been invited by the Band to make this treaty rights movie. All weekend, we were careful not to film the traditional dances. The last night there was a blizzard. The drummers and dancers from Couchiching, Seine River and Nett Lake Minnesota had to drive out together in a long convoy with a makeshift snowplow in front.

I went home to finish the movie. By the time the ice broke, it was May. I was in Toronto, so I only heard over the phone about the sturgeon running up the falls. I missed Ron's Dad's spring feast and ceremony. But I got back in time to spear three 10-15 pound sturgeon at Ivy Falls Rapids. By late May, all the snow melted. There was the loud din of frogs singing at night, mingled with the beat of Ron's Dad's drum. Paddling home from my favourite trolling run just down the river, we'd hear the drumming start.

Then mosquitoes came. "Not bad this year," everyone said. The swarms were thick. I couldn't sit still for half an hour at the pow wow circle. Now it's winter again. I can't remember the name of the insect repellent I put on every night — Old Musk Ox or something. But I remember the sound of drums at night and transistor radios.

Now it's cold. As I travelled north by train, snow gathered at the edges of roadsides. Ponds iced over, a pale green. There were tracks on the frozen creeks, and the last geese flew south. A blizzard came. I was snowed in for two days, unable to fly out of Fort Frances, so I headed by bus to Atikokan because I figured if anyone would go in the snow it was Garf, the mad pilot. It was two days before he took off for Lac La Croix.

Winter snow brought its silence, covering the cedar boughs and smooth rocks by the river. Snow clung to the sides of trees, now white where I was used to seeing

moss and shadows. We passed mink tracks, squirrel tracks and the white mound of a beaver house. When the sky turned clear and the temperature dropped, the lake began to freeze, first the bays and puddles, then beaver ponds. Icicles formed outside the window and twigs were frosted by an icy mist. It was crisp and so bright I had to squint when I took the snowmobile to get wood. My eyes burnt.

Just before the lake iced over, Ron and I took a small boat along the shoreline to set a net and get drywood. A chill blew across the lake and easily passed through my layers of rain gear and duck down. Ron watched for dead trees on the slopes of islands. We found one and eased to shore, where the rocks were glassy. We edged carefully over these to reach the deep snow on the hillside, trudging knee-deep until we got to the dead poplar. "It'll fall this way," he said, pointing to a gap between two spruce. I waited while he scored one side with the chainsaw. The old tree lurched slightly toward me, with a violent creak. "Go stand by the boat," Ron said. I hurried downhill, letting my weight give me speed, sliding and sticking in my felt-pack snowboots, not to sure of what I'd do if Ron got hit and I had to drive the boat home myself.

The tree fell just where he said. When the chainsaw noise ended, there was a huge pile of wood. I thought it would sink the boat. Each log was too heavy for me to lift, so my job was to roll them one by one downhill and along shore to the boat. By the end, I was sweaty, and dark was

falling. Sagging under its load, the little boat stuck on an underwater rock. I sat up on the heap of logs, and swung back and forth, jabbing bottom with a paddle. When we got home it was pitch black.

The next day, our friend Brian's outboard motor froze in the water. Ron chipped away at the ice with an axe, but it didn't help. We took out Henry's boat instead to check our net. By now the bays were hard. Our net was full of whitefish, suckers and northerns. The next morning most of the lake was frozen over.

This was a Tuesday, store day at Campbell's Cabins. Ron was having a ceremony for his namesakes and decided he'd like to go to the store to get raisins for the feast, and some lightbulbs. An old friend about Ron's age agreed to take us in his lund boat. We went down to the dock. Our boatman was dressed head to foot in an army green canvas snowsuit, with a little round hole for part of his face. Soon, we reached the edge of the ice.

A lund boat doesn't seem much thicker than a tin can. When we hit ice, the sound was like steel drums and nails scraping across chalkboard. The boat lurched and jerked with every slight change in ice thickness. For all the clanging and crashing, we were only progressing by inches. As we snuck ahead, the ice froze up behind us into an even thicker mass. Ron started to swing. The change in weight caused the boat to keel up and down like a rodeo bronco. Each time the nose crashed down, it broke a little patch of ice out front. Ron and the boatman

swung even harder. The nose yanked up and the tail sunk low, jackknifing into the icewater.

Then silence. It was early evening. The trees were vague grey shapes, and all sound was muffled by snow and ice. Our motor was dead. There was only the soft sound of fingers adjusting the gas line. But the silence was broken by a loud sound that disturbed me. The guy in the green snowsuit looked at my face, and burst out laughing.

Time passed. I got colder. There was an endless fiddling and twiddling with gas lines. I had no idea where we were, or that Campbell's Cabins was only a mile or two around the bend. I was contemplating how to shimmy a half mile across thin ice on my belly. Ron and the boatman took the motor apart into pieces, laughing the whole time.

Eventually, the motor coughed to life. Ron slapped the hood and gaskets back into position, then resumed the outrageous swinging up and down motion that inched us forward. When we got to Campbell's, we drank Pepsi and diet root beer. The sales clerk asked if we did a "Soviet ice breaker job" to get over. Ron gave his friend \$20 for the ride, which he used to buy all the remaining breakfast sausages in the store.

OUR LAND



WE LIVE ON SACRED LAND

You know where that old house is, up on the hill, with the bush right back of it? It was a long time before they built that house for my wife and me. Before, we were living in a little shack. They started construction on the house when my girl Marilyn was a year old. Even before they finished, we'd go and stay there at night, just sleep on the floor with a few blankets, and leave before the crew got back in the morning.

One night we were sleeping there like that when I heard a sound outside, so I got up and went to the window. A little bear was standing up on her hind legs, just looking at me. She did that for a while, then walked all around the house in a circle, stopping outside the door. When I opened it, a little girl was standing there — really she looked like a full-grown woman, just small. And she asked me, "Are you the one who's moving in here?" I said, "Yes, I'll be living in this house for awhile." She smiled and said, "I knew you were coming, and I

recognized you right away. You're one of the people we deal with."

She came in and we sat down together cross-legged on the floor, just like old Indians. She took out her pipe. It was no bigger than the end of this lighter. While she smoked on her little pipe, she told me about the place. "We are on sacred land here, and there's lots of us around. You see the Ottertails' house a little farther up there? Quite a few live around it, snakes mostly. They look like snakes, but really they are souls." That's the word we use in Indian — souls — and these souls can change into people whenever they want. She went on with her story. "People never used to live here. For your ancestors, this was sacred ground and when they came by in canoes, they'd just stop for a minute to leave an offering."

My Dad was like that when we went trapping. At the end of one day, we came to a good spot, sheltered from the wind, with lots of drywood. But my Dad wouldn't camp there or even cook anything. It was sacred land, he said, so we moved along. The Department of Indian Affairs must have decided to put the reserve here, because before, no one would stay.

She told me, "There's a road that goes down this hill and straight into the river. That's the road the souls travel on. In the middle of the river there's an underwater tunnel that leads all around the world. That's how spirits travel." I do too - I've been all around the world from that tunnel.

The little bear woman took out a birchbark dish with wild rice in it and told me, "There are four seasons, but the most important are the spring and fall. Leave offerings on the road for us at these times of year. You can leave wild rice, or blueberries, whatever you have. The other good thing is tobacco. As long as you and the others we deal with do as I say, it will protect everyone who lives on this reservation."

Q U I E T

I don't know why I grabbed this red pen. I've never seen it. I didn't even know I had it. I'm wondering if there's any people on this reserve. It's so quiet, 9:30 P.M., and unbelievably quiet. I'm wondering if I'm still alive.

I picked up this pen, so someone will show up. Whenever I sit down and write, someone walks in. But tonight, I can't even hear a skidoo. I know there's a meeting at the gym, so maybe all the people are there. It's very cold outside, 20 below zero, the radio says.

Lots of things are going through my mind. Sometimes, I can hear people talking about me, but I won't be bothered by that. I'll pretend I don't hear anything. I just looked out my window, and there's no sign of life. Maybe they're all dead and I'm alive.

I can certainly see the lights around. All this writing and no interruption yet. I've never gotten through a page

before. Usually, I have to wait until the small hours of the night, right up to 3 or 4 A.M. But now there isn't even a dog barking.

I know exactly why people avoid seeing me. I wish they'd do that all the time, so I could write something about them. I have a lot of thoughts about them, but if I let one word out, everybody would know within an hour. For sure, the next day. I know someday my dream will come true, and it will be quiet, but I won't be around the reserve.

EVERYDAY LIFE
(ONE OF JUDITH'S STORIES)

There are some places you learn to find your way to by snowmobile — the woodpile down at the lake, Ron's Dad's house, the dump. I went to all three of these today. There are rocks and holes you learn to watch out for. The weather was freezing rain, and parts of the hill were washed out. I went slow and wondered, am I going fast enough?

We went to Campbell's Cabins in the boat. Since I don't have any rain pants, I put a jacket over my knees like an old woman's lap blanket. Ron saw an eagle on the way home, but by the time I turned around, it was gone.

Ron made dinner. Salt pork and fried potatoes. It's one of his favourites, since his Aunt Ruth in Cooke, Minnesota makes it for him whenever he goes down there. You can prepare smoked fish the same way — sturgeon, suckers, whitefish, northerns. I don't like salt pork and neither do the kids. Ron hasn't got a stove or fridge, but we have a

system that works fine in the kitchen. The coleman stove, electric frying pan and a one-burner hotplate we call the electrocutor, are set up on a low cookshelf. He prefers to cook sitting down in a chair. The electric kettle melted its wire so Ron is heating up dishwater in a steel jug on top of the woodstove.

Ron felt some fluttering in his ears four times tonight, just after he ate dinner. He played guitar for awhile then fell asleep on the couch. When he hears something, he'll sleep for awhile and the next day, he might mention his dreams.

There are no straight roads on this reserve, just paths with ruts and gullies. Where the lake narrows into a river, the twenty or so houses are built helter-skelter up the hill: old 'matchboxes' and new homes with fresh white vinyl siding. The only straight line is on the teachers' side, four apartments owned by the Department of Indian Affairs. These look like motel units. There are no fences or yards. Every house faces out on the slow-moving river. In the summer, there is the sound of motorboats; in the winter, snowmobiles and chain saws. The canoeists who come paddling in the park don't like this interruption, but on the Reserve, it's the sound of everyday life, and is friendly.

GAWA BAY

The land around Gawa Bay was used by the old Indians during the summer, for Spring ceremonies and Fall ceremonies, and for fishing. It wasn't a place where people lived year-round. In those days, people didn't live in any one place all year. They'd travel to one place for sturgeon in the spring, then another place for blueberries, somewhere else for wild rice. In the winter, there'd be hunting and traplines to follow. They didn't plant any vegetables because they didn't want to stick around to take care of them; they only bothered with a few vegetables that grew beneath the ground; potatoes, turnips, maybe onions. Roots they could just leave and come back for later.

So when the government came, they made a lot of promises and didn't ask for much. They said, "This year, all we want is this one kind of tree — poplar. We won't touch anything else. And maybe next year, we'll ask for some more trees, or for the gravel. And we'll leave

everything else alone."

When the reserves were made up, there was one at Gawa Bay. It is a rocky place, good for fishing in the summertime, but difficult to travel to in winter. With all the rocks and sand, it would be crazy to try and grow anything there. But that's what the treaty people wanted. At that time, they tried to turn the old Indians into farmers. They brought all these seeds for them to plant. But the Indians didn't really want to, as I said before, because they wanted to be free to move around. Then the government agents started to say, "If you're not going to farm here, then we'll take this land because you don't need it for anything." And, "If you don't live here all year then you can't really be using it." This was about the time the park was getting started and the second Reserve was right in the middle of where they wanted the park. The government used the excuse that the Indians weren't farming, to take that reserve away.

October 4, 1873. That's when the white man shook hands with the Indians, when the treaties were made. You can write that date down, because it's on a poster over at Henry's place.

At treaty time, those who came planted a flag in the ground and said, "As long as white men are allowed among you, you'll have food up to the top of this flagpole." This was at our summer trading place. They said all they wanted was the top six inches of the ground to plant crops like potatoes. They wanted certain kinds of

trees, like poplars. But not all the trees. After a few years, maybe they'd come back and ask again for the gravel. But they took the gravel anyway. Also, the gold. A lot of gold was mined from this area. They built roads, everything else. The old Indians never agreed to any of this stuff.

THE MEDICINE FOR FIRE
(WHICH MEANS THE PAST)

I've been thinking about that old Indian Reserve at Gawa Bay, inside Quetico Park. Our ancestors camped there in the summer, and fished. The Sturgeon Lake Band held that place, and their Chief was Blackstone. When the government set up the park, they kicked them out with rifles. The people here have been trying for a long time to win compensation.

When I was told about the land at Gawa Bay, I talked with a lot of spirits. Some were even relatives of mine. I didn't offer anything to them when they came this time, not even tobacco. They told me, there are still a lot of spirits living at Gawa Bay.

My Grandfather John Whitefish told me about it one time, and Charlie Ottertail. Those are people I used to go to for stories and teachings. They told me many different things, even the medicine for fire, which means the past. I'm talking about *sagima* — *wisiwin*, meaning 'fire

medicine', or 'when not to burn'. You can even walk on red hot stones with it and you won't feel the burning. It's also related to firewater, such as whiskey.

Charlie Ottetail used to talk about this whenever I'd go to him. I offered him tobacco, a knife or mitts, then he'd make me sit down somewhere without resting my back, to listen to what he had to say. There are four spirits who will take an offering of firewater. He named them. There's a long story behind that, and I hope someday we'll piece it together.

I've been thinking about the land at Gawa Bay all morning, our relatives who lived there, how they tried to hold on to their land. It sounds like Mr. Blackstone was the toughest one who ever lived there. He fought the government to keep that place, and his words still stand out. He had lots of hopes, lots of thoughts. He said never to trade or sell this land, or we won't hang onto our fishing and hunting rights. I guess Mr. Blackstone said, "My name will always be there; my rights, my thoughts, will never die. I will help whoever tries to hold onto this land, but only to keep the land, not to sell it." So I wrote that the Ottetails are #1 of this land, because Mr. Blackstone was an Ottetail. I wish they knew this. They're the ones who should tell us what to do.

Maybe that's why our reserve is having problems, something to do with what happened at Gawa Bay. This land is very sacred. Run it carefully and everything will go well. Do something wrong and things will go haywire

like spaghetti.

Things are going wrong when people think of the land as a pie that can be sliced up in pieces. One quarter will live well, and another quarter will be reasonable. But the other half won't do too well at all. No matter how you cut a pie, in the end there's nothing holding it together. It gets eaten up like pop and chips, like raisins. It's better for people to live as if they're inside a ball. The sky, upstairs and downstairs, the four directions: these will hold everything together and not let anything escape because a ball has a top to cover us and a bottom to hold us, and everything works together.

Note : Chief Blackstone was the famous Ojibway leader and orator of the Sturgeon Lake Band, based at Gawa Bay. He lived in the late 1800s. A few of his words are recorded — roughly and with much venom — by Indian agents and surveyors who heard his speeches. He fought to keep miners, fisheries and lumber companies off all the Indian lands to the west of Lake Superior. Following the signing of Treaty #3, a number of reserves were surveyed and established in the area, including one at Gawa Bay. In the 1920's, the Province of Ontario set about establishing Quetico Park, although the Reserve at Gawa Bay was inside the park boundaries. Over several years, the Sturgeon Lake Band was driven from its traditional lands in the park by forest rangers who turned guns on people when they tried to feed their families by hunting and fishing on their treaty lands. Reduced in number by starvation and disease, the community scattered. Many fled to Lac La Croix. The Lac La Croix Band is engaged in treaty rights negotiations to get compensation for land in Quetico Park that their ancestors were forced from.

JUST A WALK



JUST A WALK

Around the month of October, me and a couple of guys went hunting at Thompson Lake, which is about 15 miles from Snake Falls. When we got in the woods we spread out, walking side by side, maybe three or four hundred feet apart, silently and slow. So we'd see a deer, we moved slow.

It was up on the next ridge that I saw a deer. I sat down and watched it for a while. He was on the edge of a cliff, and he hadn't seen me yet. I didn't break a piece of branch, but he looked up and saw me right away. I got ready to shoot him with my 30-30. Slowly, I moved for a better sight, then my ears felt strange, plugged up. Just as I was pulling the trigger, I heard him begin to talk. So I laid off aiming for a while. Then I tried again, and again he said something. He told me the name of the hill, and said the next hill was different. Again I aimed, and this time I shot him anyway.

I ran down, crossing the hill. When I got there, I broke a small poplar tree and hung my packsack on it. Then I started looking around for my buddies. I hollered and hollered for them, but they never answered. So I started running. I could hear them off in the distance ahead of me. I ran as hard as I could, but no matter how far I ran, there was always the same distance between us. I came up to the edge of the ridge and thought, I'll see them from here. But instead, I saw four deer running. I shot them all, and dragged them together to one place.

Then I went on walking. I saw a partridge and shot it, cut its head off with my bullet. Another shell got lost in the ground. It was my last one. I looked for a very long time, but never could find it. There was a hole in the ground, about fist size. A voice came out of that hole and said, "You'll never find the shell you're looking for. It's been taken by the owner of this place." So I started off again.

I kept walking and came to an old beaver pond, with grass growing about four feet high. I could just barely look overtop of it. I saw deer playing, running around the beaver pond, playing some kind of sport I didn't know. A couple of deer collided in mid-air, quite high up. One of them saw me standing there and came close. Then it changed itself into a human being, a girl. We talked for a long time, and she asked me to join in their game. I said I couldn't run in the tall grass, but she said to try it, so I did. I was running like I couldn't believe. It felt great, so good, that I could run with them.

After a while, I started walking again. The next thing I came up on was a moose herd. Seven of them were standing in the direction where I was heading. I didn't want to change my way, not even to step aside or go around them. I kept my straight line, making their sounds. I said to the closest one, don't bother me or I'll club you with this gun. Still, none of them moved. When I'd passed by, I looked back and they were still standing there.

It was about night fall. I stopped and gathered some wood, enough to last for the night. There was moonlight, a full moon. I got up and put some more wood on the fire. Then I went back to the birch I'd been leaning on. It was then that I heard a voice, about ten feet up in the air. I recognized it was my Dad's. He said, "Are you hurt, or do you have a broken leg? What's happened to you, and why didn't you come home with those guys you went with?"

After that, a deer came and looked around, across the fire. My ears felt like they were blocked or plugged. Right away, she changed herself into a girl. She stayed across from me on the other side of the fire for a long time, telling me lots of different things, actually teaching me some of the kinds of medicine and healing. She gave me her secret name. This I have carried for a long time.

She said, "If you're going home in the morning, see where the sun rises? Follow it. Head right towards it, before mid-day comes. You should get to where you started from." It was true. I got home.

A FEW PLACES

We were living at the mouth of Wise Creek for the winter. I was in my early twenties. I walked over to Snake Lake, which is around ten or fifteen miles away. I saw lots of deer, but I was looking for moose. I came to this high hill, when I heard a noise from somewhere. I kept on walking. This noise became louder as I walked. So, it was coming from on top of a hill. I stopped and listened, and figured I'd go and take a look.

They were Prairie Chickens. The swish of their tail feathers made these strange noises. One was sitting in the middle of the circle, with his tail feathers fluffed up. He looked kind of big. The rest of them seemed like they were having a pow wow or some kind of ceremony. They were dancing around this one in the middle. Lots of them. I was standing about 300 feet away. I didn't want to interrupt, so I kept my distance.

Then I saw a man coming towards me, holding a gun. He

stood beside me and started talking. He said, "Come and watch them closer." So we went near and sat down on the ground. We watched them for maybe four or five hours. I wanted to start walking back home, because I was a long ways off. I told this guy next to me, "I'd better be on my way. I don't want to walk home in the dark." He said, "Let's stay awhile longer. I'll walk you home."

We stayed more. The sun was going down fast, but this guy wasn't in a hurry. Finally, we started walking home, even though it was dark. This guy I was with said, "I live on the island in Three Mile Lake. It's across from where you live. There are a few places around there. I'll name them for you."

FIREFALL

This guy once told me a short story. He and his friend went out deer shining one day, but they never saw one. They were bored, so they took some gas out of the can and poured it on the water, then lighted it. The flames moving around on the water looked so nice, that night they stole more gas, and took it to the top of Hay Lake Falls.

They poured it out slowly, being careful not to let it get mixed up in the fast-moving water. Then they threw a match. The fire going over the falls was beautiful. They must have gone through ten jerry cans of gas. Next they went over to shore and saw a small white pine, poured gas on this tree and lighted it.

When they ran out of gas, they tried to sleep, but they couldn't. They kept hearing a strange noise. Maybe it was a moose, they said. But a moose wouldn't be that loud. This noise was so great, it carried until echoes filled the

lake. The sound kept coming closer and closer. Pretty soon, they started to shiver, wondering what to do. All they had was a .22 rifle, and this huge noise was coming so close, they could almost see it, even though it was dark. You know the sound of walking in mud, when your feet get stuck and pull in it? This monster must have been at least as big as the tallest tree.

They got in the boat and paddled to a small island where they sat until morning. Both of them couldn't sleep at all. By morning, they went back to their camping spot. Everything was still there, their tent and teapot, and it was all untouched. They even went to where the noise had come from. They checked all over, but there were no tracks at all.

They slept a while that afternoon. As they were paddling home, they asked each other if either had seen a glance of this thing, whatever it was. One said it was as large as a house and had hooves on its face. The other hadn't seen anything, only a big shadow. They figured that lighting up the stream and tree made it happen. You should never burn a living tree. By the time they got to Three Mile Lake, it was dark again, but they kept on paddling. They didn't want to spend another night out there. They crossed two portages, no matter whether they were afraid. When they got to the other side of Snake Falls, they saw a lot of cats, maybe two or three hundred of them, but that was fake, an illusion. Later, they saw a deer but didn't try to kill it. They made it home around 3 in the morning.

LOST

I borrowed a TV antenna from Debbie for a couple of months, then I went to town to buy one. I took the bus from Fort Frances to Thunder Bay. I was only to stay for six hours, but I met someone there, and we went into a crowded bar room. He kept walking. Way at the end of this room were a lot of people. I knew some of them. As we got to the very back, there was a couch. He took off his shoes and his shirt and stuff, and put pyjamas on. I said, "This is not a hotel. What are you doing?" But he wouldn't speak to me for some reason. He acted very strange. I said, "There's a bus leaving shortly, and I'm getting on it. If you're coming with me, let's go." I saw him following, but he still wouldn't speak. We got on the bus, but once it started, I knew I was going the wrong way. I said to this guy, "I think we're going East." When I asked the bus driver to pull over, he wouldn't stop. He only slowed down and opened the door, so I jumped off.

Walking back on the highway, there was a long curve. I

thought I'd take a short cut. I went through a small park with lots of maple trees and people drunk or drinking. They were strange. I tried talking to them, but no one heard me. Some were walking around and some were sleeping. Next I saw four big bottles, that stood two feet high. I don't know what kind they were.

I kept on walking and everything started to change. Even the rock formations were growing fast. I started to crawl on my hands and knees, since I was high on a mountain now, looking down and trying to see where the highway was. I came to some more people. Night was falling. It was nice. There was a blue glow all over. Down below, I saw ten or fifteen people, all under quilts. I called out, "Can someone hear me?" At least one raised his head. I asked him, "Does this highway lead to Thunder Bay?" He said, "You're a long way from there. I don't think you'll ever find it, because everything is different here, not like what it used to be. Things changed so fast, we didn't even know it. Only a few of us are still here. Lots didn't make it back."

I was still thinking of this person I was on the bus with. I'd try hard to find him, but I didn't know if I could or not. I woke up at 3:15 in the morning and couldn't sleep, so I sat around and made bannock and coffee. I was afraid of something I didn't really know. Maybe someone was coming.

A WEASEL'S TAIL

A guy told me a story. One night, he was checking his trap in the bright moonlight, around March. He had to travel at night because the snow was melting during the day. This was about three quarters of the way to the Canadian Ranger Station, on Lac La Croix. He left around nine at night, walking toward these beaver ponds. He checked two traps, about a mile away from his skidoo, and got one beaver. At the second trap, he heard a strange noise, a clicking sound. He went on, not minding it at all, and pretty soon reached the north shore of the pond. There was a high ridge. It looked like a cliff. He saw a flash, like a lighter flicking, moving westward every second, bright. So he ran to the next beaver pond, which was half way to his Skidoo. He could still see the light, so he hurried to check his next trap. He got another beaver. Now this flashing came towards him. The moon was bright. It was midnight, and the moon was up at mid-day range. The flash was heading down the hill. He sat still and waited for it to come.

When the light was very close, he could see in the moonlight that the flashes were coming from a weasel. There's a little black spot on the tip of a weasel's tail, not more than one inch long. That's what was making the flashes. This weasel passed about thirty feet from him, going down his trail. The man tied his two beaver together to drag them to the Skidoo. He never felt scared, just amazed at what he saw. He waited on his Skidoo for a long time before starting home, in case he spotted it again. Coming down across Indian Narrows to Lone Tree Island, he felt really afraid that something was following him. He kept turning to look back as he was driving home.

Perhaps it was a bad omen that he experienced. A few days later, one of his family died in Thunder Bay Hospital.

INSIDE THE HIGH CLOUDS

When I get curious about something, then I'll pray and ask about it. One time, I wanted to know about how thunder, lightning and hail stones are made by the clouds. So, I prayed to the thunderbirds, and one came to me. This was on one of my vision quests. He didn't take me up there, but he told me what goes on inside these high clouds.

When the clouds bump against each other, that's where the thunder and lightning come from. Inside the cloud is wind going round in a circle, really fast. This circle can get big: eight miles, or even eighteen miles round. And in this circle of wind, there is water spinning. Some of it freezes. This becomes ice balls which get big as a fist or even a volleyball. Once they're heavy enough, they fall down. And as the ice balls are falling to earth, they melt and get smaller. So by the time they get to the ground, they're only as big as the end of my fingernail.

I'd never been in a plane big enough to fly above these high clouds. But once, a guy told me that there isn't anything at all up there. No thunderbirds and no ice balls, nothing but some white mist.

I know that none of these things can be seen. People can't really see the spirits. And only we know what's inside us. Only I know me. I walk along, and nobody sees the spirits living inside me — not the two deer, the two moose, or my eight butterflies. One time, Donna over at Campbell's Cabins — well, I guess she was having some hard times. She said, "Now I know the word 'me'."

I have a very strong story about the word 'me'. But I haven't got it straight to tell yet.

When I came to Toronto from Thunder Bay in the big Air Canada plane, it was a lot like the time I went around the world inside a big trout. Those little round windows — the trout had windows just like that. And that humming noise inside Air Canada, that's the exact sound the trout makes when he's going. I guess that trout would be the size of a jet at least.

This trout took me all around the world, heading West and coming home again from the East. It didn't take long — about four days and four nights. You can get anywhere in the world from just a drop of water, because every drop of water connects to all the lakes and oceans in the earth. Also, the big trout can travel by means of underwater tunnels. So I wasn't too surprised when I got on that Air Canada jet.

Just north of our trapping cabin, there's a creek maybe a half mile long, then this little lake, very shallow. In fact, if you shoot a beaver there in the spring, you don't have to worry about it sinking because you're able to see it just below the surface. This was around the middle of March. The snow was half-melted and the ice on that small lake was very dangerous. The sun was bright and the snow was sparkling as my Dad and I walked along this thin ice, being very careful.

At the edge of the lake there's a point. About two hundred feet off the point, three huge boulders stick up from the ice. Only this day, I saw a very strange thing. There was a fourth one. This boulder was even bigger than the others, 30 feet long and three feet high. I thought, this isn't like the other rocks, it's light grey in colour. We kept walking for an hour, then we decided to sit and wait for a beaver. When we started back, I told my Dad about what I saw. He said he hadn't noticed

anything. We went out there, just to be curious, and sure enough there was a big hole in the ice, about 30 feet long and another 10 feet that must have been its head.

I can't ever forget that lake. Almost every spring there are signs of big turtles, big fish, yet it's very shallow and muddy. The mud is so soft, when you take a canoe across, your paddle sinks down like in quicksand. This is the lake where my Dad fought the *windigo* one spring.

SPIRIT VISITORS AND
PEOPLE WHO CHANGE



A WINDIGO

My Dad and I were out trapping. My Dad was off checking the line. When he came back he said to me, "We have to get away from here, back to the trapping cabin." We were walking as fast as we could down the path, kind of walking and running at the same time. I was surprised and afraid because I'd never seen my Dad hurry anywhere before. When we got back to the cabin, I asked him what was wrong. He told me he had seen a *windigo* back there. A *windigo* is a cannibal spirit, a spirit in a cold wind that can drive people mad.

My Dad told me to go away, to get out of that place. But I said, "No, Dad. I have my own powers and I want to help you out." I guess I was about fourteen at the time and I'd been on my fasts. Already I knew I had some powers of my own. Dad said it was O.K. to stay nearby. He was going to climb up a hill to fight that spirit. When I asked to come with him, he said, "No, you stay here. But you can watch."

Then, from around a lake past a couple of hills to the west, I could hear two howls. They sounded just like, "Yeow, yeow...". And my Dad answered him in the same voice, "Yeow, yeow...". He'd climbed up to the top of the hill and said some prayers. When he did that, he grew up really big. He was at least 300 feet tall. Then I saw *windigo*. He was in the form of a really big black dog, bigger than 50 feet tall. But it was O.K. because my Dad had grown to be a giant.

Four times my Dad and that black dog howled back and forth at each other, "Yeow, yeow..." Then my Dad reached over and pulled out one of the tallest trees from the hillside — a big old red pine. Dad was so big that when he reached down, that pine would only go up to his elbow. He grabbed the tree by the middle and pulled it up like he was picking a medicine plant. Then he hit the *windigo* over the head with it once, just once, and it was all over.

After he finished, he took some kind of medicine that shrunk him back down again to his regular size.

CANNIBAL WOMAN

This lady was living with her husband and daughter in a winter home in Quetico park with a few other families, maybe five or six altogether. She was allergic to the otter. Not knowing this, her husband made her skin one and stretch it. When you're allergic to some animal, it's usually to the blood or a certain part of its body. If you accidentally take some, it's like poison. It gets you before you know it. Usually, you are killed, or if you know what medicine to take you can be cured. But it is also possible that you will turn into *windigo* — a cannibal. You grow large and get powers to kill your own people and eat them up, a whole tribe. Sometimes, a man or woman has the knowledge and powers to attack and kill a person who has become a cannibal.

Cannibals are born and attack in the fall. As the winter ends, they start losing strength. By spring, they usually try to head to the south. They're much weaker. In other words, fall is the strongest time of year for them.

This story took place in the arctic, where it's real cold even in summer. The families were trapping. There's not many otters up there, but lots of seals. Anyway, this lady was allergic to otter. First, she killed her husband. Then, on the same night, she killed the other five families. But she wouldn't touch her daughter. After a while, the lady and her daughter moved on, heading towards the south. They passed a few families along the way that were camped a little off to the side. A cannibal won't bother people even if they're one mile to the side. Only those people who are right in their path.

They came to an Indian reserve which had lots of people, maybe forty or fifty families. The cannibal woman killed all of these Indians, but still did not touch her little girl. The only thing she'd do was cut her now and then, usually in her arm, to see if she was fat enough yet. She named her daughter *go tish shwash* which means 'testing her', and fed her what people eat. Whenever the food was gone, she'd pack up and leave again with *go tish shwash*. They were heading down into our country. It was almost mid-winter.

A cannibal must get wherever it's going in one winter. If it gets too late in the spring, or if you don't make it before winter runs out, you're dead. These two were taking longer than they should.

They came upon these trappers, four or five families, and killed them all then started travelling again. By now it was February or March and the mother felt weaker, she

was losing all her energy.

They reached an Indian reservation. *Go tish shwash* was able to go visiting people. She knew her mom was doing the wrong thing. This tribe was still living in teepees and wigwams. Together with them, she made plans to kill her mother. They made ice at night and covered it during the day so it wouldn't melt off. *Go tish shwash's* plan was to make her mother slip and when she fell down, all the men would cut off her head, arms and legs, then burn her.

One day, they went ahead with it. As soon as the mother slipped, they cut her head off. It slipped far away, but she kept trying to reach for it, rolling her body toward it. While her head was still out of reach, they cut off her arms and legs. Then all the men and women hurried to build a big fire. They had to burn her before midnight, and there was a reason for that too, burning her into ashes before midnight. But her back would not burn for a long time, and that's where her main energy and powers were.

The month was April. As the spring and summer went on, *go tish shwash* kept dreaming about her mom. She was giving her daughter powers and instructions to keep her from becoming a cannibal too.

Go tish shwash's mom appeared in a dream. She said, "Travel south as fast as you can. Early in the fall, go off by yourself. Eat an otter hind as soon as you find one, before the ice is solid enough to walk on. Be careful not

to bother people, but keep on the same path we were following. You must get to a special place in the south before you turn weak in the winter. There, you will be treated by stone people from the ocean, and by star people."

Go tish shwash kept walking south alone. She turned to a killer when her mom was killed. But she stood a good chance of making it south before the killing started. Even though *go tish shwash* was starving, she stayed away from the Indians. When she was weak from fasting she had a dream. In it, her mom came and gave her powers. The next morning, she was able to float, maybe two feet above the path, so her feet did not get stuck in the snow.

Go tish shwash made it south without killing any Indians. The spirits were happy to see her. They knew she was coming, and prepared a big ceremony for her, as they do for all the cannibals that make it. The special medicine they gave her turned her into another kind of animal, a *mi sa be*, which is something like a Bigfoot. Now she could go north again in spring, and she would never eat meat again.

B A - G O G

There are spirits who travel so fast, they go around the world four times each morning, and four more times in the afternoon. They come from the east. Sometimes you'll hear one hollering. One told me his name. It's *ba-gog*, meaning 'bones with no meat on them'. He looks like a skeleton.

There used to be an old log cabin on top of the hill near where our house is built. I liked to sit outside that cabin in the afternoon sun. That's where I saw him. First I heard a sound, like crying in a whistling wind, coming from someplace right over my head. I stood up, and there he was, sitting on the roof. That's when he told me his name.

I don't know why he goes around the world so fast every day. I figure that's just the kind of spirit he is. I wasn't scared of him. Spirits never scare me at all. I'm more afraid of other Indians. That's why I still don't like to be in a crowd, or to walk on someone else's path.

MY GRANDMOTHER'S STORY

People used to put curses on each other. A village under such a curse wouldn't catch food, or if they did get a deer or moose, the meat would be so lean, it wouldn't nourish them. It was like eating nothing. This happened once in the days when my Dad's Mom was around. For eleven days she went fishing on the river near that point where the Skidoos go.

She said prayers to her spirits, still nothing. On the twelfth day, she felt a pull on her line. She started bringing it up slowly. Just as she lifted it out of the water, there was nothing. She was fishing with a rope.

The next day, she felt a pull again. This time, she pulled it up quickly and hanging onto her line was a small merman. She tossed him on the ice and said, "You're not a fish! I'm going after fish." The boy put his head down and just pointed at the water. She had some tobacco left over from her morning prayer in her pocket, so she threw

it in the ice hole. The merman jumped in after it. Then she knew what he'd been wanting, some tobacco.

A little later, she felt a really strong pull on her line. It took a long time, but she managed to bring in a big northern. She wasn't tall, and this fish was as long as she was, twenty-five or thirty pounds. She was on her third life and that's why she was able to do it, feed her whole family.

The next day, she got two or three more in the first half hour. She used these to feed the rest of the town. Later she was given offerings by everyone.

A CAT IN THE HOUSE

Last night I dreamed there was a family living on what looked like Percy's Point. I went over for a visit. A family, and my grandmother and mother were there. I woke up to the sound of the big kids teasing me, pounding plywood on my west window, really rattling the glass. This went on for a long time. I just lay still and tried to recognize their voices.

Then I felt there was a cat inside the house, like Sylvester was meowing around. I thought, there's no cat in here, so I got up and looked out the window, pounding on it and yelling at the kids, "Get out of there. I know who you are. I recognize everyone and I'll do what I have to."

I saw one big man with them. They ran off to the south side of the house. I went to the door. When I opened it, there they all were, with a tall man wearing a black hat. They took off down the road towards the lake. I came inside and sat down, and I heard that cat meowing again,

three or four times.

When a cat turns into a person, he'll usually wear a hat and carry a walking stick. They keep medicine in their tails. Cats like to travel and visit town. They can do this in just a second or two. You can tell when Sylvester is out travelling. Even if you say his name or fill his bowl, he'll just ignore you.

Cats travel all over and find out what's going on. Sylvester knows whenever there's a shaking tent, so he'll go and pay a visit. He speaks more languages than you or I will know. They understand every word we're saying. But when they talk to each other, they talk in Indian.

I heard my Dad's voice in the room. He said, "I've been talking to this cat for a couple days. He won't answer me." I fell asleep again, and I woke up hearing that strange meow from behind my back. I saw a long shadow, leading out of my room, and two eyes glowed as they floated toward my door. I got up and smoked my pipe and prayed.

This is what I heard. There is someone after me, either me or my Dad. I guess both of us, and he wants us to fight back. I heard my Dad's voice again. He told me to lay out tobacco on the rock outside his house before dark every night until he gets home from my sister's. Dad's going to chase this spirit away, so I shouldn't step in and guard my family. I'll wait for him a little while, but I shouldn't wait too long.

A SILVER SHIP

The stone people live in the big ocean, somewhere down as far as Florida. They are my spirits, so I won't say too much about them. I don't like to talk about my own life in detail either. It's alright to tell little stories, because they only give a simple understanding. Any more than that would take all the power away.

In my dream, I travelled with the deer spirits, down to where the stone people live. We went in a special ship. It's silver and looks like a motorboat. It's also like the long white Cadillac we saw in Toronto, with one wing sticking up on the back. It's at least that big. The roof of this ship is glass; one side lifts up so you can climb in. There's a rainbow painted across the front, and a yellow and black stripe down each side. There are two round holes in the back, and two more in the bottom. Beams of light stream out of these holes and move the ship forward and backward, up and down.

These deer spirits were small people with flowing white hair. I was the biggest one in there. We got down to Florida faster than it takes me to walk over to Henry's house.

The ship landed on a tiny island somewhere out in the middle of the ocean. This island is part of a rocky reef that disappears under the waves at times. A lot of spirits were there already, having a pow wow. They came from all over. There were star people who look like starfish and seashells. The stone people sat in, spirits of every kind of rock in the world, diamonds and salt, even sheets of mica. When a big one walks up out of the ocean, he can easily pick me up in the palm of his hand. One held me up in a nest made of clouds and carried me around. I could see the islands and the water way down below.

There are many times I travel in the ship, many places we go, different ceremonies. It's a ship my spirits often use.

NEAR A HIGH MOUNTAIN

I had a nice dream last night. All of a sudden, I was sitting on top of a round grassy hill, out west of here. I don't know how I got to that place. Maybe I travelled through the underwater tunnel that begins in the middle of our river, and leads to anywhere in the world. My albino deer appeared beside me. We walked down the hill toward the water and when we got to the bottom, I saw a rocky spit jutting out into the big waves. We climbed over the grey rocks until it was very narrow, with water splashing on both sides. These waves must have been ten feet high. I leaned over and scooped up some of this water. It felt strange on my fingers, sort of dry. When I drank a little, it was full of salt. I'd never tasted salt water before.

I left the albino standing on the grey rocks, and walked back alone to the shore. I travelled south-southwest until I saw a single high peak. I recognized this as the place where the albino's name comes from: *me-si-na-te chi-we-big*, meaning a glow on top of a mountain. Just as quickly, I was back home again.

FOODS WE EAT



ARE YOU EDIBLE?

We have lots of Nanabush stories, and in most of them he's getting in trouble. Nanabush went out for a walk one day. He was looking for all of the berries. He wanted to know which ones were edible and which ones were non-edible.

First, he went up to the blueberry and asked, "Are you edible?" And the blueberry said, "Yes, everyone can eat me, both people and animals."

Then he went up to the bearberry and asked, "Are you edible?" And the bearberry answered, "The bears can eat me, but I'm not for you Indians."

Since Nanabush was also going after trees, he went up and asked a big pear whether he could be eaten or not. This old pear answered, "Oh yes, I am edible and I taste very good, but I wouldn't go after me too much. If you do, your nose will start growing. See the shape I am? If

you eat too many of me, that's just what your nose will end up looking like." All of these fruits and berries have weapons to defend themselves. Like the blueberries have their little thorns.

Anyway, Nanabush went up to the black cherry and asked him, "Are you edible?" "Yes," he said, "I am, but be careful not to eat too many of us. If you do, you'll get constipated." Next he went to another cherry, this time the chokecherry, and asked if she could be eaten. "Yes I can," she said, "but we're prickly, and if you eat too many of us, you'll get really itchy when you go to the outhouse."

Nanabush saw some moss growing on a rocky cliff. I can remember a soup my Dad used to eat, made up of wild rice and this kind of rough green and grey moss. Nanabush asked it, "Are you edible?" The moss told him, "We taste good in soups or stews, but I wouldn't go after too many of us. We're pretty slippery. You'll slide down these rocks, and your rear end will look as scratchy as we are."

WHAT ANIMALS AND BIRDS EAT

I've been thinking about what animals and birds eat, starting with the partridge. He eats leaves from the top of the trees and three-leaf clovers which are up off the ground. Ducks eat roots, minnows and small clams. Rabbits eat from above the ground. The thicker the snow gets in winter, the higher they pick their food. In summertime, they eat mostly clover and new-grown leaves. Coming to think of it, all of the animals and birds eat fresh new things.

As the seasons go around, a moose picks his twigs and sticks as high as he can, or he eats water plants and underground roots, never anything from on the ground. Deer are the same way.

Now I'm thinking about chickens and what they eat there on the farm, along with cows, horses, lambs and pigs. When people shovel out the cow manure, chickens go for it, peck at it and eat it. No wonder people get sick,

especially when a chicken has been frozen and kept for months and months at a time. Some people refreeze their meats and birds. I think these people are making themselves sick.

Our ancestors made their sugar from maple trees, and there wasn't much of it. They never ate a lot of sugar, like people do now in pop and candy, cakes and cookies. I've asked Elders from eighty years or more back, and most of them say they never heard of sugar in those days. From listening to their stories, I've learned these things are making us sick now.

TO CATCH A BEAR

My Great Grandmother had to do a lot of things for herself. She used to make lard from bear fat. And she had a special way of finding out where the bears were. My Great Granddad, and even other people, would come around to her when they wanted to find a bear.

She'd make up a clean stick of cedar — maybe two or more feet long. About six inches at one end was coloured red, so the hunters could track it in the snow.

When the time came to try and catch a bear, my Great Grandfather would go to her and ask. Then she'd take that stick out to a secret spot of hers where she'd pray over it. That's what gave the cedar stick its power.

When she felt ready, she'd go outside the tent they lived in and slowly walk around it four times. Then she'd stop and point the stick straight out, then throw it as hard as she could. That spear kept going in a straight line exactly

where she'd pointed it, travelling lightly overtop of the snow and never turning. It would turn if it came to a big tree, but only to go around it, then keep going in that same direction.

All my Great Grandfather had to do was follow the stick's red trail in the snow. My Dad went along with him on one of these bear hunts. For a long time, they followed. Then, the stick reached a spot in the snow and stuck itself there. That's where my Great Grandfather started digging. Right underneath he found a bear, sound asleep.

In winter, it's better to shoot a bear while it's sleeping. That was the way they tried to do it.

LEUKEMIA AND DIABETES

I've been given a cure for diabetes, though I haven't yet tried it out. The moose told me. He's the one for healing, and all my medicines come straight from him. He gave it to me in my shaking tent just this year, sometime between the summer and now.

The moose explained, we never used to have diabetes here, nor leukemia, or a lot of the sicknesses that are here now. They come from changes that have taken place, changes in the things we eat and in the water. It wasn't too long ago that I learned you can get anywhere in the world from just one drop of water. Not just a stream, but even a little puddle can take you everywhere. This is how the pollution gets around. We get it when we drink the water, or walk in a puddle. It falls on us in the rain, or even gets into us through tiny drops of water in the air we breathe. The sicknesses are there.

My cure came from watching the deer and the moose,

how they eat. They will never take anything off the ground. A deer will eat leaves, or buds off the trees, aspen buds and poplar, or roots from underwater in ponds and streams. And, if he does take a root to eat from the earth, it's only for his medicine. He won't touch anything from the ground, because it's just like a dirty plate. Look at a chicken or a cow. They'll eat anything off of the ground. We get sicknesses from pollution in the foods they eat.

Also, the way those animals are killed — in our traditional time, people would never eat a deer that was caught in a snare. The only thing we'd eat that had been snared was a rabbit now and then. This is because, there's disease in the liver of everyone, even in us. Nobody's perfect. When an animal is snared, the liver bursts and poison goes through its whole body. There's a completely different taste to meat killed in this way. And it is much the same when an animal knows for very long before it dies. Cows, pigs and chickens know for a long time before they are killed. That kind of meat is poisoned.

I've been given the first part of the cure, all the things we shouldn't be eating. When I'm ready, the next part will come to me. I know now that these sicknesses come from things we never had here before.

FROM A MOOSE'S LIP

The old Indians didn't have any hair on their faces at all, so they never needed to shave. They didn't have to use clam shells to pull those hairs out, because there weren't any hairs. But if a man did want to grow a beard, there was a way. You boil up the lower lip of a moose, and eat it. That starts hair growing under your mouth. If you don't want a beard, you avoid eating moose lips.

THANKSGIVING

I asked Ron about the thanksgiving prayer he said with the nine-year olds and kindergarten kids at the school.

"First I gave thanks to the Creator for being able to use tobacco, for being a pipe carrier. That's the way I start off all my blessings, by giving thanks for that.

Then I gave thanks to the air, the water, the four corners, upstairs and downstairs. I gave thanks for the part of the world we live in, the plants and the berries we have, wild rice, the water plants, and even the flowers.

I gave thanks for all the people who came here, our guests. I even prayed for travelling, for safe journeys from here to there. And for all the fish and the food. That was it."

ADDICTIONS

Someone asked me a question I didn't know how to answer right away. Then, four or five days later, I heard a voice in a dream saying, "Do you remember that question, about addiction to liquor or drugs? I know an answer you might tell to that person sometime...."

What you do is, prepare for at least eight days before you go out fasting. Sit still for four days and four nights, working with your soul. When you first see the new moon in the west, go out walking or by canoe, finding a way to feed yourself in the woods. Do this until you see the full moon up there, then stop and rest for four days and four nights. Really think hard. Remember, you are working for yourself. Some kind of spirit should come. Ask this spirit questions about how to proceed with your life. If you think you're lost, ask for directions to go home.

After your fast is through, go on feeding yourself. This

shouldn't be hard. Stay out until you see another new moon, about twenty-eight days altogether. This should help.

THE WORD ME



ABOUT WINNING

I can't tell the story of the word 'me'. Not all of it anyway. It's a story that is so strong, I can't even put it together. When I try to get my thoughts clear, it escapes me. Little parts come up now and then, and maybe these will add up to a story someday.

Just after my vision quest fasting, when I was twelve or thirteen years old, I had a dream about racing. The kids were having races then, and since I'd already finished my fasting, I knew some medicines. There's a medicine for the games people play, and I could have used it to win races if I wanted. It was the thunderbird who told me not to be a winner, not to use the medicine in this way. If you're a winner, it makes people feel bad, then they may want to do something back. I knew from my vision quest that I shouldn't be the one to start things like that. I should never get into competitions. In my dream, the thunderbird told me, it's not for you to go after winning. Instead, go inside after the word 'me'.

So I never cared what I did to put bread on the table. When I was a young boy growing up, we survived by trapping. Then I worked as a dock boy for a while. I worked on construction, building cottages for five seasons. And I was a guide for nineteen years, until ten years ago, when I got the job as Caretaker at the elementary school. It didn't matter to me at all what I did to feed my family. In this way I'm different from some people.

I was told something else then, but I ignored it for a long time. I was a good hunter and I always had enough to feed my family. But I became too aggressive. I shot a lot of animals, and wounded some. A wounded animal, when it lives, feels a lot of anger and holds it against you. This happened to one guy here. He shot too many animals, and wounded some. He died very young. I heard about the anger of wounded animals again in my shaking tent, four years ago. That's when I stopped hunting so much. For the same reason, I don't eat as much meat.

Something else came out of it. When I stopped hunting, I knew I could live anywhere in the world. Before, I couldn't move very far from La Croix, because I would miss the hunting too much. Now I can do what I do anywhere. I won't ever stop my healing. That came to me in my vision quest, and there wouldn't be any 'me' if I were to give it up.

STRESS

For a long time after my wife left, I felt so down, but I didn't want my kids to see me or notice me. So I went for long walks alone. I was trying to lose my sorrow, which was deep down inside me. Finally, I tried the word 'me', because only the word 'me' could get me through all the sadness.

This word 'me'. If I was to follow its meaning, I knew it could take me out of the anger, the hatefulness, all the feelings inside me that I never showed or expressed. Everything I know about that little two-letter word 'me' helped to get me out of my thoughts.

The first thing I did was to hide my sorrows, so that I could be a good father. Next, I thought a lot about the word 'me'. I tried to follow its meaning. Then, I tried to overcome that word so I could be with other people again. In the end, I learned to live with 'me', to be happy. I have an Indian legend about this word, and a song. I'll write them down someday.

WHERE WE ALL PASS BY



THE SOUND OF HUMAN CRIES

We had a trapping shack on Jean Lake. My family would leave Lac La Croix around the last part of February and stay there until the ice breaks, about the end of April or first week of May, and sometimes even later, say the last week of May. We'd leave our trapping shack for a week at a time and camp out along the trapline. One spring we set up camp on a little lake called Red Pine Lake, about 10 miles from our cabin. We dragged toboggans loaded with our camping gear, even a small airtight heater, stove pipe, black tar-paper and plastic to cover our wigwam. This was easier than gathering birch bark.

Anyway, we set up camp fast and had time to go set a few beaver traps. I went to the south side of the lake. My Dad went to the north, where he knew of some beaver ponds. It was late in the evening and I remember the weather was nice. I set out a couple of traps, then I saw a beaver. I shot it and started to skin it roughly. The next thing, I heard strange noises from a long skinny point. I had a

dog with me. His name was *sho shgoch*, meaning a little dog that does smart things. It's a nickname. This dog wanted to go out there, but I made him stay, good dog. This noise was exactly like someone crying, softly. When I got done skinning, I started to move slowly, making no noise at all. I strung my beaver across my back, tying an arm hole and a leg with a piece of string. I crawled out to the middle of the point, where I could see both sides of the lake. I wanted to see this thing that was making a cry. On the point, I loaded up my .22 automatic, then told *sho shgoch* to chase that sound toward me. I made up my mind, whatever it was, I wouldn't start shooting until it got close enough that I could see both eyes.

When the dog got out there, I heard partridges flying. I ran and saw six or seven partridges up in the trees. That sound was their mating call. I'd almost scared my Dad, running to tell him I heard someone cry very close to me. I was glad I'd had the heart to check it out.

Back at the camp, I put on a pot of tea for my Dad. He wasn't home yet. A big hill stood behind our camp, very pretty. When I climbed it I could see a long way off. I sat there and looked down at our camp below. It had started to freeze in the evening. Then I heard my Dad coughing and his footsteps on the snow crust, but I couldn't see him. I hollered out to him but he didn't answer. I ran down the hill and checked my tea, thinking he might have gone back out after having a cup. It was untouched.

I kept wandering around, looking for him. Finally, I saw

him about two miles away, out on the ice, just starting to head back for camp. I was really worried. I knew I'd heard him around here earlier, but I didn't say anything about it when he got here. We ate bannock, roasted beaver tails and tea. That was my dinner for the evening. Later on, Dad asked me why I was so quiet. I told him I'd heard the sound of a human cry, but I was afraid to say I'd been listening to him up on top of the hill. He must have dreamed about it, because the next morning, he told me it was a bad sign. And sure enough, we lost my Mom that spring.

STARS ON A BLUE SKY
(ONE OF JUDITH'S STORIES)

Last winter was a rough time for my Mom's side of the family. When my uncle Hank died, I went to my uncle Herb's farm for the funeral. Herb and I talked about Lac La Croix, and when it got late in the evening, he went down in his basement and found some things for me to take back there: a dish full of arrowheads he'd plowed up; three pieces from a clay Indian pipe his Grandfather must have broken when he first turned the earth. And a tied hand of tobacco leaves from the oldest farm, kiln-dried a nice gold colour. He felt an impulse to "give these things back." My Mother was annoyed at him, giving that pipe away, since she remembered it from her own childhood. Ron agreed I should keep it.

Later Ron said, a smart person knows when he's about to die, and gives his pipe away. Herb had an accident shortly after. When Aunt Clara heard of his death, she said Herb and Hank always did everything together. Got married and had kids, farmed side by side, added onto

their houses. And Herb always came in second by a bit.

Ron told me to burn sage, cedar, sweetgrass, and tobacco, and put a light on while I slept. He said this helps a spirit cross to the place beyond.

Herb's funeral was bitter cold but snowless. I got sick. I felt restless, and had nightmares. Ron went out to a beaver pond one morning and prayed for awhile. Soon the snow started circling around him, so thick he couldn't see anymore. He heard voices, and one gave him this cure for grief.

He told me, "Stay at home and sew something, moccasins, or Skidoo mitts. Or make a quilt." I've never been any good at sewing. I did poorly at Home Economics in school and I don't even know what a moccasin looks like in any detail. It took a couple of days, but finally I went down to the basement and pulled out my old bags of clothes, and started cutting what I don't wear anymore. At least I knew what a quilt looked like. I saw a pattern on the back of a cereal box. The LeMoyné Star. So I figured I'd make that one.

I sewed each block of sixteen pieces differently, with no sense of the other ones. The fabrics included gold fleck on a red background (a Christmas tablecloth), leopard spot flannelette, an old raincoat. The stars were separated by borders: green and sky blue. Time went on, months, then a year. I finished a film, a magazine, a year of teaching. I finally bought some batting to sew in the

middle and plain navy cotton for the back. I pinned the quilt together on my cottage floor. It hangs unfinished on one wall of Ron's empty house up the hill, dusty, pins pointing in every direction. I take it down now and then and work on it, bit by bit.

WHERE WE ALL WILL BE GOING TO

In my dream, I was walking west, due west, a long way. And as I got further, there were others walking along the same path — people, but also bears, deer, moose, and lots of ravens. I came to the edge of this big, deep canyon. It had a narrow bridge across it to the other side, no wider than a split log. With me were two horses, a brown one and a grey one. They told me to cross. I was scared, because the bridge was so thin. I was afraid to look down or even check my footing. So I kept my eyes on the other edge and took little tiny steps until I was finally over.

When I got to the other side, it looked much like here, but there was no water. I saw lots of people now. There was a hill, and on the other side, some little houses. Each had a window facing north and a door facing south. I looked inside one house and saw my Uncle Sam. As soon as I saw him, he covered himself in birch bark. He seemed very surprised to see me, and asked how I'd arrived at this place. I explained that the horses had

brought me. I just wanted to see a few people, but I wasn't going to stay. So he said he'd take me around.

We walked to another house not far away. It was just as small, only big enough for one person to lie down in. In fact it was exactly the size of the graves we are buried in here, with one little window. These also have doors and face directly to the north and south. Inside this one was Roy Burnside, Larry's Dad. He too was shocked to see me.

First he asked what I was doing there. When he found out I wasn't dead, he asked me to do him a favour and take some medicine back to his wife. He said, "I know she's been having a hard time down there with her heart. I gave her something before I left, but she doesn't know how to use it, and she's missing a couple of ingredients." He gave me some rock medicine, and told me the other things she'd need to make it up.

At the time, Roy was just starting to get his body back. It takes six to eight years after you die for your body to return to the way it was in the old place. I guess that's how long it takes for your coffin to dissolve. So it's better not to have a coffin made of very thick or hard wood, because that kind takes longer to dissolve, so it takes more time for your body to come back to you.

The dead have bodies just like we do, and they look the same as in middle age. But they can go without bodies if they want. They can return to the earth, to the places

which are theirs. My places are all the islands and the shores around here. My spirit could go anywhere, and be seen if I want, or be invisible. So it is better to be a spirit. But some of the dead come back to live again on this earth. My Grandmother came three times, and she's back now. I think she's living somewhere just north of here.

After I finished seeing Roy, Sam said it was time for me to leave. But first I had two people I wanted to see, my Grandmother and my Mother. Sam and I kept walking together. When we got to the bottom of a hill, I saw two people coming down towards me. They were about as far away as Leon's house across the river, maybe four hundred feet. I could see it was two women, and one came as close as the house next door.

It was my Grandmother. She said she was glad to see me, glad to know I had the power to travel to this place without being dead — that I was strong enough. Then she told me a few things about how we should act toward those who have left for the place beyond.

You can offer tobacco for the dead. It's OK to put it on a rock, on the side of a fallen log, or up on the roots of a tree. But never put an offering of tobacco on the ground. The dead do not live there. After someone has died, you shouldn't talk about it too much or call them back, because right after we die, it takes a while for our spirits to leave this earth. If we talk too much about people who have died, we make it harder for them to go. If you feel

lonely, it's alright to get a cat. That can help. I got a guitar and it made me feel better than anything. But if you still feel a lot of grief, walk out in the woods, put your arms around a living tree, and cry with it for as long as you need.

The other woman on the hill was my Mother. We spoke for a short while, but my Grandmother told me not to go any closer than about 50 feet, or to touch her at all. It wasn't because of me — I was strong enough to put my arms around her without feeling grief. It was for her sake. She might have been sad if I touched her. I knew she was glad to see me, and that she loved me very much.

So I started on my way back. There were lots of deer, bears, moose and ravens around. I asked Sam about that. He told me that they travel back and forth all the time. They cross over to play games: ring and toss, the moccasin game, and lacrosse, which has another name in my tongue.

I kept walking back with my two horses until we reached the canyon. They stayed at the edge and watched while I crossed over. This time, I wasn't afraid at all and I looked down a lot. It was the same down below as it is above, except without any water. When I got back to the other side, I woke up. It was dawn already. I'd been dreaming this dream all night long, at least five or six hours. I was happy to have travelled to the place beyond, and to see where we all will someday be going to.

SUNDANCE (THE CONCLUSION)

Two years ago last August, I went to Saskatchewan for a Sundance ceremony. There I saw four or five different kinds of Indians, as well as whites and blacks.

Above the Sundance lodge, there is an eagle's nest. All the Elders were praying and singing for four days, and some were fasting. On the last day of the ceremony, an elder came into my tent and said, "I know you have your bundle with you." I said, "Yes, I have my pipe here." He said, "Why don't you come into the lodge and pray with us, as we're saying our closing prayers now, asking the Creator for our safe journey home."

I went inside the lodge and sat next to the person who'd asked me there. An Elder picked up my pipe and stuck tobacco in it, and I told this person, "I'll be praying in my own tongue." Very soon, I knew my prayer was answered, and it was the Creator who spoke to me, in Chippewa.

After, others who were praying told me they'd heard the Creator's voice. Each was answered in his own tongue: Cheyenne, Blackfoot, Cree. They heard the same Lord that every nationality prays to. Only the Creator speaks every language there is in the world. We are all two-leggeds, therefore, we have one God. If we help each other as in one group, I'm sure we can live better and encourage each other to gain understanding.

I also hope this book will help the readers, by bringing some kind of belief and acknowledgement, although the spirits I've asked for help through vision quests and dreams do not give powers through this book.

It's just an ordinary book that people might like to read and get something out of. I'm glad.



Ron Geysbick is a traditional Ojibway teacher who was born in 1942 and lives at Lac La Croix. *TE BWE WIN (Truth)* is his first book. He is currently working on a second, *The Cycle of Seasons*.

Judith Doyle was born in 1957 in Toronto where she still lives. She has contributed as an editor and author to *Impulse Magazine* since 1978. An award winning filmmaker and writer, her collaboration with Ron Geysbick began while producing her documentary film *Lac La Croix*.

A few years ago, I started to write down stories I've gathered over time, say a little over thirty years. I told them to schoolchildren and people who wanted to know about my own struggling ways. At the school, kids asked me for the same stories year after year, so I started writing things down to help me remember. This is how the book got started. About the title, and the song I wrote: *Te bwe win* means 'truth', based on what I've heard from my Grandmothers, my Dad and Grandfather, and lots of other Elders. In these stories, I can almost hear their voices. I sat around with them for hours, listening, and sometimes I didn't understand much at all. Not until years later did I get the meaning, but I liked to visit them and help out, and they helped me a lot. Some of these stories are my own, things I've discovered myself because I wanted to know.

Ron Geyschick



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