

*Elder's story*

## The boy who went to the moon

As told to Louise Profeit-LeBlanc by Mary Vittrekwa

Many years ago, when the people depended totally on the land, the Gwich'in people remember this story. It's the story about the boy who went to the moon.

There was a couple who had only one child. He was only a few months old and was fussing, so his mother took him out of their tent to show him the moon on a warm spring night. The little boy became very happy, he smiled and pointed to the moon and said the word for moon in his mother's language. He settled right down after this. His parents realised then that he must be special and in fact his father said "I think he comes from the moon people. He has a moon spirit. We must be good to him all his life."

Time passed until the year that the people were suffering from famine. That was the year that the caribou had taken another trail in their migration. The snow and cold weather had come too quick and the people hadn't got enough to last them the winter. They didn't know how they were going to get through the winter and the whole village was worried. Some even cried because they knew that there was going to be great suffering.

This boy was about 14 years old now. Although he was this age, he was still as small as a young child. He never grew. He was a midget. His mother took pity on him and sewed him little marten skin pants to keep his legs warm and when they moved across the country she would carry him on her back, as walking over the tundra was very difficult. His parents treated him very well.

"Mom, I know how to make caribou come to this place. I will make medicine for the people and bring caribou back from their trail." His mother was very surprised when her son told her what he could do to help the people.

The little guy went out of the skin-tent and pulled at a little clump of willows in the snow. It turned into a small calf caribou right before his parents' eyes! They killed that little caribou.

"Now take some of that meat and attach it to the fringes on my jacket. I'm going to make a song and dance for that bull caribou, to change his mind." His mother did as her son instructed and attached strips of the caribou meat to the fringes of his jacket. The young boy went outside the tent again. This time he plucked some willows and peeled the bark of them. He was going to use these for dancing sticks.

"Now before I make my medicine to bring that chief-caribou back, go tell all the people what I am going to do. Tell them that the only thing I want for my work is the stomach fat around the caribou's stomach. That's all I want. Now go and tell them quick, while I make a song for them."

His mother went to tell the people. Meanwhile the boy came outside of the tent and with those dancing sticks in each hand, proceeded to sing a special caribou song, a song which even the oldest of the Elders no longer remembers the words to. He danced, clacking the sticks together to make the same sound that caribou horns make when they are in a large herd moving across the land. Pretty soon, on top of the nearest rise, the young man saw the silhouette of a bull caribou. The chief for the caribou people. He knew that there were thousands more behind him.

The people ran around frantically, herding the caribou into the caribou corrals, spearing and shooting them with arrows. They were in a state of frenzy. Many caribou were taken that day, and the young boy waited patiently in his tent with his mother. Nobody came.

“What’s the matter with my people? How can they forget their promise so quickly? His mother insisted that he wait a little longer. They are busy with the meat, my son. Be patient, they won’t forget you.”

The boy waited until nightfall. He became very upset. He cried. He cried over this condition of the people. “I want to go back to my people. Back to the moon, for these people here have no more respect. They forget promises. I don’t want to live among such people anymore.”

His parents begged the boy not to leave them. In fact, that night when they went to bed, they put the child between them so he could not leave. In spite

of their attempts, however, in the morning, he was not there. They awakened to discover only his little marten skin pants hanging from the smokehole in the middle of their tent. Their son had returned to the moon.

Now, to this day, if you look closely at the moon, you will see a young boy holding something in his hand, something that looks like lace fat from around a caribou’s stomach. And this boy is still controlling the caribou. On the first full moon in the fall and the first full moon in the spring, the caribou begin their migration as they have done since the beginning of time.

SO ROD! YOU FIGURE THE TRANQUILIZER IS WEARING OFF YET? "

