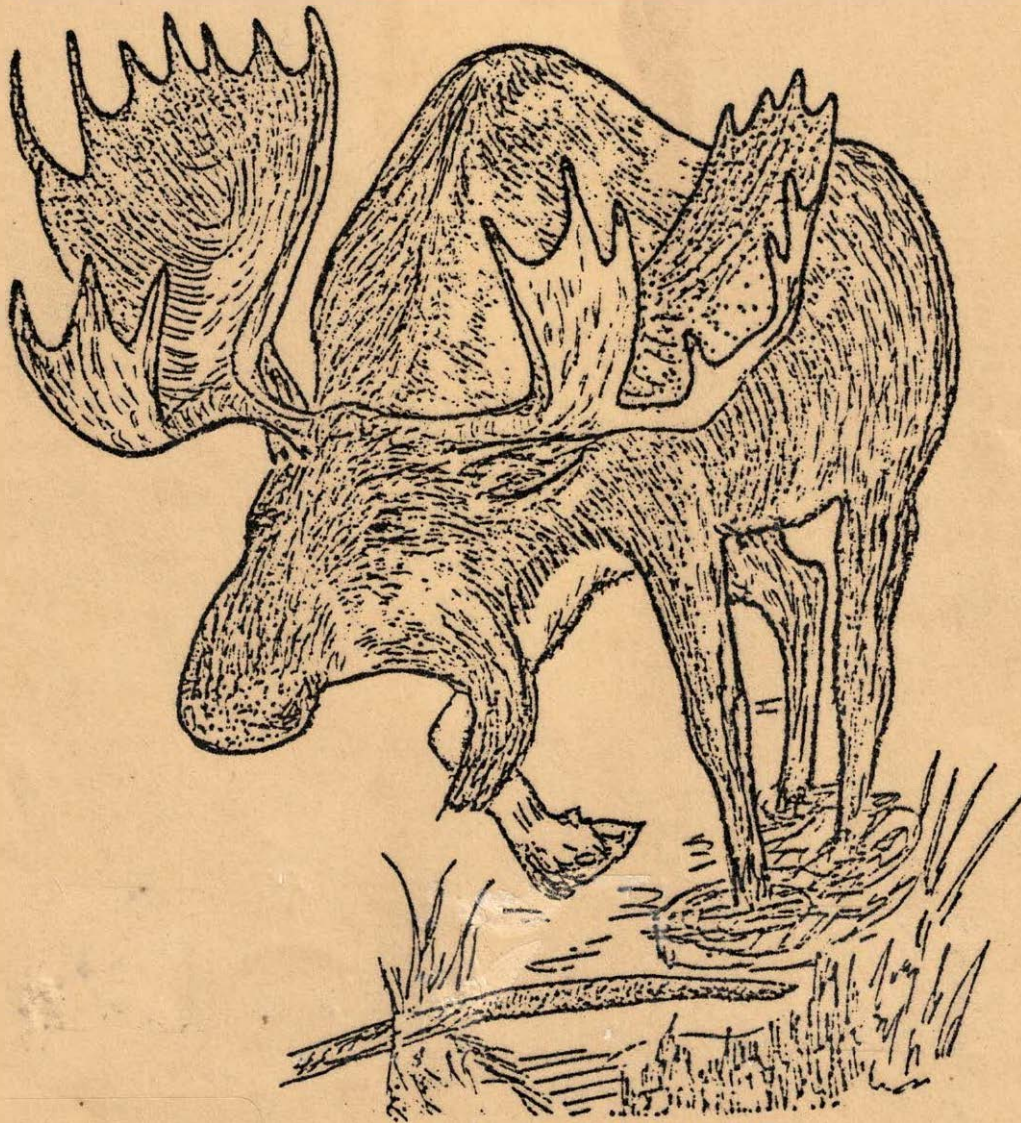




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# CREE STORIES FROM MOOSE LAKE



Published by The Native Education Branch

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## F O R W A R D

This collection of Cree Stories has been prepared for students of the Cree language in schools, and community education programs, and for any people who wish to read them for interest sake.

These stories have been told over the decades by the Indian Elders of Moose Lake, Manitoba, and surrounding areas and have prompted great interest among the people who have heard the stories.

We thank Dan Ehman, a Cree scholar and teacher at Moose Lake, for having taken time to listen to the elders and record their stories as they were told to him and Stella Cook Neff who typed the syllabics portion of the stories.

A special thanks to all the elders of Moose Lake who made this booklet possible, especially, Ben Sinclair, Robert Buck, Absolam Patchinose and Andrew Sanderson for their stories. Cree people everywhere are the benefactors, both now and in the future.

The development of this booklet is the result of a cooperative effort coordinated by the Native Education Branch, the Cree of Moose Lake and Dan Ehman of Moose Lake.

BEN SINCLAIR STORY

I have fished the waters around Moose Lake for 50 years. I would like to tell you a story about the time I quit fishing. This incident took place at Trout Island Lake.

Early in the morning as I set out, I saw a bear looking at me from the shore. I was on my way to lift my nets. When I finished, I went to shore where I saw the bear, to throw away my suckers. I threw one little Jackfish into the bush.

Suddenly, I heard a rustling in the bush and that bear came out in the open. He looked at that Jackfish and shook his head, showing his dissatisfaction; so I threw him a sucker. But again he shook his head as if to say "no". This time I threw him a Whitefish. Only then did he nod his head in agreement. He took that fish into the bush with him.

But my boat was stuck up on the shore. I couldn't push it away from the shore. But I guess that bear happened to notice my predicament. He came back out. Then he pushed my boat for me. I was free from the shore. As I was leaving, I noticed that bear waving at me. I waved back at him. I told him that I wouldn't be fishing anymore and that I wouldn't be able to bring him anymore Whitefish.



## THE STORY OF EAST ARM NARROWS

About 25 miles east of Moose Lake is a narrows connecting Moose Lake and Front Island Lake. People often go there to fish. There are many fish in that narrows, especially big Jackfish.

An American doctor has a cabin there and some other buildings. He has made himself a very nice spot there.

One thing you notice is that the water moves through the narrows in different directions. Some days it flows one way and on another day it might flow the opposite way. The people have a story to explain why this happens.

One time a big Jackfish lived in the narrows. He was the biggest fish in the lake. He considered himself the mightiest creature in the world. He was king over all the fish.

Living in that same area was a big bull moose. This bull moose was a grand animal and very proud. He considered himself king of all the animals. Often he used to go to the narrows to drink water.

One day as he went for a drink, he spoke to the other animals there. He told them that he was the greatest animal in the woods. He was king of all the beasts.

But the great Jackfish heard him. He became very angry at the words of the bull moose. So when the moose bent his head to drink water the Jackfish saw his chance. He rushed at the moose and seized him by the nose. He attempted to drag the moose into the water. But the moose put up a mighty effort and attempted to back out of the water. He almost dragged the mighty Jackfish out of the water but again the Jackfish pulled the moose into the water. Back and forth the struggle continued. Each time the Jackfish dragged the moose into the water, the water would rise on the shore. As the moose dragged the Jackfish out to the shore, the water would go down again. All day the mighty creatures struggled back and forth and the water continued to move up and down.

At long last, the two kings became tired. Neither one was a clear winner. They conceded that they were very nearly equal in strength. The Jackfish agreed to be king of the water and the bull moose would be king of the forest.

But to this day the water continues to move back and forth through the narrows, ever since it was set in motion by the battle of those two mighty animals. Can you believe it?







THE MEDICINE MAN, TWO CLAWS

In the old days people considered Moose Lake the most frightening or mysterious place. This was because it was the headquarters where all the medicine men used to meet.

One medicine man was especially powerful. He was named "Two Claws" because the nails on his index fingers were much longer than the rest.

One time, this medicine man walked on the water to Shoulderblade Island. He went to see the monsters who had no noses. These monsters lived in a lake in the very center of Shoulderblade Island. They lived in the deepest part of the water in this lake. Occasionally, people have heard these creatures banging away on something under the water. It sounded like they were banging stones together.

Only men were able to see Two Claws walk on water. If women looked at him, he would sink right away.

He learned this secret in a dream. He was told the secret by the big spider that walks on top of the water. This spider told him that he could also walk on top of the water, just like him.



## THE STORY OF NORRIS LAKE

Absolam Patchinose

There is a lake in our area here called Norris Lake, or Cow Lake in Cree. It is about 40 miles south east of Moose Lake Settlement on the other side of Bracken Lake. For some reason, the water in this lake has a strange taste. Some say it is an oily taste. I know when fire fighters camped there the time of the big forest fire about 20 years ago, they had to get their water from another lake.

The reason it is called Cow Lake is because long ago, skulls of some kind of cows were found there. These skulls are most likely the skulls of wood buffalo.

People say that there is a lot of money to be found there some place. The story of this money is very interesting. The story was told to me by an old man and he was told the story by old people when he was young, so it must have happened very long ago.

One time, two men came from the United States, north through Grand Rapids to Norris Lake. They were fleeing a war in their country. That war might have been the American Civil War. They pulled all their belongings on a sleigh. There at Norris Lake, they built themselves a small cabin and attempted to live there.

These men were not too experienced with living off the land. They weren't too well equipped either. At times during the winter they would make their way over to Bracken's Lake. They would meet Moose Lake trappers over there. They tol a little bit about themselves but mostly they wanted to buy fish.

One time they noticed a little pup at the camp of the Moose Lake trappers. They wanted to buy that pup for a pet, they said. The trappers agreed and sold them the pup. The men paid for the pup with money from a chest they had. The trappers say they had lots of money and gold bars in that chest.

The trappers suspected that the men really wanted that pup for food.

Anyway, those two men died there that winter, either by disease or starvation. But no one knows what happened to that chest of money that they had. Perhaps it is still there. Cow Lake is an isolated lake where hardly anyone ever goes.

Do you want to look for treasure? Maybe you or someone else will be lucky some day. At any rate, Norris or Cow Lake is a very interesting place to hike to.







## THE ORIGIN OF THE WETIGO

Once there was a woman who used to trap way up north. She caught a great deal of fur. One day the dogs got at her fur and destroyed all of them. The woman was very upset. She was so depressed that she gradually became insane. Then she became a Wetigo.

She flew from the north and landed in Moose Lake. She followed a light to get there. She landed on a narrow road. In those days there was much bush in the settlement and nobody knew she was there.

One day, a medicine man happened to discover the Wetigo. He saw her peeking at him as he was looking in the mirror inside his log house. He went and asked her why she was sitting there. She told him her story about her pelts and the dogs. Then the medicine man said, "You have to leave here, because I don't want to kill you".

She answered, "I will leave, because I see where there is another light to follow". What she saw was Cedar Lake.

Where she sat has been seen by many people in Moose Lake. It is on the reserve side near the lake. To this day, the ground remains bare. Nothing grows there.



ROBERT BUCK STORY

A long time ago I was lost. That was about thirty-two years ago. I'm going to tell you the story now, of how hard an experience it was so everyone can hear about it and know of it. I was about 14 or 15 at that time.

I happened to think it would be a good idea to go seneca root digging that time. So I set out. Abraham Martin and Archie Martin went with me, as well as my brother Andrew Buck.

During the day as we were arriving there, we saw a light shining. That light was meant for me. This was a sign that something would happen to one of us.

In the morning we set out. I didn't bring any lunch with me. I thought the others would bring some. I didn't even take any matches. I only took a little to drink.

The mosquitoes were very bad at this time, and I didn't have any insect repellent either. In spite of the mosquitoes, I didn't feel like coming back to the camp yet with the others. I remained behind digging. I thought I would go back later on even though it was starting to get dark. I anticipated coming out of the bush towards William's Lake.

On the way back I missed the trail that the others had used. That's where I got lost. I started walking towards the muskeg. I walked on and on until I came to a small creek. That's where I decided to camp for the night.

In the morning I seemed to remember that I had heard shots in the direction from which I had come, but I wasn't really sure. Fate seemed to lead me in the direction I was to take and indeed, that's the direction I went.

The place I had stayed that night was thick with mosquitoes which attacked and tormented me almost to the point of madness. It was also very chilly during the night.

Well, I crossed that little creek just like that. As I said, fate was in control of me, leading me on. I could do nothing but follow its course. Again, I stopped for the night. The experience was as the night before. Again the mosquitoes tormented me and started opening sores on my body. My mind was becoming obsessed with how to deal with the agony caused by the mosquitoes.

As I again thought of stopping the following night, I thought of how I could escape the mosquitoes. I came up with an idea. I had no mosquito repellent but I did have a knife. I made a tiny shelter out of willow sticks and grass. There I slept.

When I awoke the next day the sun was already high. I started off again, walking and walking. I had entered a huge muskeg area covering hundreds of square miles. Throughout the morning I went farther and farther. Sometimes I fell through the muskeg as I went. All this time I had nothing to eat. I yearned for a dry spot to lie down as I wandered through this muskeg. But there was nothing but wet land everywhere. Wherever I sat it was wet. Time and again I had to sleep on the wet ground just like that. I never thought that I would ever have to suffer such experiences. It was as if fate was intending to make me undergo great suffering.

Again I started off the following morning. At least I had eased the mosquito problem. I started sleeping more in the day when the mosquitoes were less. I had become aware of how they appeared more in the mornings and evenings. I rested up well in the sun then I continued on and on.

At last I came upon a beaver dam. It was a very long dam, between a half a mile to perhaps a mile long. I started crawling along this dam. By the time I got to the other end of it, it was already approaching dusk. I became keenly aware of hunger pangs. I was unable to find anything to eat because I was always in a wet country. I could find no berries. There were not even any muskeg berries there.

The next morning I had a drink of water. The sixth day of walking began as I wandered farther and farther. I was becoming delirious. I thought I could continue for perhaps only two more days before I would die.

Then I came across a wooded island in the muskeg. I was very happy to come across this dry ground at last. I stayed there for awhile. I was able to dry up my clothes properly. I noticed that this island seemed to border the muskeg. I seemed to get my bearings from here. I now had an idea of how to get back. I was sure though, that I would die on the way, when I realized how many days I had come this way.

As I went along the edge of this high ground that I had found, I thought that I would start praying. I asked God to give me strength and to get me back once more to Moose Lake. I wanted the people to see me and see that I was well. That is what I asked God. I felt better after thinking of God. I didn't pray very often. I used to laugh at prayer more than I used them. I set off again with higher hopes.

I came across a base line through the bush. I felt I could follow these surveyor marks back. My hopes were building as I went.

I walked along this way, following the line for three days. I felt okay, except I could only go a short distance before resting again.

I was so weak. I shook very much and was getting very thin. I was just skin and bones. I shook like a very old man. When I sat down, I would shake so much that I could hardly get up. Once I managed to get up though, I was able to go on again. I went along in this fashion resting after walking for only a short while.

As I was going along this way, I came across a fairly large river, towards evening. This was it, I thought, I can't go any further than this. I started looking along the shore for a proper place to die there.

Just at that time, I happened to spot a cabin there. Good! I thought. People will have to come here sometime, I'll go die by the door I thought. So I went there. The door was closed securely. I didn't think I would have the strength to open it. It was locked with boards and spikes. How can I get in? I thought. I went and sat down there. I begged for God's help again, for strength to get into the cabin which was locked so tightly. Yes, give me the strength to open this door I thought. Then I got up from there. I had a bit of strength for a moment, and that was enough to get the door open. I fell inside. God must be mighty to give me strength like that. I entered the house. It was as if fate was now turning around and pointing out things which could save me now. The worst seemed to be over.

There was food in that cabin. There was cornmeal there, salt, tea and sugar but no flour. There was enough there for me to live. There were many other kinds of things there too, like traps, snares and such. I found some nets there too. I saw all these things, but I couldn't take advantage of them yet. I was much too weak. The cornmeal and other food were my only concern now.

Even the next day I couldn't do anything. I just rested about. Gradually I gained some strength from the cornmeal that I had found.

I felt much better the following morning. By that time I could work a little again. I found clothing there; pants, socks and shoes. What was left of my clothes were full of holes. My shoes were hard and stiff from being wet so much in the muskeg. All my clothes were in shreds. That is why the mosquitoes had been able to get at me so badly.

Truly I had suffered greatly. I had been walking fifteen days without food. No one believes that. People who are lost and don't eat usually die before ten days. But I had lasted fifteen days without eating, and I had been walking during that time. It is extremely hard to survive fifteen days like that. I had fallen many times before coming to the cabin. But there I gained life from what I found.



The day after that, when I was starting to feel better, I started working on the nets. I also went into the bush to set snares. But I walked as if I was intoxicated. I felt like fainting at times. My stomach ached from the food I had taken. My throat felt very dry. After awhile though, I was able to set snares. I didn't set the net yet. I only concerned myself with the snares, then I rested again.

The next morning after checking my snares, I was able to cook rabbit. I was greatly revived and strengthened after eating meat. Yes, indeed, I was starting to really feel alive again.

The following day I was able to get around much better. I was to remain at that cabin for a total of 5 days. Anyway, I started preparing the net. Then I used logs and sticks to build a raft. I had nails and an axe. There was also a long length of cord there. I used the cord to draw my raft back after drifting out into the river to set my net. Using this technique I was able to get the net set. When I finished I coiled up the cord and took it back into the cabin with me.

The next morning I went to check the net. I took a tub with me. In the net were many good sized Goldeye. When I got back I cleaned up the fish, knowing I had lots of salt. Now I was truly alive again. That was the last day I would be staying at the cabin.

Early the next morning I started home again, after packing up as many supplies as I could handle. I travelled along in the same fashion as before, sleeping at night and travelling by day. Sometimes I slept in the daytime when the mosquitoes were too bad at night.

When at last I got to William's Lake, I thought of how far it was yet to get home. It was indeed a long way yet and I didn't really have that much supplies left by that time. Anyway, there I stayed overnight.

On I continued, sleeping and walking. Eventually I found an old camping spot for fishermen but I didn't find anything there to eat. As I continued walking along the shore, I saw a whitefish floating in the water. I was already short of food again by this time. I was happy indeed to come across the dead whitefish. I had a little teapail with me and some salt. I had already used up all my tea. I still had lots of matches that I had taken from the cabin, so I cooked up that whitefish that had drowned. It was good and tasted okay. It didn't affect me in any harmful way.

Again I started on my way, feeling good that I had eaten and that I was on my way home. However, by the time I reached the portage from William's Lake to Davidson Lake, I was having difficulty continuing. I was so tired. I struggled on towards Davidson Lake. There I found a message that the police had written. It said, "Robert, if you find this message

don't leave this place. Make a big fire. There are some matches for you to use here". There was also food there, including bannock. I had been twenty-six days without bannock so I camped there. I didn't feel like making a large fire (to attract attention like a small forest fire would) because I was alright. I knew where I was going now and it would not be that much farther.

In the morning I set out again. I picked up the portage on the other side of Davidson Lake. There again I found a message and some supplies. On I came to Trout Island. There it was a very scenic and beautiful place. I can remember how nice it looked as I glanced back at it.

I decided to set some snares at this place. I had brought some with me. I made a fire and put my pail on it. Then I went to try and chase the rabbits into my snares. But I didn't find anything in them. So I lay down for awhile. I heard a boat coming to where my fire was. They were coming to check on the fire. They were fire wardens. Harry Sanderson was in the boat accompanied by his son Freddie. "Is that you? Is that you, Robert?" they said to me. "Yes, that's me," I answered. "Oh, that's wonderful!" they said. "You look okay". "How should I look?" I asked them. "Really skinny!" they answered. I said nothing to that. I had picked up weight while I was staying those five days at the cabin.

I had gained weight again.

They brought me from there that same evening. We used a 5 h.p. engine from there. When we got to where the fishermen were staying they didn't quite know what to make of me, they were so surprised. That is where we camped that night.

The next morning they took me home from there. We arrived in Moose Lake around 10:00 o'clock in the morning. I wondered what the reaction of the people would be. I was sort of shy to go up the shore. I didn't know what affect my appearance would have on my relatives. Anyway we went up.

When I got there, the reaction was unbelievable. Some cried, some were happy. All the people of Moose Lake came to see me that day and to shake my hand. Everyone came to greet me. Many had been praying for me every night. My friends had become sad from waiting for me.

Some said that it was no use to pray anymore. I would never be seen again, they said. "He has been lost a long time and it is no use praying anymore".

When I got back those people were the ones who cried the most, they were so happy to see me come home; or else they were feeling a little guilty for what they had told the others.

The next morning they came to take me to the hospital. While I was there I don't know how many people came to see me. The room was often just full of people who were amazed that I had survived 28 days. I was lost! That is an amazing fact. If it wasn't for staying along the shore and the trappers who had set out food, I wouldn't be alive.

Many letters came to me. Some had \$10.00, \$15.00 and so on.

When I got to Moose Lake they had a big dance. Everyone had a good time with no fights or trouble of any kind. Everyone was welcome and everyone in Moose Lake came.

And that is all I have to say about that experience.

















## HOW BRACKEN'S LAKE GOT IT'S NAME

Long ago, people from Moose Lake used to go to Bracken's Lake to trap in the winter. In the middle of Bracken's Lake there is a long, narrow island.

One time a group of people moved to this island to trap. A medicine man was with them.

One night this medicine man heard the dogs howling. When he went to investigate, he discovered that a Wetigo was staying on that island. The Wetigo said that he would come the following evening and eat them all up.

The medicine man went to inform the others. He asked them who would be willing to wrestle with the Wetigo. Since no one volunteered, the medicine man said he would wrestle the Wetigo himself. If the Wetigo won, they would all die.

The following evening the Wetigo came. The medicine man armed himself with his axe. As the Wetigo approached their camp he gave a huge shout. All the people fainted with fright except the medicine man. He threw himself at the Wetigo and fought him. The Wetigo threw him up in the air several times. Finally, the medicine man got in a lucky blow with his axe. He hit the Wetigo on the head and wounded him. He continued hitting the Wetigo all over his body with his axe. At last the Wetigo was dead.

The medicine man's last name was Bracken. That's why the lake is called Bracken's Lake in English. In Cree it is called Wetigo or Devilman's Lake.



## THE ANDREW SANDERSON STORY

In 1910 I was living with my parents. I remember seeing my Grandfather Joseph Spence at that time. I considered myself very lucky to have seen while he was still alive. When I was 14, I started working at Grand Rapids. I lived there for some time. Then I left Grand Rapids by boat and went to Lake Winnipeg, Norway House and Black River. Those people there didn't have very many things like we did. They hardly had any tools of any sort. The main thing they had was a chimney or fireplace. They didn't have any lamps or stoves. The fireplace that they had stood in one corner. From there they got light and did their cooking.

There on Lake Winnipeg was an island. It was called Black Island. I stopped there and met the people and saw how they lived. These people didn't ever pray, as religion was unknown to them. There I saw a certain dance. This dance was called the Give-Away dance. Also I saw another ritual there. This ceremony was called the vision or encountering tent. This took place in a tent.

The Give-Away dance that these people had was divided into two areas. The first area had a fence all around. Four elders sat in a circle there. They represented the four directions. One was north, the others south, another was east and the last one was west. There also was a drum there in the middle. The ground in the other area was very hard and white. That is where they danced. Those four men in the enclosure beat the drum.

Some other people danced in the other area. The rest of the people chanted or watched from beyond this area.

The other dance that I saw was the vision dance. A teepee was set up in the dancing area. Poles were put up all around it. The tent was set up in such a way that there was no door, only an opening at the top. Bells were hung all around the teepee. Then one man got up. He wore only a black headband and trousers. He looked just like he was going for a swim. The people sitting around watched and waited. That man had cigarettes. He cut the cigarettes into sections so that each person could be given a smoke. Then everyone started smoking.

Suddenly that man came to the teepee. This time he had on only his black headband and a blanket. He had no other clothes on beneath that blanket. He started running around that teepee. He ran around it twice. Suddenly he was inside the teepee. No one could see how he got inside that tent since there was no opening. They continued smoking calmly. During this time the bells had been ringing steadily. Now there was silence. While this was happening, the man was already inside the teepee. The vision or encounter was beginning. Suddenly different kinds of animal cries could be heard coming from inside the teepee, like wolves, coyotes, lynx and other different bird cries. Then that man inside the teepee announced that we would bring a man here that they wanted to see.



That man that they wanted lived at Rabbit Point. His name was Alex Fisher. That man had done some harm to a girl from this island. They sent one man to go get that man that had done wrong. Then the bells started ringing again and the messenger man was no longer there.

I saw everything, so I know that all this is true. Well, the man said to think about this person who had been sent to get Alex Fisher. He said they should dance to hurry the journey along. So the men started beating the drums. Suddenly they heard someone inside the vision tent. The man that had left was already back. Soon after, the tent and the bells started shaking violently. They shook so much that that man told the person inside, "now, now, take it easy my friend". Then silence again. Then we heard the voice of that man named Alex Fisher. He said, "Why have I been aroused from my sleep?" Then the other man inside the teepee said, "You will know in a short time. Do you know that you did some harm to a child from here?" Alex Fisher then said that he meant no harm to the child. He only wanted to play a trick on her. Then the other man spoke and said, "that was no trick you did. You have harmed the child. I will keep you here until the child is better. I won't let you go till then". "You know I have seven children myself" said Alex Fisher. Then the man inside the teepee said, "Yes I know that you have seven children of your own. I am amazed that you would do this to someone

else's child. But I will let you go now, because that child will be better before the end of a month".

They took that tent down the following morning. Alex Fisher was allowed to go free. Nothing was done to him and before a month, that girl's eyes wer cured. She was cured by another person who was not even there at the time.

That encountering tent was used to punish or warn people about things they might do wrong.

And that's the end of my story.





