

Henry Tobac often reminds me that he has not had the advantages of completing his formal education. And he is a busy man - a father of five, a traditional hunter, and a community health representative. Despite all these obstacles, he has had the courage and tenacity to become the scribe of his dreams, of the voices within him.

It must have been a year ago when Henry Tobac showed me his poetic journal, a collection of thirty-eight pages of poetry. I was astounded that anyone would sustain such a level of creativity without any hope of publication. It was in finding people like Henry scattered throughout the Sahtu that the idea of Sahtú Godé Dáhk'é/Place of Stories was born. Such treasures of our region need to be shared.

Henry's poetry is unique in the depth and complexity of thought reflected in them. The poems explore the experience of being Dene, haunted by the old stories, in the midst of modernity. This experience is fraught with conflict, with anxieties and confusion. But it is also often exhilarating, infused with the joy of connection to this ancient and sacred land.

We hope that you will savour the texture of these woven words, and perhaps become inspired to create something of who you are.

Deborah Simmons

a poetic journal

I'm not a trained writer, nor do I have the proper education to even call myself a writer. I started writing some things for myself because I thought that I may have some talent for words. I tagged on the title "a poetic journal" for the reason that it reflected my dreams, my hopes, and my life. I wanted dearly to make some sense of what my life meant to me, and felt a need to leave something of myself to the children of my children's children, and so on, as it is, in this world.

I am a lonely man. My thoughts wander the path that not many travellers use any more. I seek courage and strength to discover the secret of living. There is a deep spiritual longing to touch and feel the Creator, to be comforted. A longing for security, such as that of a child that seeks his mother's warmth.

Each and every day I am allowed to be closer to that which I long for, and I feel happy. I feel a loving presence in my life, and I am grateful.

There is also a sense of sadness that I feel occasionally. I feel an intense passion to experience spiritual enlightenment, but realise that experience may never happen. But the hope lingers, the experience yearning for itself. It waits just out of sight for those who have given themselves willingly and sincerely to the search.

Henry Tobac

Selected poetry by Henry Tobac, Fort Good Hope, 1995-2001

LIFE AS IT WAS

**We searched for a way
To change life as it was
As life as it was was not the way we wanted it**

**We talked and talked and talked and talked
Still life would not change
The way we wanted it to**

**We tried to make other people
Change life for us**

**We complained a lot
We drank and gambled a lot
So we didn't have to endure
Life as it was**

**We tried to hide ourselves away
From life as it was**

**Still life was always as it was
The more we ignored
Life as it was
The more life got worse**

**We cried a lot
Sometimes we laughed
But life was always
As it was**

**We all dreamed of a better happier life
We wished and wished with all our yearning
Still life as it was
Was not the way we wanted it**

**We were sad, we were angry, we were lonely
We hated and sometimes we loved**

**The sun shone
As it did yesterday
And the rains came too**

**The snow fell as the leaves did
The stars twinkled
And the moon showed up too**

**Still life for us
Was always
The way it was.**

Summer, 2000

Sáhtu Godé Dáhk'é

WINTER NIGHT

Sometimes I wake in the night
It's quiet here.

I'm going over the dreams I had
Sometimes they scare me, and I worry
Sometimes they puzzle me, and I ponder

I enjoy those dreams
That leave me feeling good
I hear those thoughts clearly

Which reminds me that it's winter.
The fire in the stove hears that I am awake
And makes a muffled snap
To acknowledge my presence.

In return I walk over and open the dampers
To give it its morning air.
It crackles and laughs with delight
Happy and content with its life.

My memory is stirred
By the smell of the smoke and fire
A memory comes from far away

I remember the fire we made
High in the mountains
In the beginning of winter
Long ago

We were hunting to survive, you and I,
We were young and strong
Proud of our strength and courage

Yes I remember and I feel
Some sense of a far away feeling
Fading
As I regain my sense of presence

And I see a small boy
My son, and he speaks sleepily,
"Daddy, is it morning yet?"

I answer quietly, "No, morning is a ways off,
Go back to sleep."

As he slowly makes his way
Back to the blankets
I remember to cover him,

For it is cold,
This morning in winter.

December, 1996

JUST YESTERDAY

I find myself missing you now.

Somewhere, some time ago
You were with me
And I never gave it a second thought.

It's mysterious
The way time plays tricks on me.

Just yesterday I was
A little boy sleeping in a tent
Between my mother and father

And we talked about that rabbit
I caught that morning

And the day before
How you taught me to listen
To the lyrics of that song
That was sung by Roger and David.

Last week my daughter and I
We road on the wings of my grandmoth-
er

We saw many things
We wanted to remember
For our grandchildren

My grandfather, he told me stories
Of those faraway hills
That are real blue in the sun.

I have memories of yesterday
That I kept in the storage room of my
heart
In the hopes that I would be allowed
To tell you

You see, it's mysterious
The way time plays his jokes on me.

Just yesterday I was a little boy
Sleeping in the tipi
Between my mother and father.

November, 1995

a poetic journal

poems by Henry Tobac

OLD GUY

The old guy
Dressed in ragged illusions
Wielded a voice
That painted mental images
In colours of magical truth.

Little did I realise that time passing
Had danced around me three cycles.

Seeing the reflection
Of myself in his eyes
I found he had rearranged
The tangled egotistical knowledge
That had burdened my soul.

1997

GRATITUDE

When I feel that I have nothing left to write
You come flooding me with overwhelming words.

I quickly try to grasp them,
But in my hunger and greed
I lose some.

Sometimes, I'm confused about lines
Sometimes my lines have purpose

Maybe someday we'll meet somewhere
Between those lines

And perhaps we'll share a laugh or two
Perhaps we'll cry
Maybe we'll walk in each other's shoes.

All in all, I'd say
That I'm thankful for whatever
I was able to salvage

And I know
If only for awhile
That you may have been too.

January, 1999

MISSING MEMORIES

Here I sit by myself
Waiting for who knows why

I don't know from where or when
Why I sit and wait

I'm just the kind of person
With the questions of no rhyme or reason

I'm just waiting for something
I can't say for when or for what
There's just this nagging thought
That I'm supposed to wait.

Now you might say
That I'm talking in circles
With nothing to say

But I keep on talking
You don't know for what or when

Just these nagging words
That I have to say
For who knows why

Well, you can say
That I'm having a conversation
With nothing to say

But you know there is a message
In the words that come from nothing

And think about the questions
That kept us in time with the thoughts
That came to dig in their heels

For whoever might not be able
To make sense
Of who they are.

1995

MY RELATIONS

I remembered my brother
After I awoke from a dream
This morning

In my dream
I am waiting for him to come
Suddenly, I realise he will never come, and then
I woke up weeping

I miss my brother.

I remembered my uncle
He's been gone a few years now
He was a hunter
In my eyes, the best

I watched him suffer
As he lay there dying
He suffered
As he did throughout his life

Alone

This morning I suddenly got it
The way he treated me

He never said it
But he wanted me as his brother

And I wept

I remember my friends, they were the best
Dolphus, Freddy George, and Grandpa.

I smile now

Because I remember
How they made me laugh

I miss my friends
I miss all the people that I've lost.

As I awake each morning
I try to remember them
In the way I will live my life

I want to dedicate this day to them
I will live this day for them

Together we will have the strength and courage
To beat off the challenge
Of a lonely heart

And someday we will win back
All that we've lost.

December, 2000

SáhtuGodéDáhk'é

WARRIOR'S HEART

Once I was a warrior
Long ago
Before the storm came.

I was strong
And my wits were razor sharp
I ran like the wind
Endlessly
And my power was complete
As my world was.

I fought my enemies face to face
And they died with honour
I fought hunger
And the bitter winds that blew
Through this harsh land
That was once mine, alone.

I fought my enemies to protect
What was sacred in my heart
And I belonged.
I believed in a way of life
That taught me to be
All that I could be

I was taught to master
All the disciplines
And this earned me entry
To the world of spiritual medicine.

I was chosen by the unseen mystery
To provide a source for all my relations
And that was my purpose
I felt complete.

In those days
I was confident as a Dene
Guided by a power beyond understanding
I had been given
The heart of a warrior
My learning was my responsibility

My teachers were the Dene masters
They had seen my heart
And their power had instructed them
To impart their knowledge to me.

I learned to read
The language of all things
Through great difficulties I had earned
The responsibility to carry
The secrets of life and death.

I was taught to be resilient and powerful
I was taught the ways of knowledge
And I went to knowledge
Wide awake
With fear, respect
And absolute assurance.

There is a deep longing
In my memories and in my heart
To feel as light as I did
When the intensity and vigours of life
Ran through my body.

I remember a time when I was needed
And I came willingly to offer myself
In service of those who needed me.

I remember all my brothers
Each one trained as I was,
Each possessing
A different type of energy.

I remember a time when laughter came easily
And others were receptive to it.
The nights we spent wandering under the stars
To destinations each more wonderful than the last

The passing of the torch
From the grandmothers and grandfathers
The memories of their bloodlines and lineage
These rites of passage

And the ceremonial rituals
Still linger
Hovering
Not wanting to be forgotten.

Many harsh seasons
And the unrelenting winter
Spirit maintained a balance
That few understood.

This land
Our mother
Could only provide
So much

And so we have survived

Once, I was a warrior
And I fought my enemies face to face
Once, I was deceived
And my enemies entered my defences

Once I will gather the fragments
And weave a blanket with the thread of knowledge
And this blanket will be so intricate in design
That all will be pleased

And they will cover themselves for warmth
Then they will know
That once I was a warrior
With a warrior's heart.

February, 1999

a poetic journal

poems by Henry Tobac

RANDOM THOUGHTS

I. Stranger

Sometimes it's not easy
Being me.

One day I've got it figured out,
Next day it falls apart
I analyse and toss it over in my head
In the end all I can say is
I just don't know.

I have become a stranger to myself.

I see a face in the mirror
But it's not me
I feel loneliness
Where I used to feel joy
I feel sadness
Where laughter used to swell.

I'm lost in my thoughts
What is to become of me?
Why am I the way I am?
Nothing seems to make sense except -
Never mind.

As time goes by, I consider that
It's not coming back
There is grieving
For opportunity lost.

Am I happy? Mostly not.
Restlessness drives me
And I just seem to wander
Endlessly
Searching.

Searching for something
I just can't figure out what

Most people seem preoccupied
With material survival
Everywhere I look
Someone is trying to get ahead
Somehow.

I myself am tired
I need some rest
Sleep is tasty
Just need to lie down
For awhile.

II. Dreams

Dreams, beautiful dreams of
Exciting, powerful, mysterious places
Like nothing I've experienced
In the waking world, so strange

What is life about?
What am I supposed to be doing?
I just don't know.
Only emotions seem important
Good feelings are welcomed.

Understanding is hard to find
Most are ready and willing to judge
And execute those that cross over
Those precious lines.
Truth is hidden somewhere in the lie

But where?

Which is the truth?
Which is the lie?
Who can say, "this is the truth"
Who will believe him?

III. Curse

I have been robbed of my precious life
Time waits for no one.
I salvage whatever I can
And move on.

I was injured as a child and so
I have this limp and
My voice stutters
For fear of punishment
From my keeper.

My eyes are downcast
I have been shamed
I punish myself
For reasons that I don't know

They determined that it would be easier
That I inflict my own punishment
After all, they could not be there all the time.

I want to be free of this curse.

IV. Solitude

I have found in myself
The strength to endure pain
But I have not found happiness
In filling the void with so many things.

My emptiness fills me
With the urge to search
To wander
To weep.

Who can say, "Here, I take your pain"?
Or, "There, I give you happiness"?
No one.
There is no one yet.

So many times
I wanted to tell you
How my heart aches
How lonely I've been

How could you hear me
When you were lost in your own world?

Maybe you tried
To tell me something
But I just couldn't understand

What the weather had to do with it.

Frustration pushed us apart

**We stopped talking
We stumbled in darkness
We cursed in anger
When finally, we tired of that
We let the past swell out of our eyes.**

V. Compassion

**I have loved you
When no one dared to
You were too full of pain.**

**I was right about you
How wonderful you'd turn out to be
On the other side.**

**There was a man who gave compassion
To one who was thirsty
He gave water**

**I never forgot this
It touched me deeply.**

**I was that thirsty man many times
No one gave me water**

**Today I was the other man
The one who gave
The water flowed into him
And he lived
He was also taken
By my compassion.**

VI. Freedom

**There came to me
These beautiful visions
I wanted to remember them
So I wrote these lines.**

**I am flying through the air
Soaring free
Wind in my hair**

**The moon is high
Beautiful light everywhere
No one there
Never cared**

**I am self-aware
Senses charged
Tingling
Exhilarated
Free**

VII. Acceptance

**Today is another day
I feel fine
I think about you
Every day now.**

**I hope all is well
As it should be**

**Maybe the next time we see each other
We'll find it easier to laugh**

VIII. Desire

**You must remember
How I took your hands in mine
I needed to touch them.**

**These mannish thoughts have wanted
you
They insist that I attend to their desire
To express their truth**

I resisted

**But I lost, and so
Here are the strands
Intimately woven
That you may enjoy their offerings.**

**The energy of beauty attracts my eye
Leaving deeper traces
On my soul**

**Your beauty strikes
With a presence and sharpness
That only the energy of beauty can display.**

**I submit my admiration for your scrutiny
And pray you will accept it
Without harshness
For its primal desire.**

IX. Laughter

**I was moved to twist
My face in the mirror
Then I laughed**

**I did it again
And I laughed even more.
Silliness teasing my senses
Pulling at the laugh lines on my face.**

**I just had to leave
Or end up on the floor.**

X. The Absurd

**This journey of voices
Have squabbled and raged
Until I surrendered
To quench their lust for substance.**

**Still they complain
And I can hear the others
Scramble to the front
They bicker and argue to be heard.**

**Madness seems to hover in places
Where confusion has exhausted the
mind.
Only humour and absurdity have persevered
To replenish the depletion**

And life goes on.

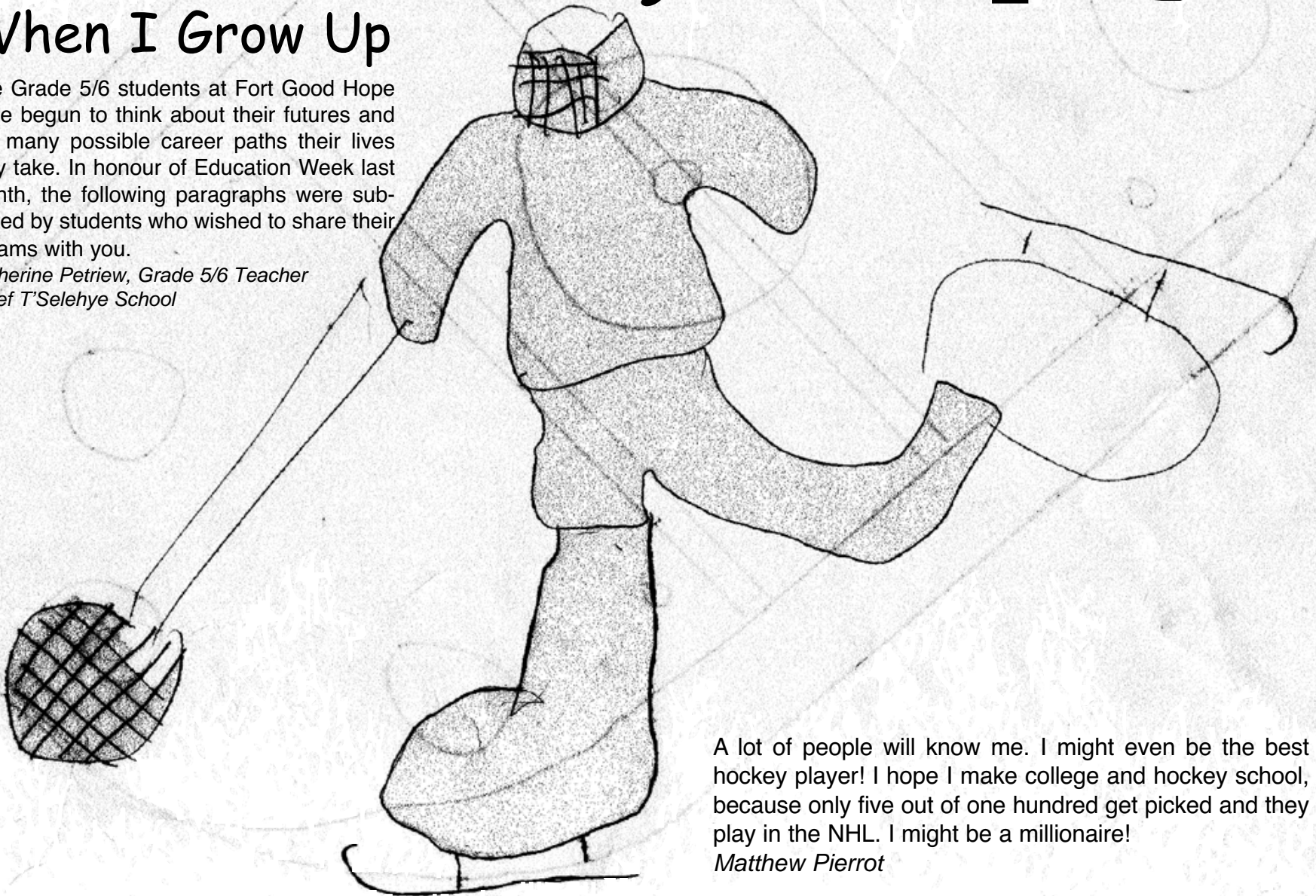
April, 2001

Pek'one Ke youth pages

When I Grow Up

The Grade 5/6 students at Fort Good Hope have begun to think about their futures and the many possible career paths their lives may take. In honour of Education Week last month, the following paragraphs were submitted by students who wished to share their dreams with you.

*Catherine Petriew, Grade 5/6 Teacher
Chief T'Selehye School*



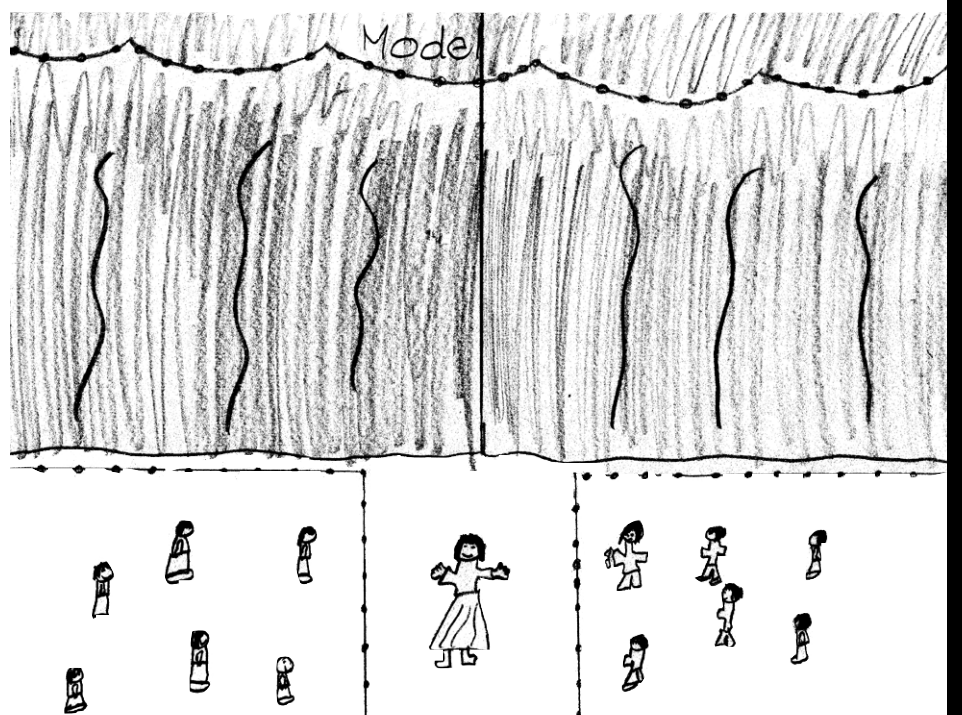
A lot of people will know me. I might even be the best hockey player! I hope I make college and hockey school, because only five out of one hundred get picked and they play in the NHL. I might be a millionaire!

Matthew Pierrot



*Rapping Babb
Dylan Kakfwi*

When I grow up I want to be a singer. I will go to college so I can be a good singer. When I sing a song, I hope I get lots of fans! I will go all over Canada and the USA. I will be a rap singer and then I'll go back home and I'll stay home. *Dylan Kakfwi*



I want to be a model when I turn fourteen. I already got asked to be a model. I also want to be a model because it is fun and I've got the looks, and I will make a lot of money in a year. It looks fun using a lot of cool clothes too. *Twyla Edgi*

Pek'one Ke

When I Grow Up

When I grow up, I want to be a police officer just like my uncle Harvey, so I can get high payments and go all over the world. I could see other people and make new friends. I could ride a horse and get a red suit. *Myrine Kakfwi*



FOUR SCENCES FROM COLVILLE LAKE

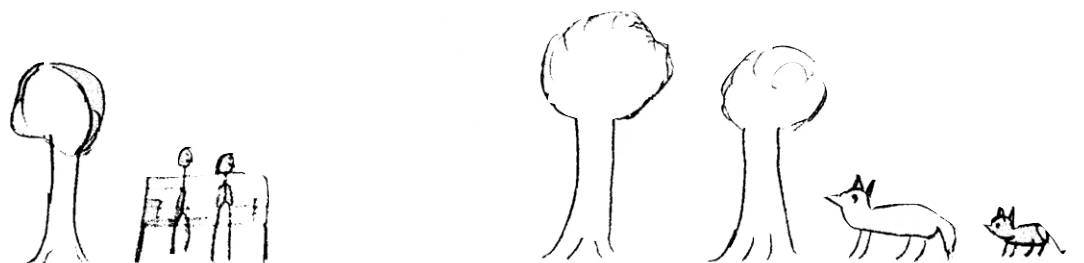
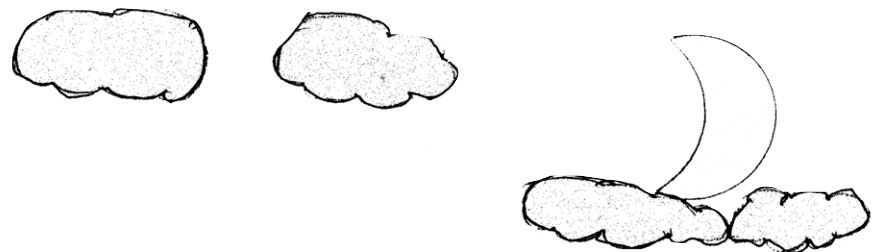
Colville Lake School



At North End

My mom and my oldest sister Sheena are going to the tipi. Me and Daniel are playing outside. My dad and my oldest brother are going to go hunting. Ryanna is going to go to the tent and fry meat. My mom and my oldest sister are going to make drymeat. Me and my youngest brother are playing tag.

Carla Tutcho



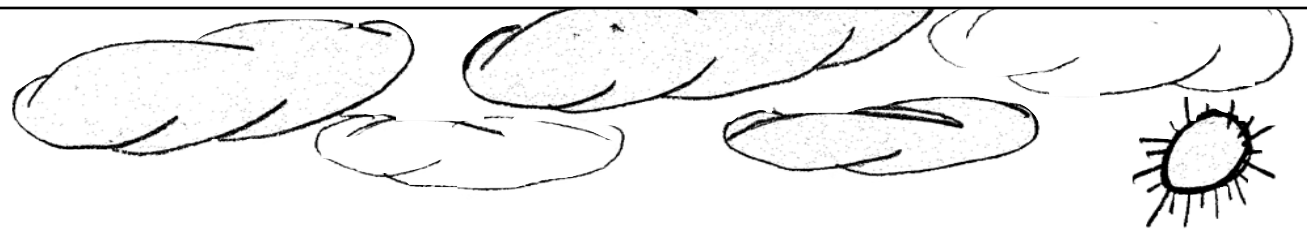
This is a story about two people in the dark. They were looking at the moon. The girl said, "The moon looks so pretty." Then they saw foxes looking at them. *Kyra Kochon*



I want to be a game designer when I grow up, because I get to design games and get paid lots of money. I get to sell lots of games to kids who like my games. I'll be the best game designer in the world!

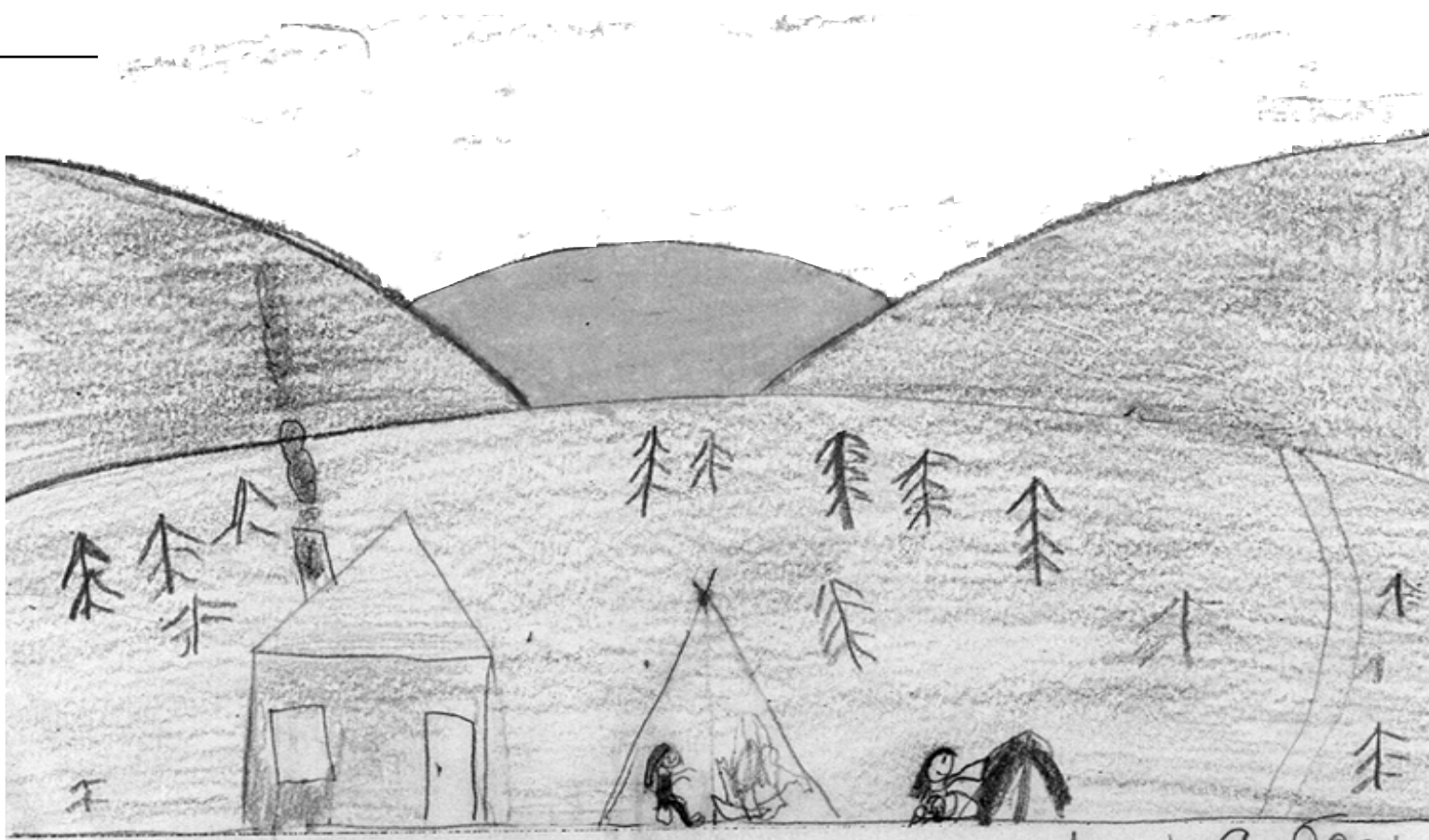
Peter Masuzumi

Game Designer



My dad went hunting with my big brother. My mom is making drymeat. Me and Joey are playing tag. It is hot outside. So we went to the tent to get juice. Then we ate drymeat. Then we played tag again. We had fun in bush.

Tracy Kochon



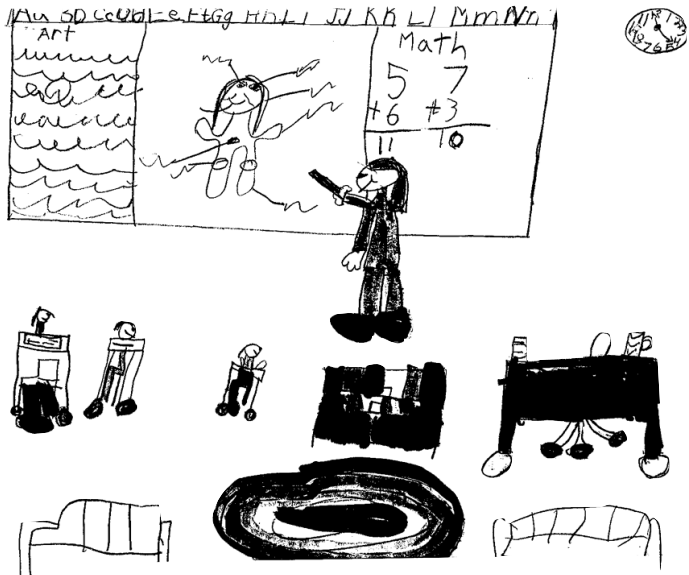
I am sitting down by the fire. My mom is scraping moose hide. My dad went for a ride to pick up his caribou, and my brother went with him. My brother likes going hunting.

Joyce Oudzi

I WANT TO BE A TEACHER

These pictures and stories on the theme "I Want To Be A Teacher," were written in celebration of EducationWeek. They encourage youth to think in a positive way about school, an institution which plays a primary role in their formation as citizens.

The stories here present school as a place not only of learning, but also where fun times co-exists with discipline. These students demonstrate their respect for the challenging responsibilities and the high level of commitment displayed by their current model in teaching at T'ehstseo Ayha and Chief T'Selehye schools.



Jeanette Kakfwi

I will teach Grade 3. I will teach my students how to do handwriting. After they learn how, I will teach them some more work. I will teach them how to work on subtraction.

My favourite book is Love Stinks by Mike Thalen, pictures by Gared Lee. I will teach them how to work on computers. They will have gym. They will run around the gym five times. Then they will play a game. The game they will play is Pom Pom Pull Away.

Yvonne Kakfwi

If I were a teacher, I would give the students homework and teach good stuff to them, like times tables and spelling. They will go for recess. They will dress up for recess and at 10:25 they will come in. They will clean the classroom and they will leave the school at 3:30. We will have a meeting about our day as teachers.

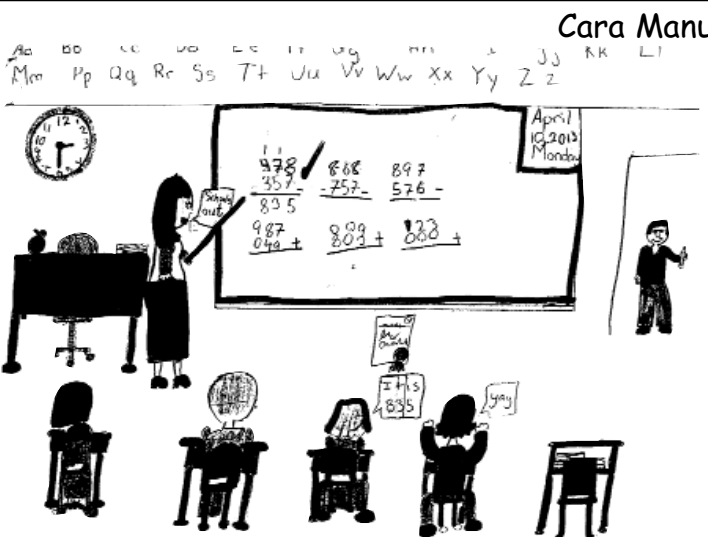
Teachers are good. They know everything. Jeanette Kakfwi

If I were a teacher, I would work hard and try to be smart as I can, and teach my students. If I were a teacher, I would teach my students and give them homework to bring home. "I'm not at school for babysitting, I'm here to teach students," I will say. The students will go and play outside. It might be hard to be a teacher, because it is lots of work, and there are too many students, and too much stuff to do.

My students are going to pass their grade. It sounds good to be a teacher. Cara Manuel

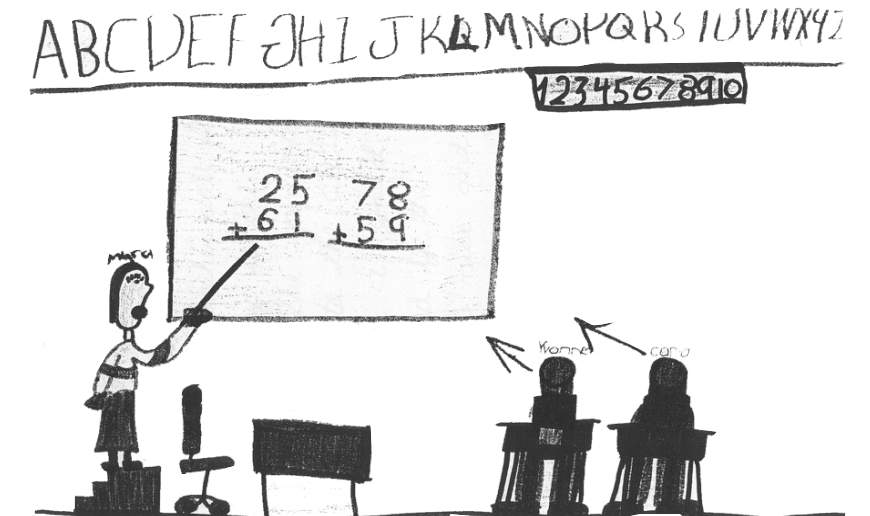


Yvonne Kakfwi



Cara Manuel

Myra Manuel



If I were a teacher I would have to do a lot of work, like correcting work, going to meetings, or doing social studies. And if someone doesn't work, I would have to send them to the office. Then send them home to do their work.

Being a teacher is hard, because you have to do all that work.

In the morning it will be Slavey class, and the students will have their breakfast. On attendance day, teachers give students attendance awards.

If I wanted to be a teacher, I would have to train and finish grade twelve. Then I would become a teacher. Gilbert Turo

I want to be a teacher to teach my students how to do math homework. At school I want to be a nice big teacher, and I will have to do work after school.

Teacher checks all the students' work. Then teacher works on adding, reading, spelling words, writing, cutting, and drawing a clown with his face coloured up. Donovan Erutse

I would like to be a teacher. You would have to listen to the teacher. I will teach some moath. A teacher gets mad because the students are bad. The teacher likes spelling. The teacher said, "You do your homework." I will have to go to a meeting.

I will teach you spelling: Spell cat, "c" "a" "t." Spell dog, "d" "o" "g." Spell octopus, "o" "c" "t" "o" "p" "u" "s." Spell Thursday, "T" "h" "u" "r" "s" "d" "a" "y."

Tracie McNeely

If I were a teacher, I would teach kids work, and correct their work. I'll help them with their work if they need me. I will do some work too.

I'll send someone to the principal's office if they get caught in a big fight. I will tell them to line up to go out for recess and line up to go check their work.

I will tell them to go to the book shelf and get only two books. After they are done reading books, it will be home time. Montana King

If I wanted to be a teacher, these are the things I'd have to do. I would teach Grade Three. I like the story "The Golden Goose," so I will read it to my class.

Teachers have a very hard job. If kids are bad, I will send them to the principal's office. There are lots of things you can teach, like subtracting, adding, and social studies.

You have to be nice if you want to be a teacher. Teachers have to go to lots and lots of meetings. Teachers make sure no one gets hurt in school and at recess too. It takes a lot of work to be a teacher. Zachery Craig

If I want to be a teacher, I have to be smart. The students will do math and they will do lots of work. We will have lots of holidays. My students will go to gym, recess, and science. I will go to lots of meetings. They will have to do journals and homework. They will do subtractions.

You have to be nice and even nicer to be a good teacher. Paul Chinna

Some day I'd like to be a teacher. I wonder about the school. I just want to be a teacher because I want to teach subtracting, spelling and math.

Only if I were twenty-two years old. But I'm only nine years old, and I am just in Grade Three, so I have to wait another thirteen years.

So then I can be a teacher and teach them everything, even playing in the gym. Lynn Turo

When I grow up, I am going to be a teacher. I would have to go to college first. Then I could be a teacher. You have to get to the school on time.

If the kids don't listen, you have to send him to the principal's office for not behaving very good. They would get suspended for not behaving very good for you. Wade Charney

Sahtúgodédáhk'éplaceofstoriesSahtúgodédáhk'éplaceofstories

Sahtú Godé Dáhk'é is published monthly in the Mackenzie Valley Viewer. We welcome your submissions. Send writing, photography, art and letters to Sahtú Godé Dáhk'é, PO Box 239, Fort Good Hope, NT, X0E 0H0. Email sahtu_gode@hotmail.com. Writing may be in Dene k'ı (syllabics or Roman orthography), French or English. All submissions must include the author's name and contact info.

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