



Raising Ourselves: A Gwich'in Coming of Age Story from the Yukon River

Velma Wallis

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Born in 1960, the sixth of thirteen children, Velma Wallis comes of age in a two-room log cabin in remote Fort Yukon, Alaska. Life is defined by the business of living off the land. Chopping wood. Hauling water from the river. Hunting moose. Catching salmon. Trapping fur. Taking care of the dogs. For a thousand years, the Gwich'in clan had followed migratory animals across the north. But two generations before, the people had settled where the Porcupine River flows into the Yukon. Now, the Wallis family has a post office box and an account at the general store, and Velma listens to Wolf Man Jack on armed forces radio. The author discovers that her people have surrendered their language, traditional values, and religion to white teachers, traders, and missionaries. Flu epidemics have claimed many loved ones. Village elders seem like strangers from another land, and in a way they are. There is much drinking when the monthly government checks come, and that is when the pain comes out of hiding. Written by the author of the international bestseller "Two Old Women," this memoir yields a gritty, sobering, yet irresistible story filled with laughter even as generations of Gwich'in grief seeps from past to present. But hope pushes back hopelessness, and a new strength and wisdom emerge.

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