

## WHERE OUR WORLD CAME FROM

*Told by Peter Ross,  
Fort McPherson*

A long time ago, when animals could speak like we do, the earth, was all covered with water. There were no hills, no riverbanks, no forests, no fields, only water and sky. All the animals lived on a large raft, including Raven.

It wasn't long before Raven was feeling a little crowded on the raft. He longed to stretch out his legs on dry ground. Now Raven liked to be comfortable and well fed at all times. Raven, you know, was a very wise bird and if he didn't like something, he would think of a way to make things better for himself. "If I had any earth, even a little bit, I would make it grow large enough for all the animals to live on," Raven told everyone.

Of course, all the animals were excited because they missed their old homes in the woods in holes, or riverbanks or in trees. They missed running and playing and stretching their limbs. But who would be brave enough to find some earth for Raven? They all knew deep in the water they could find it - far beneath their safe raft.

Some animals peered over the edge of the raft but no earth could be seen. Finally, Muskrat volunteered to search for a piece of earth. Muskrat remembered his cozy home in the river and thought to himself, "It is true that this is not a river and that I have never seen so much water before but it is water all the same."

Down dove Muskrat, and the water closed over him.

After a long time, Muskrat's good friend Otter said, "I think something has happened. I can dive well. Let me try." And down dove Otter into the dark water.

But like Muskrat, Otter never returned.

"Let me try," offered Loon. I can stay under water for a long time and travel quickly over a long distance under water. I should be able to find some earth." But like Muskrat and Otter, Loon never returned either.

You would think that the other animals would be afraid to follow Muskrat, Otter and Loon, but they were concerned about what happened to their friends. And so all the good divers and swimmers - the Loon, the Oldsquaw Duck, the Harlequin Duck, the White Wing Scoter, the Goldeneye Duck, the Grebe and the mink went down under the waters and tried to bring back some earth but none of them returned. The other

animals feared that their brave friends had drowned. "It's no use," they all agreed, hanging their heads.

But Beaver made a last try. Beaver not only was a good swimmer, but he was a hard worker and a clever builder. Now he made sure that he tied a line around his body first so that he could be pulled back up out of the water.

He dove so deep into the water; he almost drowned when he reached the bottom. As he struggled in the water, he clutched some mud from his paws. Beaver knew that when his friends pulled him up, they would find the mud. Sure enough, the mud was still on his paws when his friends pulled poor Beaver out of the water. He had used his last strength to reach the bottom and retrieve the earth and the water had been too much for him. Beaver had given his life to help other animals. All of them were sad but thankful when they lay their eyes on their good friend.

Now Raven started to work. Carefully, he gathered the mud from Beavers, paws and formed it into a ball. Then he took his walking stick and ran it through the bit of earth. He planted the stick on the surface of the water. No sooner did the earth touch the water than it began to grow, just as Raven said it would. It grew larger and larger.

When it was big enough to hold everyone, the animals stepped onto it from their raft. How wonderful it was to feel the earth beneath their feet again. They laughed and sang with happiness.

And they never forgot their friends Otter, Muskrat, Beaver and the others who had been so brave for their sakes. They had offered their great skills in swimming to find a home for everyone else.

The small clump of earth that Beaver found soon grew into our beautiful land with its hills and forests and lakes. And even today, Raven's walking stick still holds up the land. Somewhere, where the Old Crow and Porcupine River meet, you can see it. And if you do, remember this story of how Raven made the earth. And when you play on the land in the summer, remember Beaver and his friends who were so brave and kind.

**End of Story**

## Understanding the Story

1. List the animals in this story.

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2. Who was the first animal to dive into the water?

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3. Why were the animals diving into the water one by one?

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4. How did Raven get the earth to come back?

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5. Peter Ross told this story.

Which community was he from? \_\_\_\_\_

Which language is spoken there? \_\_\_\_\_

## For Discussion

- Which animal do you think was the bravest and why?

- **What is the moral (or message) of this story?**
  - **What was special about the raven in this story?**
  - **What Dene law(s) are used in this story?**
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## Other Activities

1. Ask the students to list all the things they would need to create a world. Can you organize this list into any useful categories?
  2. What are the characteristics of the Beaver that are necessary for any difficult task? What qualities do the other animals possess?
  3. Use a Field Guide for Birds and find the other types of ducks listed in the story. Make a list of the ducks
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4. Instead of bobbing for apples, ask the students to bob for a baggie of sand at the bottom of the tub. Who can "dive" down and get the earth?
  5. Language Activity - match the Gwich'in word with the English word for each animal in the story.
  6. Sequencing - Cut out the 6 sentences at the bottom of the page and glue them in the order they happened in the story, at the top of the page.