

The RAINBOW, the MIDWIFE & the BIRDS

GOSEH MILEH, TINEH YENENEH
GU OHKIEH

SAMPLE PAGES



4 Dene Tales

illustrations
SAMANTHA GIBBON, RICH THÉROUX
ANTOINE MOUNTAIN

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GOSEH MILEH, TINEH YENENEH GU OHKIEH

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Flight Through the Rainbow

Goseh Mileh Dieh Derewih

*T*HERE WAS ONCE A WONDROUS TIME when I flew through a rainbow (*Goseh Mileh*) in a small bush plane up North. First there was a big rough storm (*Yak'eh T'sideh*). Our poor little airplane was shaking. Clouds (*K'oh*) were rumbling and crying down heavy rain (*Shohn*). Lightning (*Edih Koneh*) was flashing and thunder (*Edih*) was roaring in the sky (*Yak'eh*). Bouncing around in the dark, we felt like a little leaf being blown about every which way. The pilot asked me, "Raymond are you scared?" I kept thinking, "What if a bolt of lightning hits us? We're going to go down." I remember the pilot saying, "Don't be scared, we'll be fine." So, I put my trust in her. She steered our way through the dark, black storm and got us out.

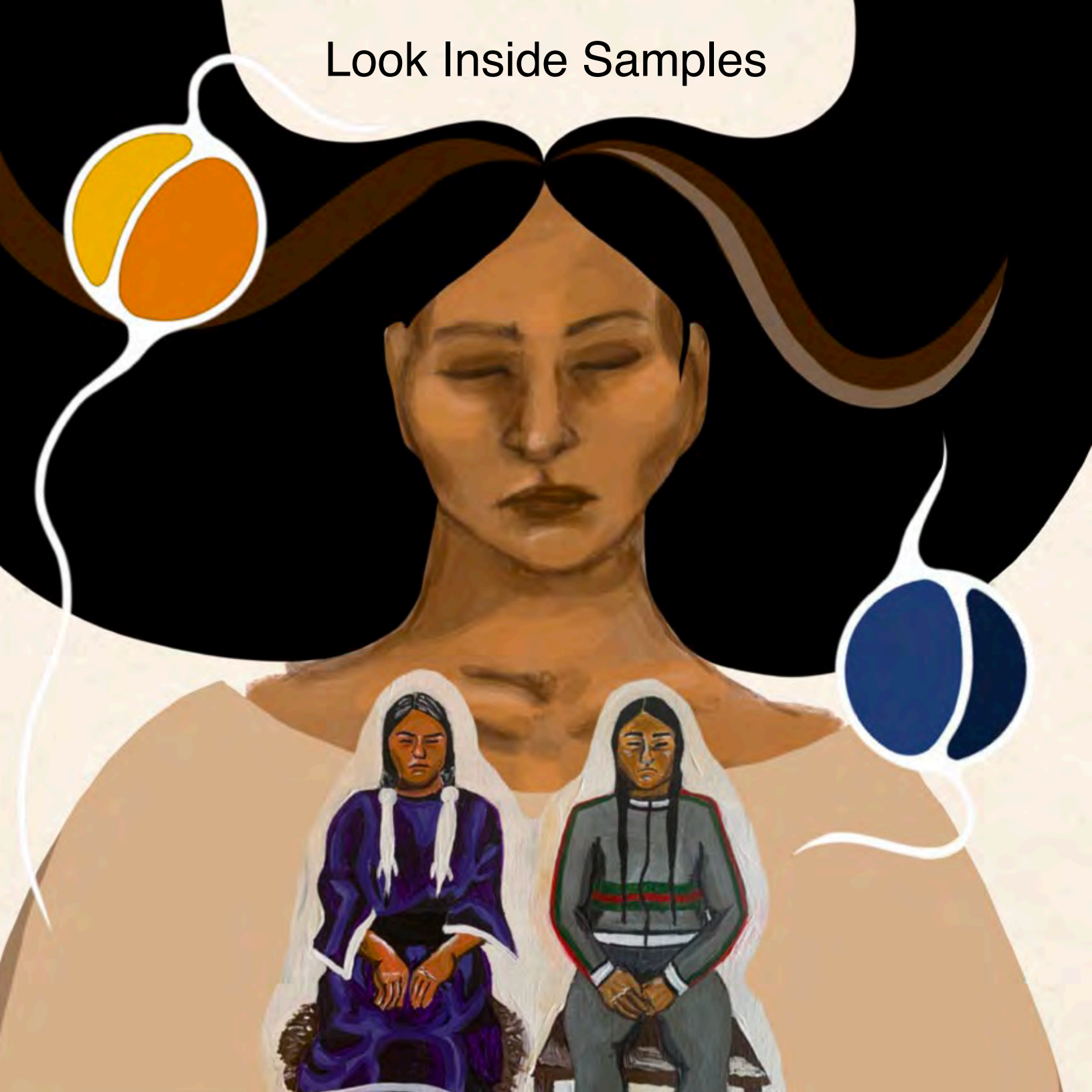
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Our Elders (*Dene Hihnshta*) often talk about the special spiritual relationship we Dene People have with all animals (*Eh-ah*), including the spider (*Goseh*). They talk about how the spider can weave a web that catches the raindrops that creates the rainbow. When there was a big flood, the spider set its net and stopped the rain, allowing our Dene people to survive. Spiders (*Goseh*) have powers beyond our Earth and they deserve our respect. We Dene consider the spider to be the greatest hunter of all. We call him “Grandpa Spider.”

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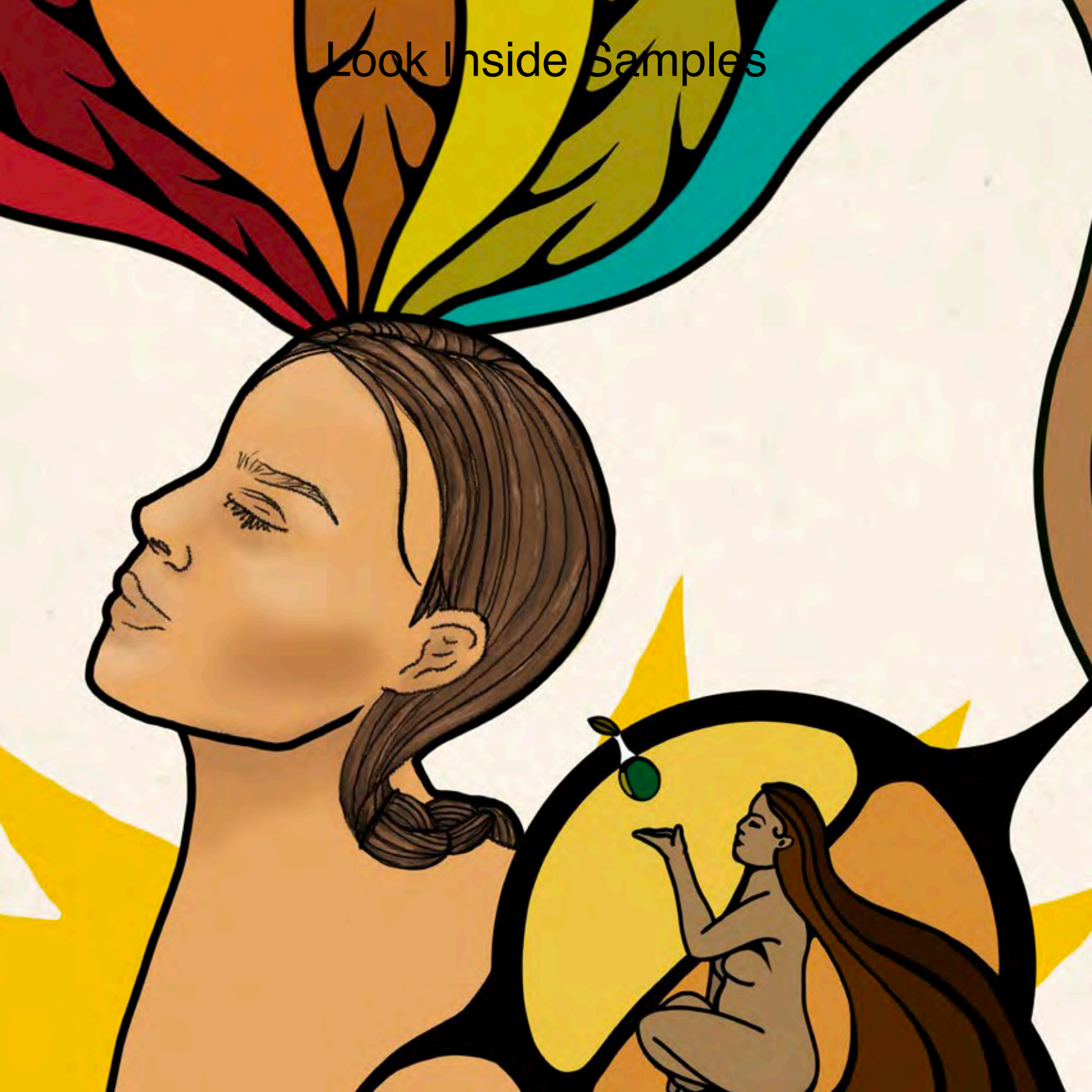


The Midwife and the Spirit of Life

Tineh Yeneneh gu Godieh Dyin

*W*E DENE BELIEVE IN REINCARNATION (*Dene Rats'dlih*) and that everything completes itself in cycles. This happens when a new life comes into the world. I have heard our Elders (*Dene Hihnsha*), like my Granny Harriet and my Uncle George Blondin talk about the special time before a baby is born, when a woman is still pregnant. A Spirit whose human life was not yet complete tries to find a suitable pregnant woman in order to be reborn. At this time, discussions happen in the Spirit world, where the Spirit Elders talk about who is going to come back as a human. The Spirits know the upcoming life of that baby (*Behbih*), so they know what the future will be to those who want to be human again — those who want to come back in this world from the Spirit world to be with their relatives.

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Honouring the Midwife, Granny Harriet

Tineh Yeneneh Kugha Godih, Ahsó Harriet

MY GRANNY HARRIET thought she was the last person in the world who would become a midwife!

When Granny Harriet was first married, she and her husband Albert went up to the mountains on a hunting trip. (Albert, her loving husband, eventually became Chief Albert Wright, the first Dene Chief of the United Fort Norman First Nation in the Northwest Territories.) Anyway, at the time of the hunting trip, Granny was only seventeen years old and was not really trained in the traditional ways because she had been taken away to residential school at the age of five and did not come back until she was fifteen. She had lost the ability to speak the Dene language and had lost many traditional skills of being in the bush with her family. But in the few years she had been back, she recovered the language and was relearning many of the traditional ways.



*Granny Harriet with
Grandpa Chief Albert Wright*

One night, while they were up at their hunting camp in the mountains, a man arrived from the Sahtu band and said his wife was ready to give birth to her baby. The man asked Granny Harriet for help. He said, “We have a granny there to help deliver the baby but . . . that granny is blind.”

They hitched the dogs up and followed the man back to his camp where his

wife was in labour. The only light was one candle in the middle of the tent but there was a fire going so it was warm in there. They introduced everybody around and the blind granny said to Granny Harriet, “First of all you have to be clean, wash your hands and get the clean blankets ready.” Then the blind granny said, “You will have to be my eyes. Don’t be scared, I can’t see, but I will tell you what to do, step by step.” Granny Harriet told me when she heard that,

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she felt a calmness come over her. The delivery was successful that cold night — a baby boy.

Midwife Granny Harriet went on to deliver over four hundred babies in her life. She became the midwife for Tulita, Northwest Territories, which is my hometown. She delivered my mother and then she delivered me as well. She never lost a single baby.

Granny told me the toughest time she had was a baby boy who had the umbilical cord wrapped twice around his neck. They almost lost him because he couldn't get air. Granny said, "That was the closest call I ever had."

The other part of this story is that Tulita (formerly Fort Norman) used to be the capital of the Northwest Territories and we had a hospital there. Whenever a Dene woman went into labour, the whiteman doctors would call for midwife Granny Harriet to come and deliver the baby be-



*Granny Harriet with a child
she helped bring into the world*

cause the Dene women trusted her calmness and kindness. Now, in these days, the health centre in Tulita is named after Granny Harriet. Her second husband was Grandpa Noel Gladue, so it became, and still is, the Harriet Gladue Health Centre, in honour of her.

Granny Harriet was a very spiritual woman and taught me a beautiful story about the divine spirit of the wind and the glorious scent of wild-

flowers. She said to me, "Creator Newet'sine is like the wind, You cannot see Him as we see each other but his spirit is in all of nature — the flowers, the animals, and even you and me." I was honoured to include her teachings in my book "The Tree by the Woodpile."

Granny loved communicating with the Creator at the magic time of birthing babies. She was a big believer in the spirit life that babies have before they are born into this wonderful world we live in.

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The Slingshot and the Songbird

Edech'e gu Ohkieh Hejehn

SPRING arrived with its warm yellow and pink sunlight (*Sahdieh Dehfoh heh Dedeehl-dek'aleh*) on the face of Bear Rock Mountain, which watches over my hometown of Tulita, Northwest Territories. Noisy black, white, and grey snowbirds (*Ohkieh dezen, dek'aleh heh dezen-dek'aleh*) were flying everywhere. The snow was still on the ground, but we knew spring had arrived. The snow was soft (*Yah detloh*). Icicles on the roof melted, making puddles of water and mud. Even the air smelled different, like it was cleaner. The Elders (*Dene Rats'dlih*) and babies (*Behbih*) sat and enjoyed themselves in the sun, with a small fire burning, creating smoke. A tea kettle perched on the fire for visitors. There was bannock too.

Life was good and simple then. We all went to a two-room schoolhouse to learn how to read and write. After school, my brothers and I would saw and chop wood (*Se t'sefihn*), collect ice from the Mackenzie River (*Duhogah*) for drinking water, for washing clothes, and for the weekly Saturday night bath. My sisters would help mother cook (*Ligih heh behkat'setieh*), bake bread and cinnamon buns, wash the dishes, and clean up the house. There was always something to do — no end to it.

We all did our homework by the light of the

Coleman gas lamp (*Edih koneh*) and sometimes by the candle (*Ehk'ah dek'oneh*) on the kitchen table. About this time, I got to read and know about Huckleberry Finn and Dennis the Menace and became an admirer of both of them. I liked Huckleberry Finn's adventures and his sense of righteousness. Dennis the Menace was always on the not-so-innocent trail of mischief. Through books, I got to know about the outside world where things were very different from what we knew in our isolated northern town of 300 people, 178 dogs, and one tomcat named Pinky. We knew about wolves (*Beleh*), bears (*Sah*), ptarmigans (*K'ahbah*), and the Northern Lights (*Rayuka*)

Spring was everyone's favourite time. Easter holidays with no school for ten days was something to look forward to — better still, no homework. The trappers started to come in from their traplines with their dog teams (*Liedad la*). The dog harnesses would jingle from the bells and ribbons attached to them. We could hear them before we saw them. Then they came in from all directions, their blue (*Deht'leh*), red (*Dedeleh*), and yellow (*Dehfoh*) ribbons flashing. Their sleds were filled with furs and their faces eager to see their families and friends. We would help them tie up and

The RAINBOW, the MIDWIFE & the BIRDS

GOSEH MILEH, TINEH YENENEH GU OHKIEH

Written by Raymond Yakeleya, “Flight Through the Rainbow” is about flying in a small plane through a rainbow and tells a legend of how spiders catch drops of colour in their webs. “The Midwife” is a story told to Raymond by his Granny Harriet about bringing the spirit of babies into the world. “The Slingshot and the Songbird” is about a boy’s deep empathy for a friendly songbird, and “The Medicine Brothers,” told to Raymond by his uncle George Blondin, is about a battle with giant birds when the world was new.



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ANTOINE MOUNTAIN
Dene Translation & Illustrator of
the Birds Stories

Raymond Yakeleya is an award-winning Dene television producer, director, and writer, originally from Tulita in the Northwest Territories. Raymond is author of the Dene children’s book *The Tree by the Woodpile* and co-editor of both *We Remember the Coming of the White Man* and *Indigenous Justice*. He also wrote and directed the animation “Flight Through the Rainbow” which can be seen here if you follow this QR code.



Ages 8 - 14
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