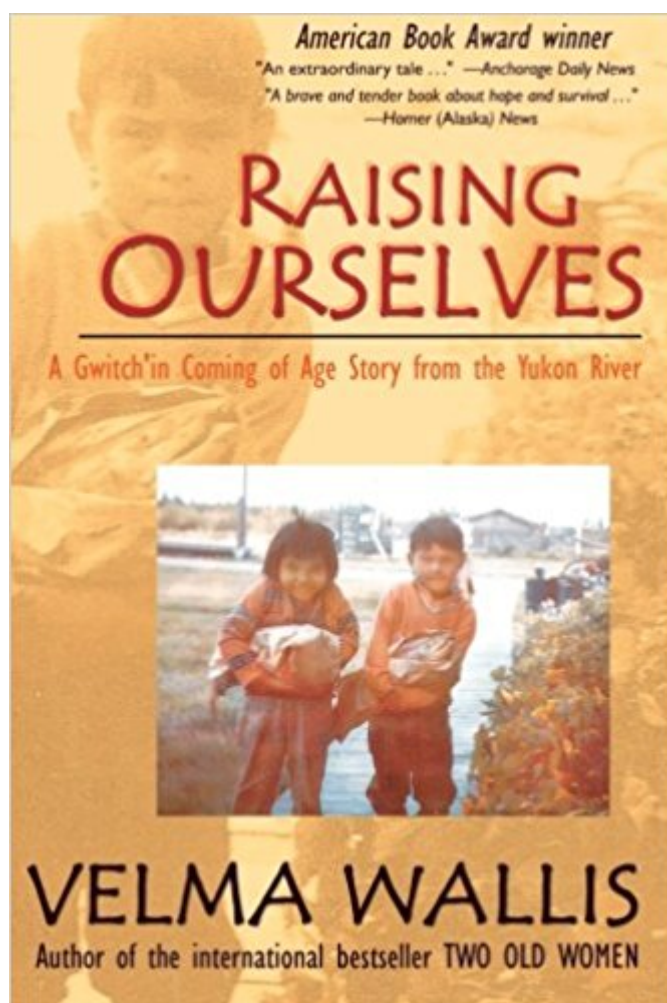




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Raising Ourselves: A Gwich'in Coming Of Age Story From The Yukon River



Synopsis

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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Customer Reviews

"If you want to know the truth about being Indian, read this book"

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. Chop wood. Haul water from the river. Hunt moose. Catch salmon. Trap fur. Take 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. RAISING OURSELVES is 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.

This is a fine follow-up to Alaskan Indian Velma Wallis's best selling book "Two Old Women," which is based on a story her mother told her, just before she would go to sleep in their two-room cabin in Fort Yukon in the Alaskan north country. It was a cabin she shared with her parents and 12 brothers and sisters, and in this book, she helps us to see every nook and corner of that cabin, including all kinds of interesting items under the beds, and that Alaskan staple, the chilly Outhouse. She describes the struggles her parents make just to keep the family fed and warm ---a real subsistence life-style. Then the changes in the 1970s, when television and a liquor store came in. Early in the book, she says that there were many times in her childhood when she was happy, but also a good number of times when she was unhappy because of the alcoholism affecting those around her. As a resident of rural, or "bush" Alaska, I feel that we could all use many more stories about village life in this last frontier, especially stories told by the Native people who live there. I share another reviewer's conclusion thanking Velma for her courage and insight. Also her appreciation of the tiny details in our daily lives, and finally, her sense of humor. No matter how difficult the winters or family circumstances can become, I've learned that a sense of humor always helps. I'm eagerly waiting for your next book Velma, and a movie as well.

Life through the eyes of a child is always enjoyable.

This book is about Velma Wallace's life. She is only two years older than I am, so it has been a real mind bending and awakening read for me. She is very open about life growing up in Fort Yukon,

Alaska with twelve brothers and sisters. She lets us see within the walls of her two room log cabin that sits downtown. We see the joys, the struggles, and the sorrows of growing up Indian in Alaska. Velma is not very many generation removed from when the Indians had to survive together off the land, before the influence of Western Culture. She artfully expresses the changes that happened, and how the old ways were still woven in with the new ways. I learned a lot about the culture, and the changes and challenges that affected these people. From the comments on the cover by other Native American Leaders, this story rings true for other Native cultures besides just the Gwich'in. A very powerful book.

It was a good story. Not as good as Two Old Women.

I loved this book....So interesting to see how these people lived. It bothered me very much to see how their traditions were stamped out by missionaries though threatening Hell. Very well written and terrific recall.

I have been researching Alaska for a novel I'm writing, and I found this autobiography very interesting and informative. It was not an easy life, and Ms. Wallis has written very evocatively about brave and lively children growing up under difficult circumstances. It shows the strength of Gwich'in the women in coping with hardship and tragedy, as well as their ability to maintain a sense of humor throughout.

Book quality as listed, received quickly. Enjoy Velma Wallis' work, so for me, a good read.

As I had read two other books by Velma Wallis (Bird Girl and Two Old Women) I looked forward to learn more about the author and her early life. Very well written and very interesting.

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