

Animal Mother  
by Kitty Smith

# MY STORIES ARE MY WEALTH

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as told to Julie Cruikshank

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## Animal Mother

"Game Mother" or "Animal Mother Story" has parallels with fertility myths in other cultures. Details of the two versions here differ considerably and more versions would show even more variations.

In the first version, the three initial characters are a woman, her sister and their husband; in the second, it is one woman who has two husbands. Both express some of the tensions between men and women, in one case relating to the scarcity of food, in another to the sharing of work. In each case, the strongest alliance seems to be between co-spouses.

The story relates how one woman gave birth to all the animals which now inhabit the Yukon, teaching them what to eat and how to behave. (Animals had to be taught the correct behavior toward humans just as humans have to be taught appropriate behavior to animals.) A year later she gave a great party for them in which each sang his song and danced on a moose skin trampoline. After this, she left them to look after themselves.



## Animal Mother

told by Mrs. Kitty Smith, Whitehorse

This story happened a long time ago. Goat was the only animal in this country. Goat and buffalo. That's all people live on. Pretty hard. No rabbits, nothing.

One man had two wives, two sisters. That oldest one is named *Nakayh*. She's got some kind of doctor, some potion. They're going to starve, you know. He hunt porcupine, that man. When he finds fat one, porcupine mother, he don't bring it. He cook it, he keep it somewhere. Just porcupine daddy, that's the one he bring home.

"You don't get porcupine Mamma?" they tell him.

"No, that's the one I get, just in a tree, porcupine daddy."

Well no fat, you know, that one. His wives go. They keep wondering all the time where they get game, you know. They keep going.

He says, "She eat him, that porcupine mother. I'm going to fix her this time. Don't look when she comes back, just look around that way."

"All right."

Hit him it. He got porcupine mother, he got porcupine daddy

too. That daddy, he's going to pack for his wives. This one, the mother, he's going to eat himself. He cook it. Cook quick, throw head, throw in fire, want to eat quick. She's just fat, you know. He pick up head, want to chew tongue, face it toward him. He bite her. (Claps) She bite his mouth shut. So he can't eat. Well she's cooked now. He put it in packsack, porcupine daddy too, go back to camp.

They made camp already, his wife.

She's going to have baby, that oldest one, *Nakayh*.

He comes back, grunt, mouth shut by porcupine. His wife work on fire, that youngest one.

"What's the matter?" she said. She helps him make that porcupine head fall down.

"I starve, that's why I cook that head, but he bite me," he said.

"You do that all the time. You never do that just first time, this time. You think I don't know?" that oldest one tell him.

He don't say nothing. Anyway he take out that cooked one, porcupine. They eat him.

"I want to eat because I starve, that's why I cook him."

"No, you do that all time." Those women know.

She's getting big now, that woman, can't walk, you know. She tells her sister, "I'm not going to walk no more. You fellows make some kind of place for me."

Her husband cut big tree, get wood. Big pile of wood. Her sister work. They fix big house, they said, big place.

"I'm not going to be your wife anymore. Going to be something wrong with me. But you people, you're going to eat lots now. I'm going to be different. I'm going to get game to eat. I'm going to have baby. Going to be something wrong," she tell them.

She tells her sister, "Get sinew, fix snare." She fixes it for her. That's rabbit snare she make. "Knock down tree, for him to eat." She's got no baby yet, but she teach that one, her sister. Fix snares good.

They're gone then. They got to move on, can't stay in one place. That younger sister and her husband move on.

"You come and see me when she feel like it. I can't stop now. I'm going to have grub all the time, me."

That time that husband go, somebody give her box. I don't know who is that somebody. "That's your grub box," he tell her. Little goat inside, he stand up. "Don't kill him though. Just one side you cut him. Cook one side. Then you close him, put him back."



"All right." When she want to eat, it's simple, open that box, cut one side, he don't move, that little goat. Cut one side, cook him, close him. Eat good. She start to get sick now. Her sister (had) made her big blanket, sew for her, give it to her. She put it on top grass. Put up sticks to hold it. Underneath just some kind of grass.

That's where her babies born. Rabbits born first. Then ptarmigan. Then grouse. Everyone she give clothes when they're gone. Next caribou. Next sheep. She talk to them. She give them grub, everyone and say, "This one you're going to eat." She tell them all. She give. They chew. "This going to be your grub."

Then grizzly. Then wolf. She's got nothing for them. Don't know what they're going to eat.

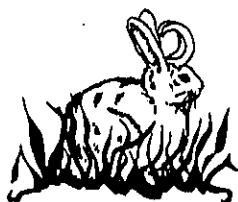
She said, "That's all right. You fellows treat your brothers just like game. But I don't want you to have teeth." She tried to take off his teeth. "Don't fight. Don't fight people."

Grizzly gets mad at his Momma, and take off. "I'll keep it to fight." He's dangerous.

"Don't fight people," she tell him.

Moose last one born. He's got teeth just like grizzly. "NO, you're not going to fight with people," she tell him. "I make you for this ground. For people." His mamma take off those people. "You don't try to fight people."

Then that sister and her husband come back. She shows them what she made.



Rabbit had little horn, that time, just like sheep. "You can't snare that rabbit that way," her sister tell her.

"All right, I'm going to take off," she said. She take off those horns. That's why rabbits now had no horn.

Now everybody eat it. Rabbit got strong skin that time, just like mink. But people use it too much. That's why that mother get

jealous about that. So she take feathers and blow them on rabbit. That's why that skin no good. People used too much of it. Now nobody use rabbit skin except sometime for net blanket.

Yes, that time when they come back lots of moose, lots of caribou, lots of ptarmigan, lots of grouse. All full now. Indians going to eat lots. That's how they get their grub.

"You fellows leave for good now. I'm going to leave this ground, going to watch my kids, going to watch my kids."

All right. They move. They got lots to eat now. People got lots to eat. Animals got lots to eat.

After that sister and husband left for good, that's the time she made that swing, over Bennett Lake.



Another man from Tagish saw all this. He's hunting on that mountain behind Choutla school. Look around. He sees that mother sit there, big moose skin swing. She sing for her kids. They jump on top of that skin.

Moose come first, sings, "What kind of skin you fellows got. Don't you see how big is me?" He steps right through that skin and she has to get another. Put up another skin.

Caribou, everyone jumps on that skin.

Then wolf. His mother said he got to sing by himself, wolf. "He's going to be mean to us. We're not going to help him sing," they say that, that game.

So he sing himself, that wolf. He's going to go alone, that wolf, going to be good hunter.

Everyone got song on that swing. Grizzly bear, he try to sing, he fall down. That's why he's so clumsy. "Just like that, you go now you," she tell him. That's why he's clumsy.

That game mother made all those animals the way they are. That's a true story.

That man who watch them, he tells those people at Tagish what he saw. He told them there's going to be two winters (joined together). "Try the best you can, you people."

Dezadeash froze to bottom, they say. Everything froze. Talk about ducks! Swans, froze. Grizzly froze. They say one woman who had no husband but had three kids, she pick up animals that froze, pull them out, save herself.

To get fish they say, people make ladder down through ice. My daddy's mother told me about that. They stay in Haines. Lots of grub there. Salt water...

Long time after, in my mother's daddy's time, man saw Game Mother. This is just a little while ago, in shotgun time.

My momma's daddy knew this man. He throw away game for nothing. Shoot game, just throw away. He do this all time. One time moose come to him, pick him up on horns. He drop his shotgun right then. That moose carry him away, he can even sleep right there on those horns. He carry him across lake, across to other side.

Woman she stand up outdoors. Woman, she's not old, nothing. That's Game Mother. She stand up. She laugh.

"This the man you wanted Momma?" he tell her.

"Yes, that's the man I want. Come on in." She talk Indian. Inside house campfire, she's got.

"You do too much. Me, I make for you my kids," she tell him.

"You use too much. When you need it, use it. But you, though, you throw for nothing! What for you do that? One month you're going to stay with me. I'm going to teach you." She tell him.

That grub box, she got him yet. She open that box. She cut one side that goat. Cook him, feed him. Pretty soon one month.

"He's going to take you the same, my son." He came back, same moose. She give him lunch, cooked meat. She tell her son, "If he needs water, take him to water place. You take him home to his wife and kids."

Keep going, keep going, across water to wife and kids. Come to camp spot - it's September.

"Momma tell you everything you got to do right," moose tell that man. Then that man tell people how to hunt meat, how to eat, all she teach him. True story. This one happen.