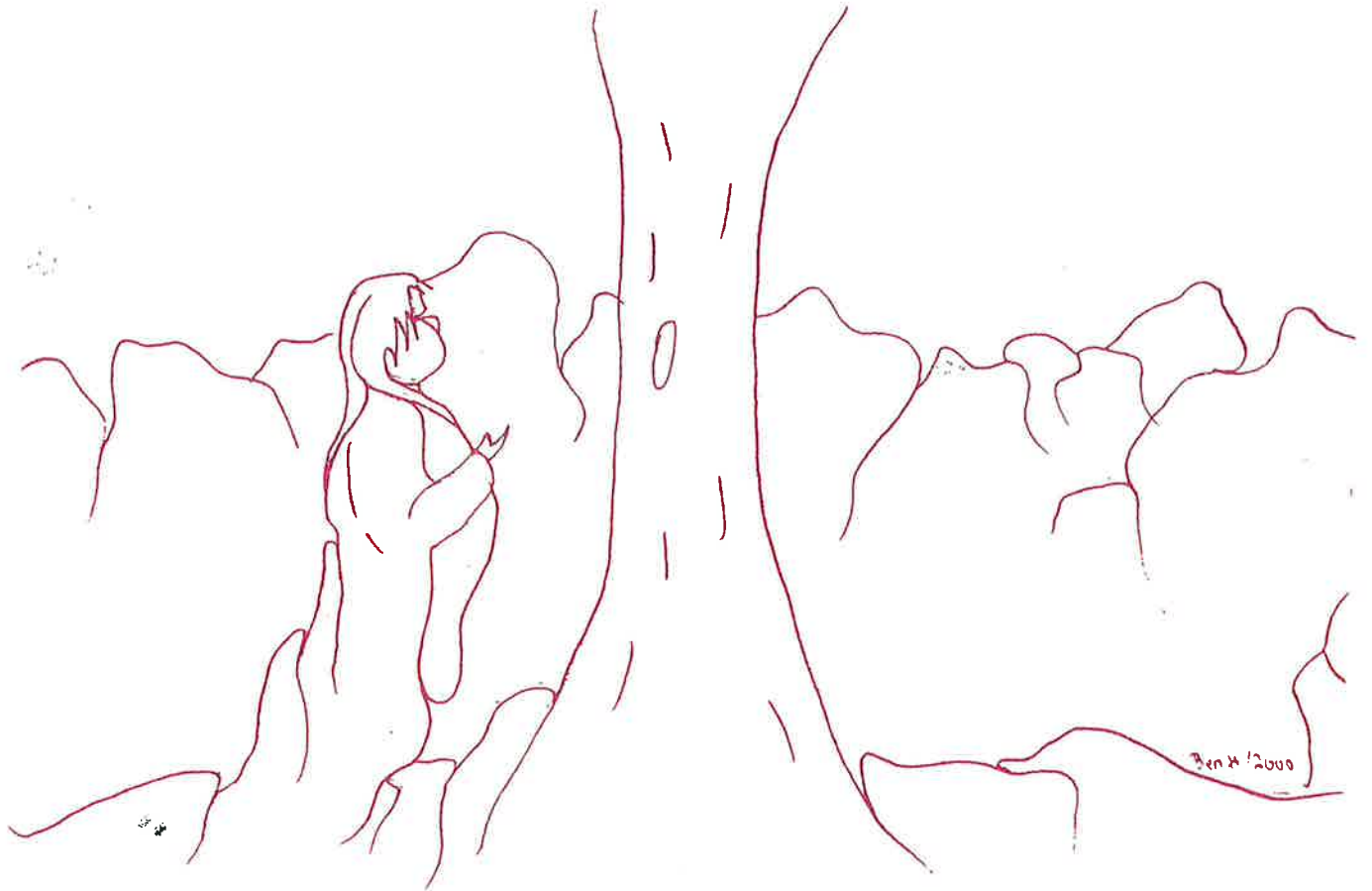


Big Skunk, and Wolverine and the Wolves



transcribed and translated by Anastasia Weesk
illustrated by Ben Hookimaw

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Big Skunk

told by Raphael Wabano

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Long ago there was a man named Big Skunk. The one known as Big Skunk was human.

It is said that at one time every creature you see was once a human. According to the legends, all the animals that existed before people were humans.

The one called Big Skunk was enormous.

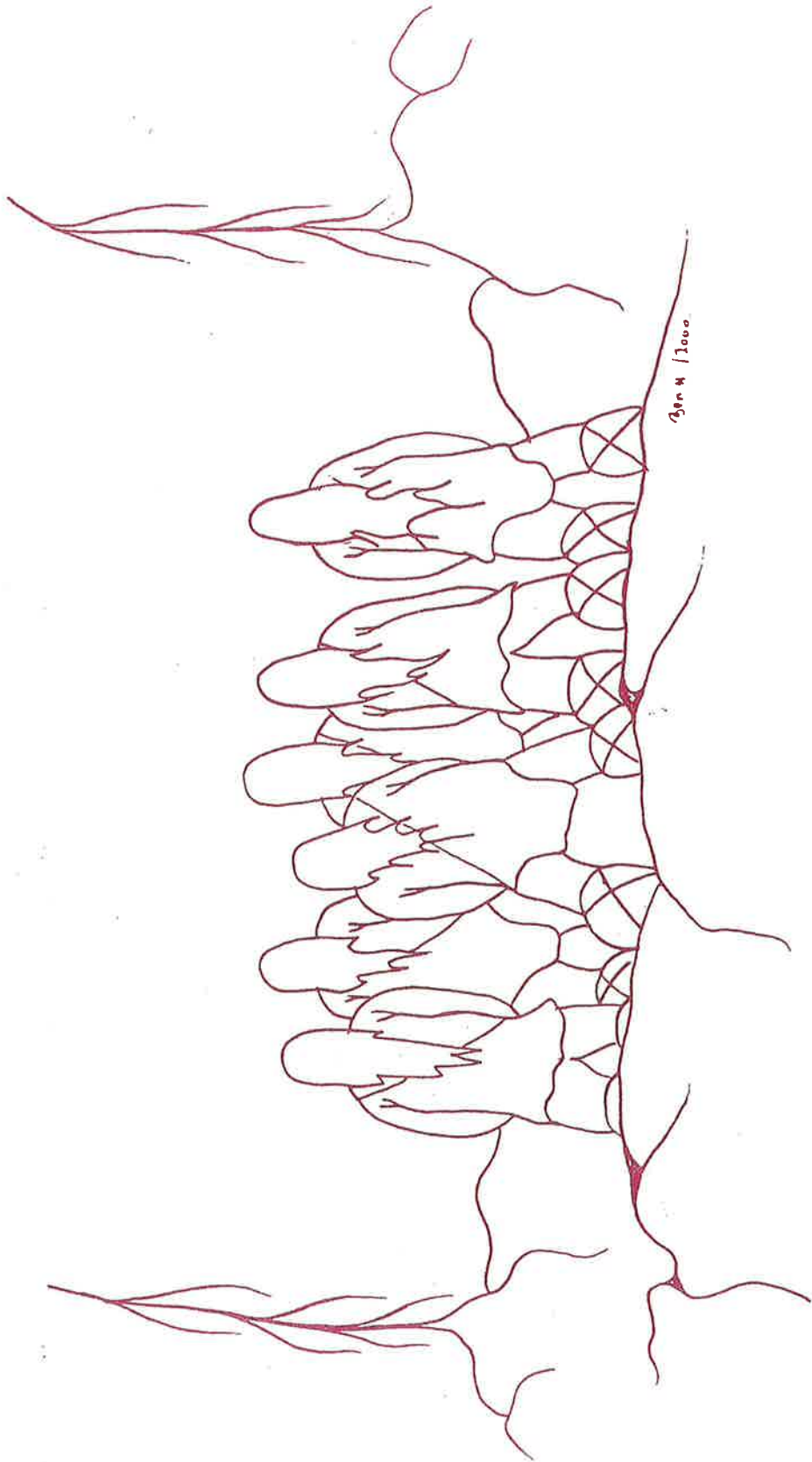
He was not the same size as the skunks we see today.

Big Skunk was single. He lived with one relative, a sister.

No one knows where Big Skunk came from. There must have been other older skunks, his parents for example, which explains why he was known as Big Skunk. The only time I heard Big Skunk mentioned was through legends; I never heard anything about his parents.

Big Skunk roamed around searching for food. He wasn't a meat eater, but he was feared nonetheless. The other animals, the humans, were very wary of him. One time when the humans were wandering around looking for food, they came upon Big Skunk's tracks. "These are the tracks of Big Skunk," they said. "Yes, these are indeed his tracks. He must know that we had come upon his tracks," they continued. The humans immediately turned and went back to their camp. When they arrived, the humans started packing their belongings. They wanted to go somewhere safe because they had seen the tracks of Big Skunk.

The humans got ready to leave. When they left, they decided to move to a far away place. The humans travelled all day.



Of course they had to travel all day because they were running for their safety.

They stopped at sunset and constructed a winter shelter covered with tree branches.

Canvas wasn't used because there was no canvas at this time. Anyway, there stood a shelter made of evergreen boughs.

Early next morning, at dawn, they departed again. There, where they built a shelter, they left an old woman behind. She was so old she could hardly move. The old woman had given up, consequently, she remained behind as everyone else left. "For sure when Big Skunk sees our tracks he will follow us," the humans exclaimed excitedly.

Now, I will go back to Big Skunk.

He wanted his sister to cook a meal for him. It must have been in the evening. "Cook the woodland beaver [it really was a bull frog]," he said. "So I can see what's happening," he continued.

That is what he did when he wanted to find out about something, or whenever he had to do something.

Then Big Skunk's sister cooked the woodland beaver. When it was finally cooked, she handed the beaver to him. Big Skunk sat down and got ready to eat. When Big Skunk started eating, he ate very slowly. He had to because he wanted to understand what was happening. He chewed very slowly. Suddenly, while he was eating, he said, "Yes, I do believe my tracks are being followed step by step." He cut off another piece. Again, he chewed it slowly. After he swallowed that piece, he declared, "Yes, for sure, I am being followed." Big Skunk was talking about those humans who came upon his tracks and he understood then that they had seen his tracks.

Big Skunk got dressed early next morning. He followed his own trail until he came upon a different set of tracks. These were the tracks of the other humans. Big Skunk followed these tracks until he came upon their abandoned camp. He continued to trace their trail; he was very persistent. Then he saw the shelter where the others had made their

last camp. When he looked at the shelter, he thought he saw smoke. "I wonder why smoke is coming from this shelter," he remarked.

There must have been something covering the entrance.

Big Skunk lifted the entrance covering and saw an old woman sitting there by herself. It was the old woman who was left behind because she had given up. She couldn't move because she was too old.

The old woman thinking that she had a visitor related what had happened. "The children ran away," she said. "One time while they were wandering, they saw the tracks of Big Skunk," the old woman continued chattering on. He looked at her. The old woman did not even realize she was talking to Big Skunk. "I do not think my host should be annoying me," said Big Skunk. "I am going to die for sure thought the old woman. She did not speak any more after that. "I am going to leave now, Grandma," Big Skunk told the old woman. After he went outside, he called back to the old woman. "Hey, Grandma, I have some grease for your face here." As the old woman opened the entrance covering, Big Skunk sprayed the old woman right on her face.

That is what Big Skunk did to humans. He sprayed them.

Big Skunk went on his way again.

The trail was going that way (legend teller pointing in front of him).

While he was walking, following the trail, Big Skunk came upon a loaded toboggan. When he looked up, there were more loaded toboggans in front of him. Then he saw humans lying on the ground. Big Skunk went from one person to another checking them over. "I wonder what happened to them," he said. "I wonder what they died of. For sure, they died of something," he continued. He started examining them and began feeling the inside their mouths. "They are still warm!" he exclaimed. "They must have died very recently," he said. He checked all of them. He examined them all over, feeling them, even between their legs. "I wonder what they died of?" Big Skunk asked. "Oh there it is," he said. "They must have gone into battle," he said. "This is where they got



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hit," he said. "These humans got slashed as they were dodging attack with their legs wide apart," he said. He checked all the humans that he saw there. They were all women. "I'll leave them alone for now," he said. "But I'll come back later."

There was a trail leading through the bush. This was the trail of the men who had left earlier.

Big Skunk departed again. He followed the trail. It went a great distance. Big Skunk came upon another loaded toboggan. From there the trail lead towards what looked like a river. The men's tracks headed that way. That's where they were catching beavers. The men were chiselling through the ice trying to block the beavers' underwater entrance to their lodge. Unexpectedly, Big Skunk came upon them.

One of the men Big Skunk came upon was Wolverine.

There were four families living in the area at that time—the Wolverine, the Lynx, the Marten, and the Mink. Big Skunk approached Wolverine who was closer to the shore. Wolverine was the first man he came across. Wolverine was always on the look out for Big Skunk. He knew that Big Skunk would eventually appear. When Big Skunk saw Wolverine he started to sneak up on him. Wolverine pretended not to notice as he had already seen Big Skunk. He kept on chiselling ice, singing "nenenenen nenenenen," while at the same time keeping watch on Big Skunk. He saw Big Skunk crawling backwards to him. I think I can reach Big Skunk if I jump at him, thought Wolverine.

He was that close to Big Skunk.

Big Skunk lifted his tail. Quickly, Wolverine pounced on Big Skunk. Wolverine clamped down hard on his rear end to prevent Big Skunk from spraying him.

He managed to jump on him before Big Skunk had a chance to spray him.

Wolverine cried out to his friends, but only some of them came right away. They began fighting Big Skunk, biting him on the back of his neck. There was no sight of Lynx. For a

while he did not appear even though the others called out to him. Lynx only answered their shrieks. Suddenly, Lynx appeared.

There were towering trees all around them.

The racket the men made while fighting Big Skunk sounded as if the trees were being shaken. During the fighting, Lynx climbed to the top of a tree. "Make room for me on his neck," he yelled. They made room for Lynx on Big Skunk's neck. Lynx jumped right on it. He leaped from the very top of a tree onto Big Skunk's neck severing it in the process.

That is how Lynx took part in the fight.

Once the animals killed Big Skunk, they tore him into small pieces. After they cut him into tiny parts, they scattered the pieces around.

From these parts came the small skunks we see today. Ever since Big Skunk was ripped into tiny pieces, skunks have remained small.

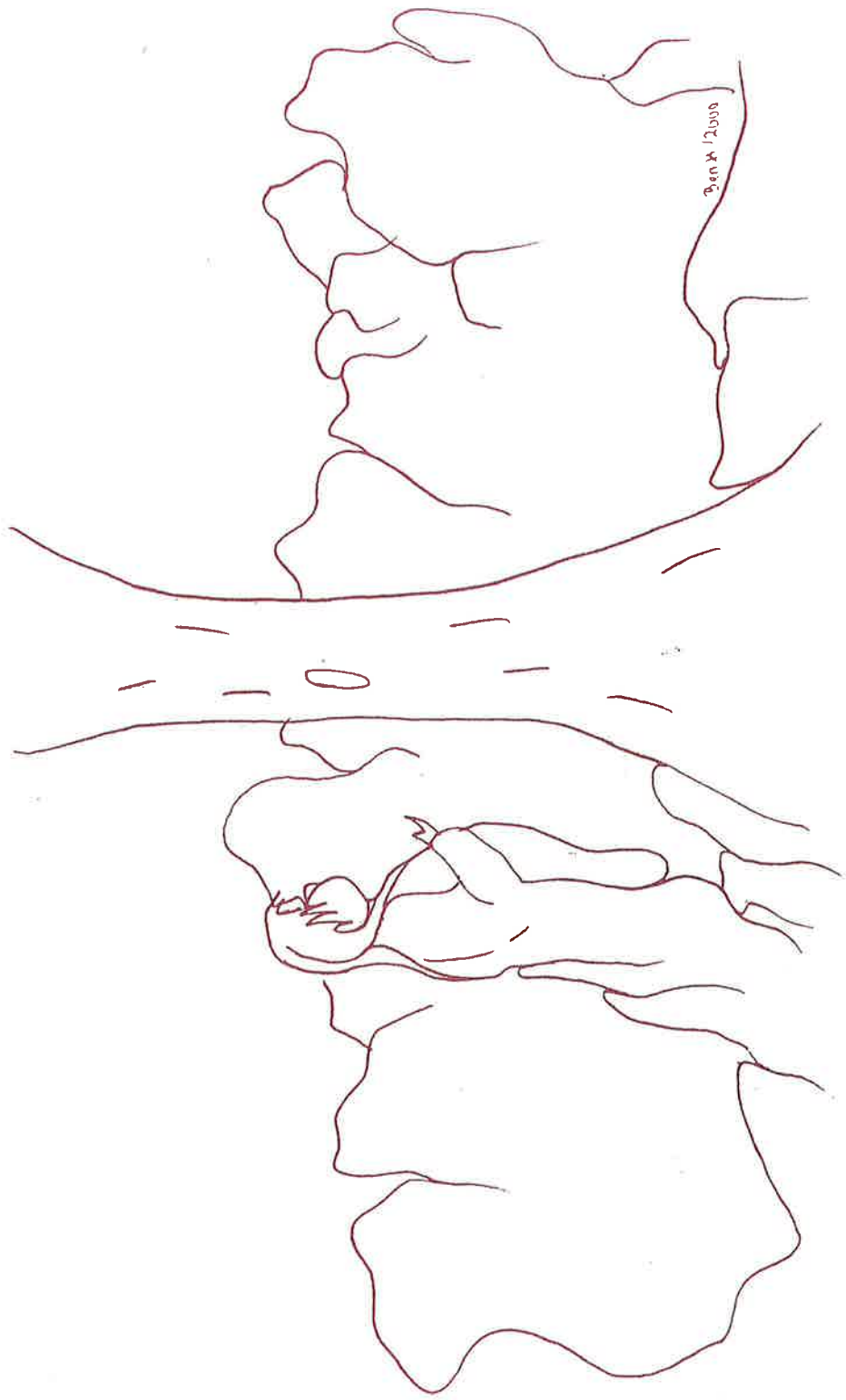
Wolverine departed after that. He could not open his eyes because some of Big Skunk's spray had managed to get on his face.

Wolverine left.

He headed towards the area where he thought the bay might be. He walked a considerable distance.

I guess he was extremely far from the bay.

As he walked, Wolverine stumbled into a tree. "What kind of tree are you?" he asked. "It is I, a Muskego tree. I stand in the muskeg," replied the tree. Wolverine went on his way again. After walking for what seemed a never ending period of time, he bumped into another tree. "What kind of tree are you?" he asked. "It is I, who stands near the big water," said the tree. Wolverine went off again after speaking to the tree. As he was



walking along, he tumbled over a log. "What kind of tree are you?" he asked the log he tripped over. "It is I, who drifts along the shore of the big water," the log responded.

Driftwood is often found along the shore near the big water.

That was the last tree who had spoken to him. Wolverine got up and walked straight ahead. Somehow, he finally reached the bay. There Wolverine washed himself. He cleaned the areas where Big Skunk had sprayed him.

It is said that this is why the water in the bay is salty because Wolverine washed himself there.

Wolverine remained near the bay for a long time.

There is no legend of anything that happened to him there.

Summer arrived and Wolverine grew restless. He wanted to go back where he thought he came from. Wolverine began walking. He changed direction many times when he found the journey difficult.

Wolverine travelled farther and farther away from the bay. Snow began to fall as winter appeared. Much snow fell causing Wolverine to get very tired. The air was calm as he walked.

You can hear clearly when the weather is cold.

Wolverine took a break. He always sighed when resting. Someone thought he heard a sigh. It was a wolf who heard him. The wolves ran toward the sound. That's when they found Wolverine. "It's our older brother," they said. The wolves invited Wolverine to come with them, but he really didn't want to go. Wolverine went with the wolves anyway. He went hunting with the wolves for caribou inland. There were old wolves, the elders, and young wolves in that family.

Wolverine and the Wolves

told by Michael Patrick

transcribed and translated by Anastasia Weesk, illustrated by Ben Hookimaw

[During his time with the wolves,] Wolverine married a female wolf.

His mother-in-law and two brothers-in-law were wolves too.

Wolverine was good at killing beavers. Because wolves weren't as good at killing beavers, they were fairly helpless. In spite of this, Wolverine did not want his brothers-in-law to go with him. Wolverine did not want his brothers-in-law to know where he did his ice-chiseling. Also, he did not want his brothers-in-law to observe him killing beavers. Wolverine often killed many beavers and he fed his brothers-in-law well.

No one knew what he used for an ice chisel because nobody had ever seen him carry anything that could be used for a chisel.

Once as Wolverine was leaving to kill beavers, his brothers-in-law thought maybe they should follow him. So one day, they pursued Wolverine, but stayed well away from his trail. The wolves followed while Wolverine was searching for beavers in the river. They watched him as he found a beaver house. This beaver house was near the riverbank on a river winding eastward. The wolves hid among clumps of trees nearby watching Wolverine as he secretly shovelled snow.

He used a wooden scoop, or snow shovel, called a ma ka nay hi kun.

Wolverine shovelled snow to clear an area of ice near the beavers' underwater entrance. He always made an opening in that area.

Wolverine had a long tail then, although it is not known why he had such a long tail.



When Wolverine wanted to make a hole in the ice, he backed up to the cleared area and began to make an opening using his tail. Wolverine's tail was his chisel.

That's why Wolverine did not want his brothers-in-law to watch him.

While the wolves were spying on him, wanting to know what he used for a chisel, Wolverine's tail broke in half.

It is said that is why Wolverine's tail is short now, because it broke in half.

Wolverine fell towards the hole he had made in the ice. That is when he realized his tail had broken in half. Wolverine knew then that the wolves had spied on him. "They must have spied on me," he said. "That is why my chisel broke in half." Then Wolverine went into the bushes looking for tracks. Sure enough, he found the wolves' tracks.

Wolverine had a difficult time trying to make something he could use for a chisel. It took more time to kill beavers because he no longer had a fast chisel. Wolverine decided he wasn't going to give the wolves anything to eat. He was going to starve them. That is what he thought. Wolverine even kept an eye on his wife so she wouldn't give her mother any food. He gave strict orders not to feed any of them.

Wolverine had two sons. They were the ones who secretly kept their grandmother alive. She lived for quite a while.

They lived at their camp until they had nothing left to eat. Wolverine's children fed their grandmother secretly to keep her alive. She was living by herself at the time. The wolves, driven by extreme hunger, went caribou or moose hunting.

There were moose then too, but their range was not as large as it is today. However, according to this legend, there were many moose in that area.

Once, when Wolverine was away ice-chiseling, the wolves went moose hunting. They came upon the tracks of a cow moose. The wolves chased this moose towards Wolverine, in an attempt to make him see the moose running on the river. As he was

chiseling, Wolverine suddenly saw a moose running on the river towards him. When the moose came in front of him, he started screaming and yelling. This frightened the moose away. Wolverine did not want the wolves to kill it.

The wolves deliberately drove the moose towards Wolverine.

The lead wolf, already across the river, ran and waited in the bush. The other wolf who was hungry sauntered after the moose. Not too long after, this wolf came upon Wolverine and asked, "How long since the moose ran by?" Wolverine told the wolf that it scarcely disappeared a moment ago. He said, "If the moose had a long tail, I would have seen him yet."

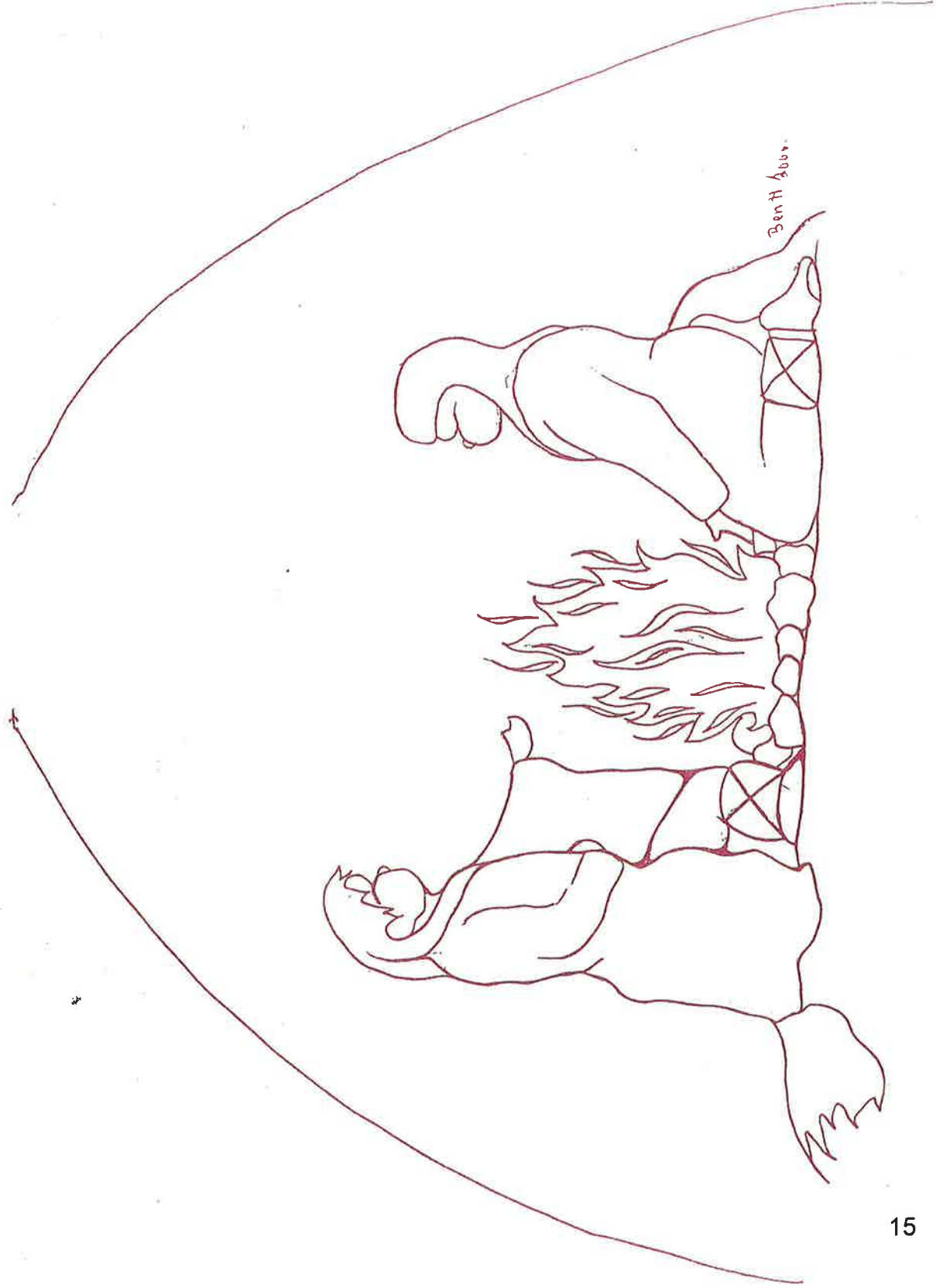
He had enormous contempt for the wolf.

Wolverine told the wolf that the moose had just gone by. The lead wolf, who had been waiting, eventually caught the moose on the other side of the river. That is where he killed the cow moose. The lead wolf had killed the moose, while the other wolf had driven the moose to him.

They intentionally chased the moose to the river. This would allow Wolverine to see them, because he had thought they were almost starving to death.

Wolverine killed many beavers—small ones—and he took some of them home. His wife went to see her starving mother who was living nearby in a shelter made of evergreen trees. "Can you at least give me a small beaver? My breathing is getting shallow due to hunger," her mother sighed. Later, Wolverine's wife told him, "You are being asked for a small beaver. Your mother-in-law is starving." "Go and give it to her," he said.

"Wait a minute!" exclaimed Wolverine. "Hand me a beaver." He took the beaver (a very small beaver at that) and started to flatten it with his knees. In the process, Wolverine crushed all the internal organs including the gall bladder. He did this to spoil the taste. The beaver became very limp because he had broken all its bones. Wolverine's wife took the beaver to her mother in spite of this. The old woman didn't touch the beaver due to its poor condition. She knew that Wolverine had burst the beaver's gall bladder.



That night the two wolves who had killed the moose returned to their camp, but Wolverine was not aware of this. Suddenly, he heard a banging noise coming from his mother-in-law's shelter. Wolverine went outside and asked, "What are you pounding on, my mother-in-law?" "I'm pounding on a bone so I can make broth for my sons who are nearly starving to death," she replied. Wolverine laughed because he was certain they would all die soon.

Early next morning, Wolverine went outside. He looked at the neighbouring shelter. It still had frost on top. I wonder if they froze to death he thought. Wolverine believed they were dead. "They have not made fire yet," he said. "The wolves probably froze to death. Go and see," he told his children. "They probably froze to death because they had not made fire yet," Wolverine said. He heard his children yelling in the shelter. Wolverine told his wife to go over and see what happened. "I'm afraid they will tear them to pieces if they really froze to death. The children are shouting," he said. The other old woman (Wolverine's wife) went as told. She returned with broken moose bones. These back leg bones had the marrow removed.

This surprised Wolverine. The wolves had killed the moose after all he thought. He had not revealed that he saw the wolves chasing the moose. So they did kill the moose he mused. Then he got an idea, a different one. During the night the wolves returned to their kill. They worked until dawn making a shelter covered with tree boughs. Later they started butchering the meat, into strips, to be brought inside. The wolves even brought the fat inside. The moose they killed was very fat.

While he was inside his shelter, Wolverine made a decision. He had a considerable amount of food including smoked beavers and beaver tails of different shapes and sizes.

Beavers who occupied lakes had wide tails and were called lake tails. Those with narrower tails, who inhabited rivers, were named river tails.

Wolverine told his wife to tie these tails together because he wanted to offer food to the others.

Following their tracks, he took these tails on a toboggan and went to feed the others.

The wolves had already hung up all the fatty meats including the rib and chest bones. They hung the fat, dripping from the heat, by the door because it was known for sure that Wolverine relished fat. The wolves hung the pancreas, still frozen, close to where the smoke went. Somebody shouted that a visitor had arrived. Then Wolverine threw a rope with food attached into the shelter in the hope that his mother-in-law would pull it in.

This was his way of offering food to her.

"Why bother feeding me now that I'm no longer starving to death?" the mother-in-law screeched. "Don't say that," her sons told her. "Just accept the offer of food." All the time she was at home starving and Wolverine had plenty of preserved food she thought. Wolverine entered the shelter. He almost walked into the dripping fat as he sat across from the fire. "My goodness," he said to his mother-in-law as he looked at the fat. "That fat really looks wonderful. Your food really looks good, with all that fat. Remember, long ago, when we were poor, too young to hunt for ourselves, the names we were called? You were called *kway chee shkwa chee kwash* because you liked eating the meat from the inside of the hide, and I was called *wa wi ship* because I liked eating the fat."

Finally, the mother-in-law removed the fat from where it was hanging. She wanted to give it to Wolverine. The wolves hung the fat there on purpose to entice Wolverine into craving for it. After the wolves set the fat in front of him, the mother-in-law told Wolverine to close his eyes. "Close your eyes because it is the first time your brother-in-law has killed a moose," she said. Wolverine closed his eyes as he ate, but sometimes he would open his eyes a little. His mother-in-law got up and adjusted the strips of meat while reaching for the pancreas. She threw the pancreas striking Wolverine on the head. "You're going to kill somebody," cried the brother-in-law. "Why is the old woman bothering with the smoking rack," the brother-in-law mumbled to himself.

She was just pretending to arrange the meat while she grabbed the pancreas.

The mother-in-law hit Wolverine sideways almost knocking him out. "It's all right. I'm not hurt much. Just a bit sore," he said.

“Well then, just eat and close your eyes again,” said the mother-in-law. But he kept opening his eyes just a little. “I think I can see the whites of your eyes,” she continued. Wolverine closed his eyes really tight. The old woman took perfect aim and threw the pancreas killing Wolverine instantly. Wolverine’s body twitched as the life went out of it.

That was the purpose of the pancreas and the fat. Wolverine said he liked to eat the fat and hoped to get some of it.

Then the wolves took Wolverine’s body outside, and placed it in such a manner that Wolverine’s wife would see it. Later on Wolverine’s wife appeared with the heavy load of smoked beavers and beaver tails. Because she played a role in the starving of her mother and brothers, they killed her as well.

With no parents, the mother-in-law adopted the two children of Wolverine and his wife.

At this time, the two of them still looked like humans.

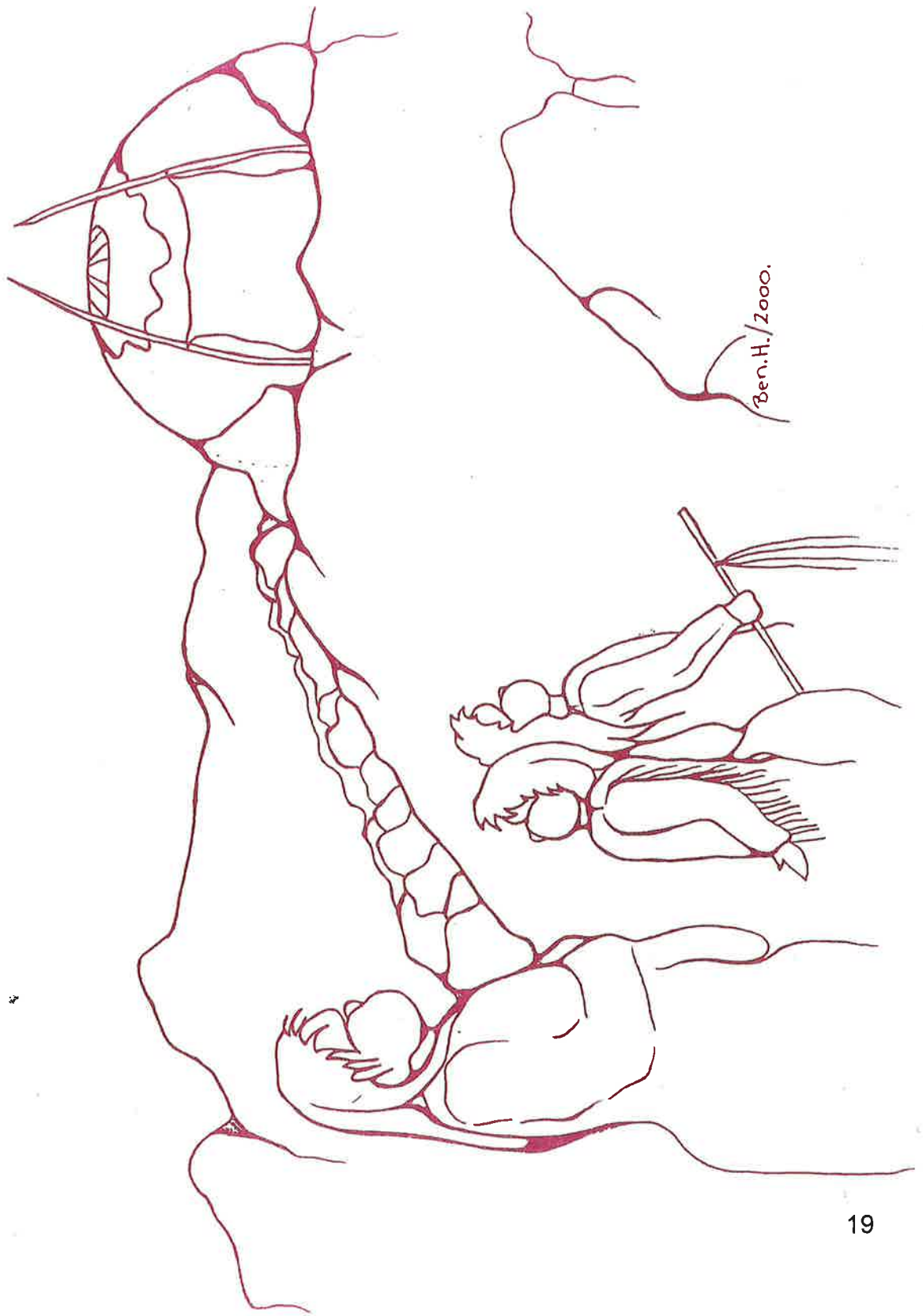
It is said that children playing camp inside a shelter, making needless noises, or crying pretending that something had happened was not allowed.

One day the young wolverines made a camp inside in the shelter. Suddenly they cried saying, “Grandmother is choking on moose bone.” The old woman was cooking a moose neck at the time. Quickly, she got up because she was choking on a moose bone.

The children caused her death, by giving her bad luck, through their imaginary games. That’s why children were forbidden to make camp inside a shelter or cry like something had happened. When something like that happens, a person receives misfortune. Following this incident, the two young wolverines were brought up by their brothers-in-law.

After eating, the wolves decided to have a family meeting. The young wolverines were old enough to understand then.

Although they were called wolverines, they still looked like humans.



Ben.H./2000.

At the gathering it was decided that they should go their separate ways. The wolves said, "We will roam in the swamps looking for food while you wolverines will wander along the river."

The wolverines headed towards the river and the wolves moved towards the swamp. As the wolverines ran along the river searching for food, their footprints changed into wolverine tracks.

They became the animals that we know as wolverines.

This happened to the wolves as well.

They became the animals we recognize as wolves today.

That is the end of this legend.

