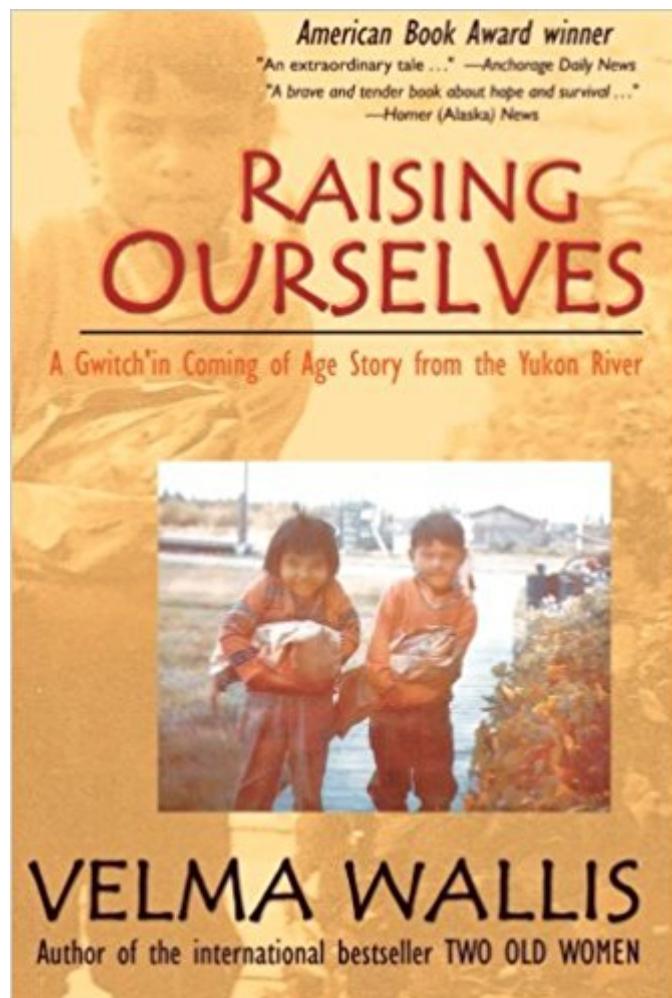


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Raising Ourselves: A Gwich'in Coming Of Age Story From The Yukon River



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.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is Velma Wallis' third book. Her previous works, "Two Old Women" and "Bird Girl & the Man Who Followed the Sun," deal with traditional stories told by the Gwich'in people of Fort Yukon. Her latest, "Raising Ourselves: A Gwich'in Coming of Age Story from the Yukon River" is an

autobiographical account of her growing up in Fort Yukon, Alaska. The book offers a very open and candid look inside not only the community of Fort Yukon, but also into the intimacies of her immediate and extended families. For thousands of years, the Gwich'in people lived semi-nomadically along the Yukon, Porcupine and Black rivers until, within the course of two generations, they found themselves settled into a static community surrounded by evidence of modern day life. Wallis represents this "lost generation" caught between wanting to move forward into the modern world and yet yearning to retain the traditional ways of hunting, trapping and other forms of traditional knowledge. Through her, an outsider can see the struggle within the village and its people as they are forced to adapt and evolve to the new ways. The major issue that strikes the reader squarely between the eyes is the epidemic of alcoholism in Fort Yukon. It is not something that only affects the adult community, but as Wallis points out, teenagers and even children in some cases. One paragraph in particular brings the issue home: "After days of drinking and fighting came the slow, painful task of sobering up. My mother's swollen face would gradually heal. My father's face would go blank as if nothing had happened. That was an emptiness about our cabin as in the aftermath of war - a war no one had won." (p.

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