



#### STORY NUMBER 14

## *The Teachings of Paul Blondin*

**I**n the time around 1926, the Dene people hunted beavers and muskrats on the east side of Great Bear Lake River. There were three families. Even though it was spring, there was still ice on the big lake.

George was only six years old. He was around his mother all the time, in the tent and outside the tent. No one explained to him that the lovely land with the animals and the birds existed. One night, George's mother told him that he was going camping with his grandfather, Paul. George was really excited about this camping trip, but he knew nothing about the beautiful land, and the animals and birds that were out there.

Paul had a birchbark canoe. He sat in the middle of the canoe and George sat right in front of him.

The trip began along the shoreline of the big lake. There was ice in the middle, but there was open water along the shore. Paul talked to George as he paddled along. For George, it was an exciting time on this beautiful land. He heard all kinds of ducks squawking in different tunes and it was music to his ears. George asked many questions and his grandfather answered them.

George asked about the Dene name for duck – which was “chu” – meaning mallard. All duck species have their own name in Dene. In his replies, Paul provided all the information that George needed to know. It was a beautiful night, with not a stir of wind and the lake was calm. The sun was just setting behind the hills.

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land to prepare a meal. George was excited and happy. Paul started a fire and told George to do everything that he did. For a six-year-old youngster, it was exciting to be taught such tasks. Paul and George made preparations to start a fire. "You gather dry twigs from the base of a spruce tree and push them together," explained Paul. "Then you hold a lighted match to the twigs until they catch fire. Once they start burning, you add more twigs. As the fire gets bigger, you add bigger pieces of wood to it." A six-year-old who learns to make a fire for the first time is really proud of himself.

In the winter, one usually starts a fire in the same way, but sometimes it is more difficult due to ice on the twigs and bushes. If that happens, you have to use another method to start a fire. You start by first shaving dry wood with an axe.

Once the fire was started, Paul started to cook. He taught George how to hold a knife, then showed him how to clean a fish and set it by the fire to cook. George also learned the proper way

to cook a duck. First he had to pluck its feathers. George's grandpa helped him pull some feathers from the duck. He held George's hand with the knife and steered his hand to cut the duck in preparation for cooking. In the end, they had a good meal.

Paul continued to teach George about nature. "Everything you see here is the creation of the Creator," he explained. "The Creator made mother earth and everything in space, including man and woman. As God is a spirit we cannot see him, but he is close by. He looks after us. Every night we pray to him and thank him because he protects us as well. If we have a problem or if we need help, we pray to him. If we are good, clean in mind and a good citizen, the Creator may give us a gift of medicine power to use as our own.

Paul and George left that area and continued along the shore. Paul talked to George as they moved along. The sun was just coming up from behind the hills. It was a lovely, beautiful morning. It was a great day and a good time to be alive.

The ducks were quacking and making their own music, because when the sun rises the ducks are happy. Paul and George heard a loon call out loudly. "What is that call?" George asked. "It's a loon calling others," said Paul. "We call them "tootsi". Loons have different calls. One is high-pitched, which the aboriginal people recognize as a warning of a windy day to come. In low-pitched tones, the loons are talking to each other."

After a meal, Paul and George kept paddling along the shore of the big lake. Paul continued to talk to George about nature. George was excited to find out that nature was beautiful. He was lucky to have a teacher who was willing and ready to teach him all he needed to know about nature.

They saw a muskrat in a willow thicket by the shore. Paul began to call the muskrat by pursing his lips together and making a high-pitched squealing sound. The muskrat started to swim towards them. Paul shot the muskrat. He let George pick it out of the water.

Every time they approached a shoreline that was thick with reeds and grasses, Paul looked around as if he was looking for something. Eventually, he thought he had found what he was looking for – duck eggs. He was right. They were mallard eggs, eight of them. Paul showed them to George. George almost jumped out of the canoe in an attempt to grab the eggs. Paul grabbed George saying, "Go easy. Don't touch the eggs. If you do, the mother will never come back to the eggs." Paul tried to explain to George that all ducks

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have eggs. That's where the baby ducks come from. So for the first time, George saw eggs and realized that they were the babies of ducks.

Paul and George made camp. Paul kept on teaching George how to start a fire, as well as how to prepare and cook meals. Even when he was resting, Paul continued to teach George about the land and nature.

It was morning and the sun was just coming up from behind the hills. "There is no reason why you should be unhappy," said Paul. "Be happy at all times because the Creator wants you to be that way. You see all these ducks quacking and making a lot of noise. They are doing it to make you happy. There is a robin singing for you. He will do that all his life. God made everything that you will need for life. All you have to do is work for it.

That is why the Creator wants you to work for a living, and to be happy and pleased that you are working for a living. Don't sleep during the daytime. Get a lot of exercise by doing small tasks like chopping wood, paddling a canoe, running down a caribou or moose, walking and running. They are good for your health." So Paul preached one night to six year old George. These teachings should also be good and useful for the children of these modern times.

Paul also explained one of the Dene laws. "Love one another as much as possible. Share your food with the poor. Don't harm anyone. Don't quarrel with each other. Be very kind. If you do this, you will live long. Do not worry. The land will provide everything that you need. Be a good person."