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The Owl

A long time ago, one of the first things Dene parents taught their children, especially very small children, was how to listen. They had a culture where they scared children to make them listen. One of the things they used to frighten the children was the owl. The owl squawks and can be very scary.

In the evening, after sunset, an owl usually sits on top of a tree and starts to squawk with his deep voice. It is pretty loud. You can hear it from a long distance. Sometimes, the owl comes close to a tent, sits on a tree and makes a loud squawk. It sounds like, “Teacsow, teacsow, moh, moh.” With a loud thunder of squawking, you know it is close.

Sometimes, you can see the owl sitting in a tree and sometimes, a mother would make her child look at the owl. The owl looks ugly with his unusual bright eyes. When the owl sensed the child, the mother would say, “Now, if you don’t listen to me when I say go to sleep, that owl will get mad at you and come and scream just outside your bed.” So Dene children were scared of owls when they were small. The Dene parents would use their culture to scare a wild child who did not listen to them.

We say Dene lifestyle depends on medicine power. All Dene laws or policies come from medicine power. A long time ago, when the world was new, an individual medicine power person had the power of an owl. He and the owl had a

conversation about people. The man said that humans have a hard time listening to each other, especially children to their parents. The owl said, "I know all about human beings. I read people's minds. That is how I know. I can't help adults who don't listen, but maybe I can scare the children if they don't listen." That is how a

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culture policy came about when the world was new.

And that is how Dene parents, through a scare, make their children go to sleep – or they face the owl. Mothers always tell their children about this big bird. The children listen because they are scared of the owl.

