



*Volume 11
Issue 1*

The Willies

Verne Ross

In the early part of a cold winter morning I woke up needing to pee. Sleepily, I tried to convince myself that I could wait it out, but once I started to squirm around under my covers I knew I would have to get up. It was bad enough the house I was living in had an eerie presence, or so I thought, the house did not have an inside toilet. Instead you had to go outside to a little house called an outhouse where you went to pee. That was the part I hated the most. The reason being that I was always afraid to go outside when it got dark. By that I mean I imagined the bogeyman was waiting outside to get me. I was afraid of this thing I had never met and, even if it had never existed, it had always controlled my mind. I was indeed afraid of it.

I looked around the room to see if anyone else was moving, but everyone was fast asleep. I thought about asking my aunt to come with me to the outhouse, but I knew she was not feeling well so I did not want to disturb her sleep. I would not even dare to wake up any of my older cousins or I would run the risk of being made fun of. This

meant I was on my own. I slowly put on my brown checker coat and my black winter boots and headed toward the door. I first had to pull out the knives from the doorframe that my famous uncle used to keep the door locked. To me it was cheap security. Yeah, like I really felt safe. After I took the knives out, I slowly opened the creaking door and took a peek outside. I tell you, it was sure cold out there; you could feel the cold air coming in. When I stepped outside I was sure glad to see our dog Duke, a German shepherd, come right out of his doghouse. Duke was glad to see me. I felt so bad for Duke because he was not allowed to come into the house when it was cold. Duke was not even allowed to sleep on the porch. If it was not for his thick, dark brown fur coat Duke would have frozen to death for sure. As I walked with Duke toward the outhouse, I stopped to look around and I noticed that off in the distance the whole village was silent. I just hoped Duke would not bark. If he did, it would mean someone was around, and I'd have to hightail it back to the house, and I did not want to. I was always told that dogs can see things that we normally cannot see. I really believed that, because I knew that Duke did not bark for nothing. Sometimes I had to tell him to keep quiet, however in this case, Duke was my "be on the alert" button. I loved that dog; he made me feel safe at all times. So there I was finally peeing when all of a sudden I heard Duke growling outside of the outhouse door. I asked him, "Boy, what do you hear?" I was starting to get nervous, and there I was still peeing. I

swear I must have drunk a whole lake because it was taking me a long time to finish. Then I heard Duke growling again, and I noticed that Duke was no longer outside of the outhouse. He had gone back to his doghouse. I found myself alone, and I could feel the silence crowd in on me. I started to get scared because I did not know who or what was outside of the outhouse that Duke was growling at. Then I heard the frozen ground crunching, and I knew I was about to meet the bogeyman. I tried calling for Duke but he did not respond to my call. I said to myself, "This is the end for me, the bogeyman is going to take me away." I decided to call out one more time for Duke and this time he responded. He came back to where I was, and when I stepped outside of the outhouse I was so glad to see him that I hugged him. After that I noticed again how silent the village was. There was no one around. I could not understand, or anyways I did not want to think about, the sounds I had heard outside of the outhouse or the silence that surrounded me. All I knew was that the crunching of the snow outside of the outhouse did not sound like a person.

I started to make my way back to the house, and I took my time. When I reached my front doorstep Duke went to his doghouse. I looked back at the outhouse one more time, and there was still no one around. The only thing I could see was my own breath sending smoke signals into the air. It was time to get back inside. I tried to be quiet but my aunt heard me come in. She said to me, "What were you doing out in the cold night?"

I replied, "I needed to go to the outhouse." I was so cold I was answering her in a language that was hard for her to understand. I was talking a cold language. I began to tell my aunt what I heard at the outhouse, and all she said to me was that I was not to ever go outside alone at night. After she said that to me I was even more spooked. My aunt told me to get to bed and cover up and go to sleep.

That same day, later in the morning, I was back outside playing because there was no school. Apparently, when the temperature drops the buses cannot run properly. I did not mind this at all. This gave me the opportunity to go and see my friends. I met up with Ernie, who was one of my best friends, and we decided to go sliding because that was where many of the other children were. We had to dress warm for sliding or else we would freeze in no time. For sure my aunt would be mad at me if I did not wear proper clothing. In fact she would stop me from going sliding. To have frost-bite on your ears is not so pleasant.

Before I left home my aunt said I must be home before it got dark. She said it looked like it wanted to snow so I could not be gone long.

While I was walking with Ernie, I decided to tell him what had happened in the early morning. After I told him, he told me that it must have been the ghost of William. I asked Ernie, "Who was he?" There was a pause and silence. Finally, Ernie told me he was not allowed to talk about him and that he was dead. I said to Ernie that that was ridiculous. Who was he anyways? "Come on tell me, Ernie, I need to know." Then he finally gave in.

He told me that William had been found frozen to death after he went missing in bad weather. The whole village had gone out looking for him but he was not to be found. This gave me the chills. Ernie told me that William was around our age and that he was always going away from home. By this time we had arrived at the hill, so we started to get the toboggan ready. I soon forgot what we were talking about, I was having so much fun. I did not realize that the time was starting to pass by fast. I did notice that bad weather was moving in on us, so I told Ernie we better go home before it got any worse. Ernie said not to worry that we would go soon. He told me to hang on, and that he wanted to go down the hill one more time. I said just one more, and that we better get going or else my aunt was going to kill me. I was getting tired and hungry but Ernie was so full of energy; I could not figure out where he got it all. When we arrived at the top of the hill for our final run, Ernie positioned the toboggan and told me to get on first. Before I got on, I noticed the wind was picking up and all of a sudden I became nervous. I told Ernie, "Let's get going," but the only answer I could hear was Ernie laughing and hollering. While he was doing that, I was getting a snow face wash. It was too bad I did not have a pair of windshield wipers on my glasses. When we arrived at the bottom of the hill I noticed the wind was picking up even more, and it was getting near dark. I said to myself, "Oh no." As I watched the sun slowly going down, I grabbed the toboggan and started heading home. It started to snow hard and the wind was starting

to blow more. I told Ernie that we better hurry up. We both started walking faster pulling the toboggan, but the wind was getting the best of us. It became a tough job pulling the toboggan. Ernie was telling me he had never seen such bad weather come so fast. I noticed that Ernie was getting scared, so I told him we must keep moving. The weather was starting to get really cold, and I was starting to get really tired. I told Ernie that we must ditch the toboggan and come back for it later. He told me I was crazy to do that. It took me awhile to convince him that our lives were far more important than that old toboggan. At this point Ernie had no choice and he agreed to leave the toboggan behind. By this time we had wasted valuable time. As the weather got progressively worse, Ernie and I got colder, so I told him we had to keep moving. Then all of a sudden we were not able to see anything in front of us. I knew we were in big trouble, in fact doomed. I told Ernie to hold on to me and not to let go no matter what. My face was so cold but I was still putting up a fight, struggling through the snow. Ernie was barely moving, and then he started to cry. I told him to hang in there. We were both still moving, but then it became completely dark. I did not want to believe that we were lost, and that we just could not move anymore. The path was no longer a path for us, so we huddled together and shivered. I figured if we didn't move someone would come to our rescue, but no one came. I sat there with Ernie and started to pray. I was telling the Creator that I was too young to go. "Please, Creator, help me and

Ernie to get home.” I promised I would be a good boy, and I would listen to my aunt. Ernie just kept quiet. After I was finished I noticed this tiny little light in front of us. It looked foggy at first, but then the light got closer and closer. When it came close enough, I noticed that it was not a man but a little boy causing that light, but I could not see his face. He told us he would see that we found our way through the storm. He pointed us toward the village. Then the little boy told me to call out to Duke. So I yelled out his name real hard, “Duke.” I was answered by his bark. I told Ernie that Duke was coming, “Do you hear him?” He said no. “Do you see the little boy?” I asked. His answer was yes, and then he said he could hear Duke.

The little boy said we must wait for Duke then he must go. When Duke arrived at my side I was glad. Ernie was so glad himself that he started to pet Duke. Before I could thank the little boy he was gone. Ernie asked me, “Where did he go?” I told him I guess he had to go. Once again, I told Ernie that we must go. I grabbed Duke’s collar and I had Ernie hold on to me as we struggled through the snow and wind. Ernie and I continued the journey home. Duke kept pulling us toward the village, and as we got closer I could see some lights. I did not let go of Duke until I knew that we were really close to our village.

When we arrived in the village we headed toward the village centre. I tell you when we went in it felt so good. My hands, feet, and ears began to thaw out. Ernie was warming up too, but was shaking. We were not the only ones in the centre; there

were other people already there. Apparently they were in search of us. The people from the village asked where we were and how we wound up in the storm. I could not answer them, in fact I had my head down. I asked one of the other people to let Duke in and the person said that there was no dog around. I thought maybe Duke went on home. Later my aunt walked in the centre and she grabbed a hold of me. Ernie's mother and father grabbed him when they saw him also.

They asked if we were alright, and I said that I just wanted to go home. The police called off the search, and the community members all went home. When I arrived home with my aunt I filled my frozen belly with nice hot rabbit soup and scone. My other cousins were glad to see me, and the next thing you know I fell asleep on the couch.

The next morning I went outside to check on Duke, and there he was just wagging his tail. I went over to give him a hug. My aunt came outside, too, and started to take some clothes, which were all stiff like cardboard, off the line. She told me not to go very far. She asked me how was I able to get through the storm. It was impossible for anyone to see where they were going. I told her that it was the little boy who had shown me the way, and that the little boy had told me to call out for Duke so I did, and he came and led us to the village. My aunt did not ask anymore and became very quiet. I asked my aunt, "What's wrong?" There was no response; she was very quiet. Later she told me that the little boy I saw probably was the missing boy from the snowstorm many years

ago. I told my aunt that it must have been him who saved Ernie and me. My aunt told me that I should not mention this to anyone, that if I did I might upset the family. So I did what she wanted.

That evening when I had to go outside to the outhouse, I was not afraid. So when I heard the footsteps and Duke was not with me, I called to the spirit and I thanked him for saving our lives and for showing us the way home. To this day, I am no longer afraid and I do not get the willies anymore. I believe that noise at the outhouse was the spirit of the missing little boy, and he taught me not to be afraid anymore.

Verne Ross is from Cote First Nation. He is in his second year of a PHD Program at the University of Toronto Languages, Literacies, Education. He graduated from the Transitional Year Program in 2004, with Honours (Bachelor of Arts) from the University of Toronto. He holds a Master of Social Work in Diversity/Social Justice. Email: vernee.ross@alum.utoronto.ca