

Better That Way



Written by Rita Bouvier
Illustrated by Sherry Farrell Racette
Michif Translation by Margaret Hodgson

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The Gabriel Dumont Institute

2 - 604 22nd Street West

Saskatoon, SK S7M 5W1

www.gdins.org

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if you ever have the chance
to lick salt with cows, join them
otherwise, you will never make a friend.

kispin wihkac ta-kaskihtäyan
tanohkwätäman le sel asici la vache, wici nohkwätä
ahpo ci mohkatch ka-wiciwäkanihkan awiyak.





go swimming in a puddle
with all your clothes on;
for no reason, other than
that it feels good.

topakasimo ɗa labo
iyawis asici kitawinisa;
namakikwäy ithtamowin kihci
ta-miyo mahcihoyan poko
eyako miyömahcihowin.





use your little pinky
melt a hole on the frosted window
to see the pin point of your father
returning home from work;

apacihta ki-iskwëcihcis
tihkisa wäcis ka-iyîkwatik da l'shäsi
tawäpämët ki papa kapëcastamohtët
ë-pikiwët; ë-ponähtoskët;





run to him and when
he scoops you into the air
fly, just for that moment
he won't let go—I promise you.

nāci päha kipapa ekwa ispi
kikwāpahapitik ispi
pimiya, tipiya animēyiko kanakēs
namōya ka-kitiskinik, kitasotamātin.





hide from the adults all day
pretend you don't hear them;
when they ask where you were
say, *nowhere*.

käsöstäwik ayisiyniwak kapëkisik
ähki tapiskohc ka-ëpihtawacik
ëkwa kispin kika-kwëcimikwak tänihtë kitayan
ka-ititwän; namöya nänihtaw.





lie on the rooftop with your mother

pimisiñiy taħkohc l'kovarrhcırr asici ki mama





watching the moon and the stars
wondering how far away, is far;
it's zany

ë-kinawapämäyëk tipiskäw la lun ëkwa açähkosak
ë-mâmaskätamëhk tänimayikohk wahiyawiskamik, öma wahiyaw
pïtoch isi mämitonihtamëk – kïskwëmakan





go dancing in the park
 after a rain with all your friends
 with only your pajamas on;
 it's entertaining for the people
 caught inside their houses

tonimihitök nakëwinihk
 ka poni kimöwak asici kahkiyaw kitotëmak
 asici poko nipëwayän;
 mohcikihtawin ayisiniyak kitchi
 pihcäyihk wikowäwa





save all the earthworms you find
 on the sidewalk after a rain;
 return each and every one
 to the place they know best;
 you never know
 when you might need a helping hand.

māwacihik kähkiyaw mohtēwak
 ka-miskawēcik pimohtēwinihk ka-poni-kimowahk;
 kiwēhtahik kahkiyāw
 ēkoti wiyawāw piko ka-kēskihtahkwāw
 namōya wihkāc kakiskēyihitēn
 tānispīhk ayi ka-kwētīmān wicihowīwin.





bury all the dead birds in your path
find a special place for each of them
preferably in the garden;
you just never know

nahinik kahkiwäy piyësisak ka-nipicik miskanasihk
miska ita ka-miyowasik ta-nahinacik
nawac dan le gardin;
mohkac ayis kakiskihitën





it's okay, steal peanut butter
and bread from the pantry
while the nuns are sleeping;
there are worse crimes one can commit.

namöya nänitaw ayis ta-kimotëyan pëkan la buerre
ëkwa le pain oyäkanikamikohk ohci
mëkwatç les soeur ë-nipacik;
misawätç ihtakonwa maci kikkwäya taki-itötamän.





when your mother tells you
that she loves you to the moon
and back times infinity
try to out-do the immensity
of the love she describes to you;
there really is no end to it.

ispi ki mama ki-wihtamäk
ë-säkihis ësکو tipiskäw la lun
ëkwa ësکو ëka-ë-nistawë yihtakwa kïkwäy
käkwë paskiyäkëw kocihawin misäwin
öma säkihitowin ka-käkwë mämiskötamäs;
miwhkac tapönipäyëw öma itwëwin.





finally, believe what you say
or don't say anything at all;
it is better that way.

piyisk tapwëhta kíkway kawihhtëman
ahpo cî kawîya nanîtaw itwëw;
nawatch miyowäsin êkosi.





Rita Bouvier is a Métis educator born and raised in Ile à la Crosse, Saskatchewan who loves to write essays and poetry in her spare time. Her publications include two poetry books, *Blueberry Clouds* (nominated for First People's Publishing, *Saskatchewan Book Awards*) and *pâpiyâtak* (released by Thistle-down Press, and nominated for Book of the Year, 2004, *Saskatchewan Book Awards*), and a co-edited book entitled, *Resting Lightly on Mother Earth*, highlighting educational experiences of Aboriginal people in urban environments. Rita's poetry appears in literary anthologies and television productions, and has been adapted for *The Batoche Musical*, a collective work, and more recently for a musical in *Wa Wa Tey Wak—Northern Lights/Aurores boréales*, a contemporary Cree legend by Andrew Balfour. She holds B.Ed and M.Ed degrees from the University of Saskatchewan.



Sherry Farrell-Racette is one of the early builders of the Gabriel Dumont Institute (GDI). During her tenure with GDI – as an educator, author and illustrator – she left an enduring legacy of highly-acclaimed resources, including *The Flower Beadwork People*, *The Flags of the Métis*, several posters, and most recently, *Fiddle Dancer*, which was nominated for three *Saskatchewan Book Awards*. She has also illustrated Maria Campbell's *Stories of the Road Allowance People* and Freda Ahenakew's *Wisahkecahk Flies to the Moon*. She recently completed her doctorate in traditional Métis clothing and adornment through the University of Manitoba.



Margaret Hodgson, born in île-à-la Crosse, is a Michif speaker from Saskatoon in 1972. She went to University from 1987-91 and received a Bachelor of Education. Margaret moved to Hobema, Alberta, where she taught for three years. She has taught Cree at the University level for a few years.

Author Dedication and Acknowledgements

Thank you to Karon Shmon and the Gabriel Dumont Institute for the wonderful idea of transforming *papîyâhtak* into a children's book. I also want to say *merci* to Sherry Farrell-Racette for the beautiful artwork (*Wah Wah!*) and of course, my cousin, Margaret Hodgson (Gardiner) for the Michif translation. I acknowledge my cousins, my sisters in Cree kinship, Madeline Durocher, Vye Bouvier and Adelaide Bouvier for the first draft translation as they assisted me in capturing the essence of the original poem. I will remember the night of laughter forever. Thank you to David Morin for the design and layout, and Darren Préfontaine for the editing.

I wrote *papîyâhtak*, now transformed to *Better That Way*, for my son when he was about eight years old; however it quickly transformed into a poem for all our children. Although Matthew Joseph grew up as an only child, he has been taught to share, and to be generous of heart, mind and spirit. This poem was no exception. How do we tell our children we love them? How do we nourish their spirits for *miyo pimâtisiwin*—the sacred act of a good life? I remembered a long philosophical conversation one day with my mother, Annie, about passing on what we know to our children and why it was so important. The essence of what she said in Michif, my first language, was that passing on our knowledge and wisdom to our children was a sacred act of love. I also remembered my grandparents, Flora and Joseph, and the aunts and uncles who raised me. Their presence in my life was pervasive, and through simple and often joyful acts they showed me that they loved me by passing on important values. And so I dedicate this book to all children in the hope of keeping them safe in their journey for *miyo pimâtisiwin*.



Better That Way captures the essence of growing up in this wonderful poem, beautifully illustrated by Sherry Farrell Racette and translated in Michif by Margaret Hodgson. A narration CD in English and Michif is included.



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