

Photo by Catherine Orr for Emma Coon Come



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From our first footsteps on Mother Earth to the celebration of a life lived to its fullest, we celebrate these sacred rites of passage to carry on the important cycle of cultural transmission through the generations.

### Celebrating the Spirit of the Child

Birth can be seen as the passage from the Spirit World into this one; once we have chosen our parents, we may finally come into this world.

Before the child saw this world, the women (also known as water carriers due to their womb) kept their pregnancies secret to protect the purity of the new incoming spirit. Only a select few such as the *kuuhkumnouch* were aware of the child. While the mothers secretly prepared for the child's arrival, these *kuuhkumnouch* gave them guidance, advice and teachings.

Once the child had arrived into this world, its placenta was ceremoniously bundled up and placed on the highest tier of a tree. A feast was then organized in his/her honour during which the newborn child was presented to its relatives. During that first acquaintance, the relative would tell the child how they would support them throughout their lives.

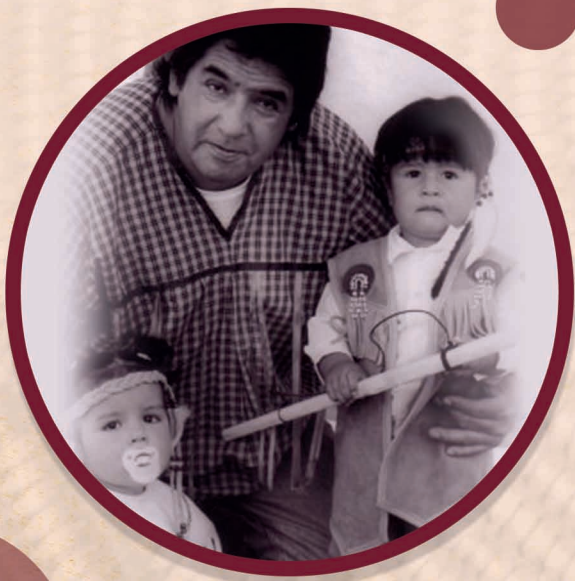


Photo by Amy Mark

### Children and the Land

Certain legends tell us of the importance of the **Walking Out Ceremony**. For example, there is the one that tells the story of the boy who could not hunt. Due to the fact that he had never done this rite of passage, the spirits of the animals could not see or recognize him. In return, the animals never offered themselves to him, leaving the hunter to return to his camp empty handed every time.

As the newborn child grew older, the mother made sure he/she did not touch the earth before their Walking Out Ceremony. Usually done in the spring —the season of renewal— this ceremony served as an introduction of the child to the spirits of the land, as well as, his/her future role and responsibilities.

The **First Snowshoe Walk**, in continuity with the Walking Out Ceremony, introduced them further to life on the land. This ceremony also served as a means of blessing them to better achieve their future endeavours, as well as, to teach them respect for the land and the order of things.



Photo by Jacko Otter

### Celebrating Accomplishments

Although their freedom was well respected, the children eventually had to learn more about their future role and responsibilities, either as hunters or camp keepers. While the girls often hunted small game, the boys were told to respect a certain order of things. One had to start by hunting small game before bringing back bigger game, thus showing their capacities as providers. As she/he grew older, the rites of passage also included the celebration of his/her **First Harvest**. An example of this is the first goose or *nuuschiminihuun* in *liiyiyuu-liyinuu* language.

Children, often around the age of ten, celebrated their kill which was often a goose. When this happened, the family held a feast to honour the little hunter and his/her first kill. The goose (or any kill) will then be cooked and shared with close and extended family. On occasion, they also rubbed the grease from that goose on a baby's forehead to share the good luck with the future hunter. In some cases, the stuffed head of that first kill was decorated and given to the child as a keepsake.

### Walking Into Adulthood

When the first signs of puberty were observed, young women and young men were guided more thoroughly into their roles.

The **First Moon Time** represented a young woman's passage into womanhood. Having her first period was a sign that she now has the ability to bear children. Moon Times also serve as a time for reflection and cleansing, as it is a moment when she can draw strength and energy from the nature surrounding her.



As for the men, once the sound of their **voice changing** started, they were brought onto the land and given teachings in regard to their role. In some cases, they were left on their own for a few days and expected to live off the land on their own or fast. A few days later, their father or grandfather would go check on them. If their experience was successful, the young men would share the story of their time alone in the bush.

In both cases, **puberty** as a rite of passage also consisted of a proper introduction to sexual health and the importance of respecting each other. In due time, **marriage** was another rite of passage to be celebrated. Such union is to be seen as sacred, as it represents the power of creating life and a proper balance between the water carrier and the fire keeper's role.