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## The Birth of Yaabaa Teeshaay

As Told by Ellen Demit



I goin' tell little story about tree.<sup>1</sup>  
Um, this is why we respect. . . .  
This is, I got talk with English.  
And we gotta respect our tree out there.  
Especial[ly] old tree, growing together,  
that said to be man and wife.  
And um, old Grandma,  
back days he have war  
and old. . . . Grandma,  
she was alone.  
She's too old to take care [of] herself.  
He<sup>2</sup> try best she can to take care of herself.  
But, he can't even go out, get his moose.  
Little animal thing he got,  
keep his life up.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ellen called this the story about the *Tsogh Boy*, that is, the Tree Boy. She surprised me with this story. It took a few minutes to realize that she was actually telling the story of the miraculous birth of *Yaabaa Teeshaay*. It was a very exciting revelation since his birth is generally unknown.

<sup>2</sup> Upper Tanana Athabascan languages, such as Tanacross, do not differentiate between masculine and feminine gender, and many elders in the Upper Tanana River Valley use gender-specific pronouns interchangeably in English.

<sup>3</sup> That is, she was able to hunt only small game to stay alive.

*The Adventures of Yaabaa Teeshaay*

In fall time, pitch dark.  
And she was alone and she had *ch'elaats'eyh*<sup>4</sup> house.  
And uh, he keep herself busy, best [as she] can.  
And one night, she's very lonely.  
And one night, she was real upset.  
She cried.  
Why have to be like that?  
Why all her son and daughter gets killed?  
And lot of tree out there.  
All sudden, Grandma listen [to] baby cry.  
Grandma don't know what to do.  
She kind [of] afraid.  
And he worry about baby cry.  
He got extra [blanket], put it on her shoulder.  
Pitch dark, he go this big tree,  
two together.  
Their roots had just connect[ed] together.  
That's had to be man and wife.  
Just like animal out there.  
Just like person.  
And all [of a] sudden, he hear baby cry,  
and he called that little boy *Ch' echenh xaghinshaay*<sup>5</sup>  
That's mean *Ch'echenh xaghinshaay*, that's means  
That's come out under two tree,<sup>6</sup>  
that baby.  
And Grandma, he go there.  
She's scared, but she just go there.  
Pitch dark.

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<sup>4</sup> Spruce bark.

<sup>5</sup> Literally, "the one who came out from [the base of] a tree."

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Eliade 1960:45 Other ancient stories sometimes denote human life as springing from tubers or roots.

And all of a sudden,  
kind of little bit bright,  
he see that baby.  
He just grab that baby.  
*Xeyh*<sup>7</sup> [fine spruce roots]  
That's come out from tree.  
He cut that one,<sup>8</sup>  
he rub with her clothes,  
and he bring back that little baby.  
He just worry about how he goin' feed.  
He try best he can for that. . . .  
That's little boy.  
He's so proud of that little boy.  
So he . . .  
Soup, anything on the land,  
he just feed that baby.  
Not even month, that baby start to walk around.  
Maybe three month time,  
full growing man and turn around, take care of his  
grandma.

This story, nobody know about it.  
That much that's secret story.<sup>9</sup>  
Just very off and off,<sup>10</sup>  
people talk about it.

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<sup>7</sup> The umbilical cord is *xeyh*, a fine spruce root.

<sup>8</sup> Probably the umbilical cord/tree root.

<sup>9</sup> It is a notable mark of these times that the thirteen indigenous grandmothers (and other indigenous people throughout the world) are freely sharing their most ancient and precious teachings with all of humanity in this particular time of human history.

<sup>10</sup> Every once in a while.