

1975

# Born Tying Knots

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FOUR POEMS BY SAMUEL MAKIDEMEWABE

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*These are translations of Canadian Swampy Cree personal name origins. They were told by Samuel Makidemewabe during a long apprenticeship period in which I also learned the specifics of the naming process as related to both these "earned" names and clan-affiliate names. I began the actual process of translation about 1968*

—Howard Norman

### Born Tying Knots / Samuel Makidemewabe

When he came out, into the world,  
the umbilical cord was around his toes.  
This didn't trouble us,  
that he was tying knots **THAT EARLY**.  
We untied it.

Later, he heard his birth  
story.  
It caused him to begin tying knots *again*.  
He tied things up near his home,  
**TIGHT**, as if everything might float away  
in a river.

This river came from  
a dream he had.

House things were tied up  
at night. Shirts, other clothes too,  
and a kettle. All those things  
were tied to his feet so they would not  
float away in the river he dreamed.  
You could walk in  
and see this.

Maybe the dream stopped  
because it was no longer comfortable  
to sleep with shirts tied to him.  
Or a kettle.

After the dream no longer came,  
he stopped tying things  
**EXCEPT** for the one night he tied up

a small fire.  
Tied up a small-stick fire!  
The fire got loose its own way.

## Sat in the Center / Samuel Makidemewabe

This boy went out in a snow blizzard  
to catch fish. He went out on the swamp ice  
and brought his ice chisel with him  
to dig a hole through it.  
He went singing.  
In summer we could hear that swamp  
sing all its birds and frogs together, BUT THIS WAS  
IN WINTER.  
He was the only one singing.

We heard him dig the ice hole  
in the distance, but we could not see  
this. It was a chewing sound  
his work made. After a while we got worried  
he fell in.  
Or that the snow snakes curled him  
away.

Worried we would never again  
see him bob up among the wood duck  
decoys, LAUGHING!  
In summer.

He stayed out on the ice  
until night. Then we saw his torch-stick fire  
moving toward us, in the dark,  
and he came BACK HOME to put the fish he caught  
on the fire.  
Our worrying did not stop there.  
He sat with us and watched the fish thaw  
and cook on the fire.

He sat with us  
in the center, shivering.  
THEN we heard his laughing thaw out  
too.  
That's when our worrying stopped.