

# THE BEAVERS' BIG HOUSE



By J.D. Panas & Olive Whitford  
Michif Translation by Norman Fleury

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J.D. Panas and Olive Whitford

# LII KASTORR LEU GROOS MAENZOON

J.D. Panas pi Olive Whitford aen kii ooshpayhahkiik



In the middle of a lush green forest all was quiet, except for the distant sounds of - munch, munch, crunch, crunch, snip, snip - the sound of two busy beavers building a big house.







"Timber," shouted Baptiste the Beaver with excitement. "One more tree for our dam!"





**“Baptiste, are we almost finished building?” sighed his young sister, Betsy. Betsy was ready to play.**

**“Betsy, the dam is almost done, but we still need to add onto our lodge,” reasoned Baptiste. “As beavers we have to work hard and always be prepared, because you never know, we might get company someday.”**







**"C-c-company," Betsy stammered, "our family is so big when we all get together – there's aunties, uncles, cousins, Kookums and Mooshoms! How will our house ever be big enough?"**





But before Baptiste could answer Betsy, Maurice the Moose emerged from the depths of the crystal clear pond, where he had been feasting on tender pond lilies, shoots and buds. Water cascaded down his majestic pronged antlers and long narrow face. Maurice greeted the beavers, "Tansi, my friends. Why are you working so hard on such a hot day?"

"We are completing our dam so we can continue to build onto our lodge," said Baptiste.

"Making it bigger and better!" Betsy remarked proudly.

"Did I hear you correctly? You're building onto your house?" Maurice asked with a puzzled grin. "Isn't it big enough already?"







Baptiste wiped the water from his furry brow and replied politely, "With respect, my friend, when I was young the Elders told me that beavers should build a big house, because you might get company someday."

"Yes, it is good to be prepared, but you must be expecting the whole forest to come," replied Maurice the Moose, shaking his head in disbelief as he submerged underwater.





Undeterred, Baptiste and Betsy began working once more, and were determined to finish their job by the end of the day. On and on they worked packing twigs, branches and mud into the wall of their dam. Bartholemew the Black Bear, who had been fishing downstream, lumbered along the shore to where Baptiste and Betsy were working. He waded into the cool stream and greeted the busy beavers. "Hello friends. Why are you working so hard on such a hot day?"

"We have to finish our dam," answered Baptiste, as he paddled up to Bartholemew.

"That dam stretches as far as I can see!" exclaimed Bartholemew. "Surely you will be able to rest soon!"

"Oh, no, then we must continue to build our lodge," said Baptiste.







**"Isn't it foolish to have such a large house for only two beavers?"  
Bartholemew grunted and grumbled as he lunged at a passing trout.**

**"You never know," said Baptiste, "we might get company someday."**

**"Wow!" snorted Bartholemew, "you must be expecting the entire forest to come!"**







Just then Scat and Kat, the Bobcat twins, burst through the bushes wrestling and rolling to the edge of the pond. Gazing up in amazement they cried out, "That beaver house is gigantic!" The little bobcats watched young Betsy the Beaver as she glided up to them. "Hey Betsy, come and play with us!" called Scat and Kat.





**“Oh yes, I would love to romp and play with you, my friends, but I promised to help my brother with our home. He has instructed me to work hard and always be prepared, because we might get company someday.”**

**“Perhaps you can play later?” Scat and Kat replied, as they tussled back into the woods.**

**“Yes, perhaps,” sighed Betsy.**







Finally, with the dam now finished Betsy and Baptiste were ready to begin building onto their lodge.

“Look Baptiste,” Betsy noticed, “it’s Flora the Fox.”

“My friends, my friends,” Flora purred as she took a drink from the pond. “How silly you are to be working so hard on such a hot day!” Flora laughed, as she wiped droplets of water from her long silky whiskers.

“You know, Flora,” said Baptiste, “when I was young the Elders taught me that a Beaver’s house should be big enough for his family.”

“It looks like you will have more than enough room!” she said sarcastically.

“You must be expecting all the animals in the forest to come!”

Baptiste replied once more, “Well, we might get company someday.”







Flora glanced slyly at Baptiste, turned and sauntered away, her large bushy tail swaying high in the air.





Hot and tired, Baptiste slapped his scaly paddle-shaped tail in the water. “Betsy, it’s time for a break.”

“Great idea!” Betsy cheered, as the two beavers scampered to the top of their home to rest and nibble on some poplar bark, their favorite food. As they admired their hard work and enjoyed the view of the pond, Betsy felt a slight breeze. Her fur bristled and her nose twitched, as she raised her head, sniffing the foul smelling air. “Brother, you are older and much wiser than I am, what is that strange smell?”

Baptiste dropped his lunch and checked the air. It was a bad smell, an evil smell. “I think,” he exclaimed in shock, “it’s smoke! The Elders warned me about fire! It is very dangerous!”





**“Baptiste, let’s investigatel!” and the beavers scrambled into the woods towards the smoke.**

**When they reached the trouble spot, Baptiste gasped, “It’s a smoldering fire-pit left by careless two-leggeds!”**

**“What shall we do?” shrieked Betsy. “One tiny flame could bring disaster to our tinder-dry forest!”**







**“We must work together! On the count of three, let’s swat it out with our tails!” instructed Baptiste. “Ready, one... two...” But before he could count to three, a gust of wind blew a tiny spark out of the pit. It moved quickly, igniting the tall dry grass.**

**“OH, NO!” Betsy cried. “Look how fast that little spark is growing, soon it will be a big fire!”**

**The wind grew stronger and blew harder, causing the flames to dance from weed to weed and from tree to tree, destroying everything in its grasp! “This fire is out of control!” shouted Baptiste. “We’ll never stop it by ourselves, we must tell the others!”**





**When they reached the pond, Baptiste leapt to the top of their house and gave a mighty smack with his tail, summoning the forest animals to come at once!**

**“What is all the excitement about?” asked the animals as they gathered.**

**“Listen everyone!” Baptiste spoke urgently. “Our worst enemy is on its way!”**

**“Who?” The animals shuddered.**

**“Fire!” A hush fell over everyone!**

**“We should run away!” squealed Flora the Fox.**

**“We should hide!” whispered Momma Bobcat.**

**“We should climb a tree!” growled Bartholemew the Black Bear.**







**"We should work together!" cried Betsy the Beaver.**

**The fire had grown angry and hostile, the animals were frantic!**

**"Don't panic!" shouted Baptiste. "It's always better when we work together!  
Maurice, use your antlers to clear a fire-break!"**







**“Right away, Baptiste.” Maurice the Moose began pawing at the ground and underbrush, scooping up great mounds of dirt with his spade-like antlers.**

**“Betsy and I will cut down trees to keep the fire from spreading from the tree tops. Bartholemew, you are the strongest, pile the fallen trees on the other side of Maurice’s fire-trap. Everyone work together and do what you can to fight the fire!”**





The wildfire hissed and sizzled as its fury grew, consuming everything in its path.  
Suffocating clouds of smoke choked the breath from the forest.  
Bumble Bee Bombers attacked the roaring flames from above, while the fish splashed, squirted and spit  
water from below. Everyone did their best, but the fire could not be stopped.







**Amidst the turmoil Momma Bobcat realized her kits were missing and darted into the fiery forest to search for her twins.  
The fire's scorching flames seared the animals' fur and smoke stung their eyes!**







**“Baptiste!” Bartholemew howled, “Sparks are landing everywhere! What should we do?”**

**“Use your powerful paws to stomp out those smoldering pieces of bark!” ordered Baptiste.**





**Momma Bobcat was back with her terrified twins.  
Scat and Kat, afraid of the smoke and fire, had been hiding in their den.**

**Baptiste called out to the bobcats, "We must work together!"**

**The wildcats' instincts kicked in and they pounced on the burning coals that were exploding from the monstrous fire! The ferocious demon roared, as angry flames licked out at the animal firefighters.**





"I'm scared!" cried Betsy. "This fire is too big for us!"







**Fear blazed in the eyes of the forest animals. It was hopeless!  
The inferno raged, belching out great billows of deadly smoke and ash.**





Searching frantically for a way to stop the fire, a thought came to Baptiste.  
"Follow me!" he shouted as they raced across their huge beaver dam.







Looking over her shoulder, Betsy could see the fire chasing them, gaining every second!  
“Whatever your plan is, Baptiste, there is no time to lose!”







The horrified animals huddled together!

**“We need to break the dam!” yelled Baptiste. “It’s our only chance to save our forest.” They all knew what was at stake.**





**Bartholemew the Black Bear growled as he pushed at the mud wall. Maurice the Moose bellowed as he backed up and charged the dam. The other animals, some big and some small, did their part too. They grunted and groaned, picked and poked, dug and scratched against the mighty wall.**

**“We’re taking too long!” Betsy screamed. “It’s not budging!”**

**“When I count to three we all move together!” Baptiste shouted. “It’s now or never!”**

**The animals positioned themselves against the beavers’ fortress.**

**“Ready, One... Two... Three... GO!”**

**With all their power and strength the animals worked as a team for one last heave against the massive foundation. The wall creaked and cracked, it was moving! Then with an earthshaking tremor, a thunderous whoosh and a loud hissing sound, waves of water flooded the forest floor!**







The raving monster spewed out blinding thick puffs of smoke!

“Stay low!” warned Baptiste. No one dared to breath!







Unable to see, Betsy rubbed her stinging eyes. "Do you hear that, Baptiste?"

"No, I don't hear a thing!"

"That's what I mean!" she whispered, "There's silence!"  
Baptiste murmured, "It worked!" Then he sang, "The fire is out!" The animals danced for joy.





However, when the smoke cleared the animals' victory soon faded.

"The forest ... it's ... it's gone!" coughed Baptiste.

The animals gazed around, the trees, the brush, the grass and the plants were burned.  
Nothing but charred remains was left.

Staring in disbelief, Flora the Fox wailed, "Our homes - where are we going to live?"

There was deep sorrow on Betsy's face as she surveyed the blackened landscape.  
"The fire took everything!"







Baptiste put his paw on his sister's shoulder to comfort her. "It is true, Betsy, some of our forest is gone for now, but realize it will grow back." He smiled as he looked away.





All the animals nodded their heads in agreement, they knew that the trees, the brush, the grass and the plants would grow back and their forest would soon be healthier and better than before.

Betsy sniffed. "Why are you smiling?"

Baptiste motioned to one home not destroyed by the fire - the Beavers' Big House! "I'm smiling because we remembered to always be prepared."







**Baptiste invited all the forest animals to stay in the big house.  
Then he asked, "What have we learned this day?"**

**One by one the animals answered:**

**"Finish your work before you play!" piped Scat and Kat the Bobcat twins.**

**"It's always better to work together!" blared Bartholemew the Black Bear.**

**"Always put out your campfires!" Maurice the Moose said very seriously.**

**"And always be prepared!" purred Flora the Fox.**

**Baptiste was pleased with his friends, who had learned so many valuable lessons on such a sad day.**





**"I realized something too!" said Betsy.**

**"What?" asked Baptiste.**

**"I think we did make our house just big enough!"**







And all the animals joined in the chant, "Because you never know when you might get company!"

That evening everyone gave thanks, for they knew all of the beavers' hard work meant that they would have a home while the forest renewed itself. They celebrated their survival and told stories far into the night.

**The End.**





### **Joanne Panas – Author and Illustrator**

Métis author and illustrator Joanne Panas is from Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. Her first children's book, *The Beavers' Big House* is a collaborative project she and her mother, Olive Whitford, have been working on for numerous years. Joanne is also an accomplished illustrator. She draws a regular cartoon for the Prince Albert *Rural Roots* newspaper entitled *The Farmers*, and recently illustrated Ken Carriere's *The Bulrush Helps the Pond*, which won a 2002 Saskatchewan Book Award in the *First Peoples' Publishing* category. Drawing has been a life-long passion for Joanne: "I can't remember a time when I did not draw. With loving encouragement from my Mom I never stopped illustrating". Joanne operates and instructs her own non-profit Tae Kwon-Do club, The Flying Dragon Academy of Tae Kwon-Do Inc. She and her husband Dennis also volunteer for the SaskTel Pioneers in and around Prince Albert.



### **Olive Whitford – Author**

Olive Whitford, a Métis Elder, comes from a long line of gifted storytellers who influenced her to record her family history and experiences and to write for children and adults. Recently, Olive began submitting stories of her childhood experiences and her memories of her grandfather to *Rural Roots*, a Prince Albert newspaper. As a result, she has received much positive feedback from the community, encouraging Olive to continue her writing. Olive lives on a farm, near Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, with her son Keith Magee.

### **Norman Fleury – Michif Translator**



Originally from St. Lazare, Manitoba, Norman Fleury is a gifted oral storyteller. Fluent in the Michif language, Norman has worked extremely hard in its promotion and preservation, including the production of language resources and an introductory Michif dictionary. Norman has been active with the Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF) since 1967 and is currently the MMF's Director of the Michif Language Program. Married with two children, Norman farms southwest of Virden, Manitoba in the small community of Woodnorth.



Joanne Panas' and Olive Whitford's first book,

*The Beavers' Big House*, is a full-colour illustrated children's book that tells the story of a forest fire and how two beavers – Baptiste and Betsy – rally the other forest animals to fight it. The book teaches children valuable lessons such as the need for cooperation and preparedness. *The Beavers' Big House* includes a Michif translation by Norman Fleury and a Compact Disc narration component in English and Michif.



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