

Whistle for Protection

Story by Jeanne Pelletier and interview by Maria Campbell

Maria Campbell (MC): Did you ever hear about *Roogaroos*?

Jeanne Pelletier (JC): Oh yeah...Shape-shifters...*Roogaroos*. At Lent, especially during Lent, that's when the *Roogaroos* were active. I remember we used to go, and dance at my aunt's house from seven to eleven, and everybody had to be home by twelve o'clock. Like, we were all teenagers. Everybody had to be home by twelve o'clock because the *Roogaroos* come out after twelve. And we danced on Sunday. It was not Lent on Sunday.

MC: So you could dance on Sunday?

JP: From seven o'clock in the evening to eleven at night.

MC: On Sunday night?

JC: Yeah, but we couldn't dance during the week. We couldn't eat sugar or something that we liked. We had to put it away for Lent. It was a Lenten thing to do for us. But Sunday nights, we danced a little bit.

MC: Well, how come there was no Lent on Sunday nights?

JP: I don't know...That's what we were told. So that's a time we had to do our dancing.

MC: Did you ever hear of anybody who saw a *Roogaroo*?

JP: Oh yeah. The last time my uncle came to visit us in Regina (he used to live in Calgary), and he was about eighty-something when he came. That's the last time I saw him, anyway, 'till he passed. He was telling us, and we were asking him about this *Roogaroo* he used to talk about. "Oh yeah," he said, "we were going to the dance, and the dance was held in the reserve someplace." And he said, "I was going with this guy," but he never said the name. He just said he was gonna go walking with him, and they had about a mile to go yet. And then this guy said, "Well, do you want me to give you a ride?" And then my uncle said, "Nah, you can't give me a ride. I don't want to ride. I'll walk." So he walked and this guy told him, "Okay, but if you hear anything, don't look back." So fine, my uncle just kept on going, and then he heard a noise, just like somebody getting choked. He didn't look back, and then he kept on. Said he was pretty close. He could see the light of the house where they were dancing. All of a sudden, this big dog passed him, and that was okay. He looked behind, he didn't see this man coming, his partner that he had gone to the dance with. When he got to the dance, there he was sitting.

MC: So the *Roogaroo* was...

JP: Yeah, he had changed into a dog. And there was another one that I asked my mom about not too long ago. My grandma used to tell us this, and it'd kind of scare us. I guess it's just one way of teaching us. When I come to think about all these things that was the way of their teachings. These men were going to, I don't know if it was Lent or not, but anyway they were going to the dance. And they had to go through a cemetery. They didn't have to go, but this one man wanted to take a shortcut. So one went on the other side and one went in-between, riding horseback, eh? And just as he was getting close to the end of the graveyard, he whipped this grave and said, "You, too, I'm inviting you to come dance." He was just kind of crazy, a crazy young man. So they went into the dance. They were dancing there, having a good time, and all of a sudden this guy comes in. Everybody knew he had died. He comes in, and he sat down. He just sat down, and it was almost midnight when he came in. And when they stopped to serve a lunch at midnight, he walked up to that guy that had whipped

the grave, and he told him, "Oh, I came and had a good time tonight. Now I want you to come to my place. You know where you invited me from."

So this guy, he was scared. And then he turned around. This dead man left. He walked out the door, and they didn't see him. And this guy, he was so scared he was shaking. He didn't know what to think. And then, all the people were saying, "Wasn't that that guy that died? You know, we just buried him not to long ago." They named the guy, but I don't, I don't remember the name, and even if I did, maybe some of his people are still living, you know.

But anyway, this young man that had invited this dead man, he went to the priest the next day. He was so scared, he went to see if the priest would help him. So anyway, he said, "I have to go to that grave on Saturday. I don't know what's gonna happen, but he invited me to go because I invited him." He told the priest all what he did. So the priest told him, "You have to go, and the only way you can go is to take a baby, a newborn baby. You go with that baby to that grave." 'Cause he was just lucky because his sister just had a baby that was actually a few weeks old. So he took this baby with him to the graveyard, and that man was there, the one he had invited. And he told him, "You're lucky. You brought this child, because if you didn't have this child, I'd do the same thing that you did to me."

MC: So he whipped his grave?

JP: Yeah. He would have whipped him good. And then that was all. This guy came back, and he was holding this baby. They just took the baby from him, and he fell over. He didn't die, he passed out. That's how frightened he was. Yeah, that's the kind of stories they used to tell us. I guess that meant respect that graveyard, you know, when you go? 'Cause we used to get silly, too.

MC: My grandmother used to, before we go to bed, she'd tell us about *Whiitigos*. Did you ever hear about *Whiitigos*?

JP: The *Whiitigo*? After he eats in the daytime, after he eats these people, they turn into *Paakuks*, and they fly around; flying skeletons. Yeah, my grandmother used to tell us this story. One winter she stayed at our place, eh. The one at the little cabins, and we used to bring my grandma some smokes. We used to go and give her one, and she used to sit there and tell us this story. And that's what she used to tell us, and we used to hear the train right at midnight. A sharp whistle in a nice calm night, in a moonlight night, and she used to send us home just before that whistle. Then she'd tell us this story, and then we'd be halfway from their house and halfway to our house. We'd be halfway home when this whistle would go off. And boy, we'd run because she said that they still hear the *Whiitigo* every so often. He made such a loud screechy whistle when he's hungry. And that's why on a windy night you can hear the skeletons, *Paakuks* flying around, and if they touch you, they'll eat you. And then you become one of them. Yeah, she used to tell us this story.

