

Coyote and the Salmon

as told by the ancestors of the Secwepemc and re-told by
Kenthen Thomas.

Illustrations by Pam Richards



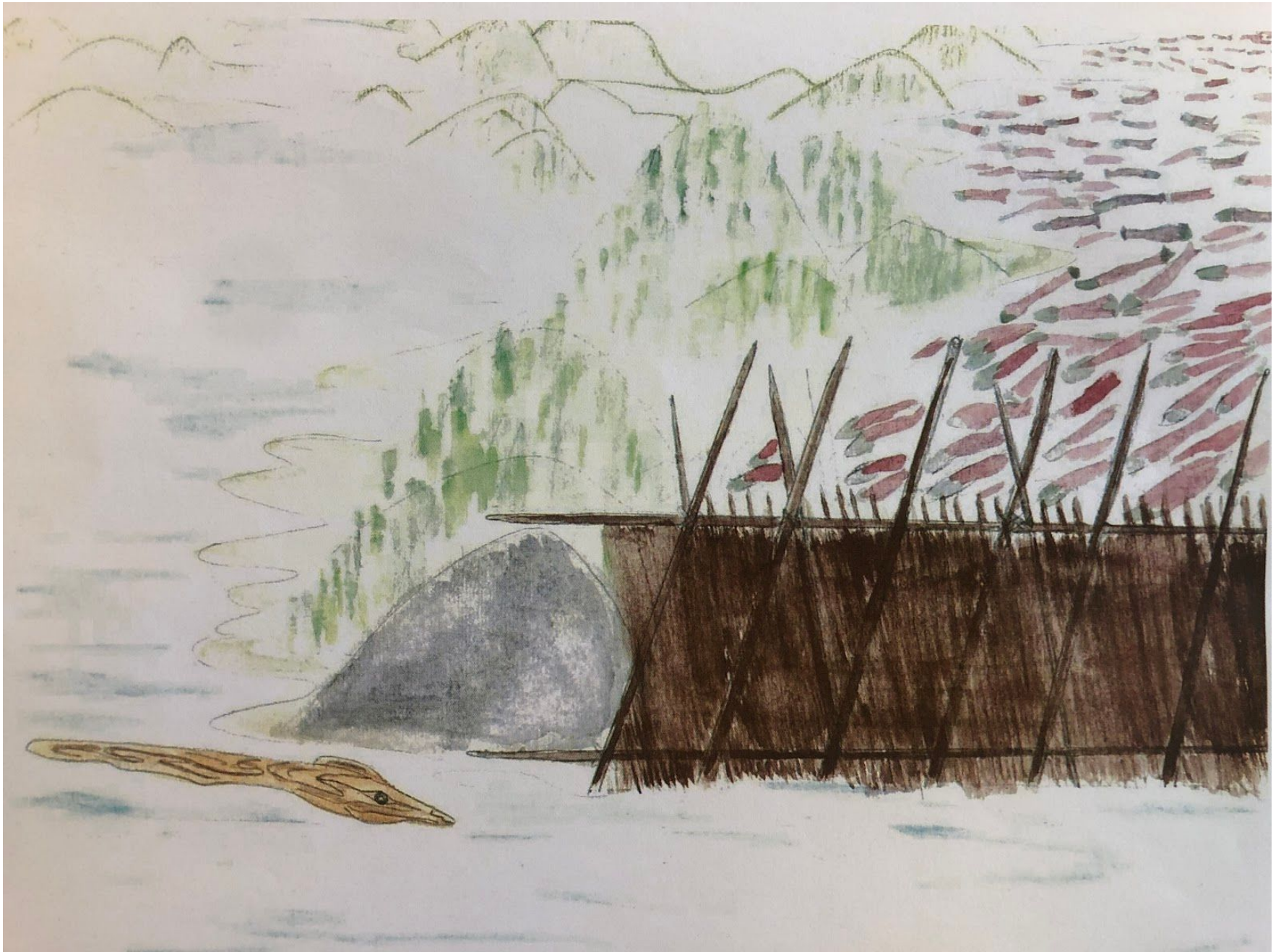
A long, long, long, time ago, **Sklep** (Coyote) saw that there was no food for him and the **qelmucw** (people). Coyote was very hungry and wondered how he could help find food? Coyote went to the river and asked, “why do the salmon not run up the river this way?” “if they did they would be able to feed everyone.”



He entered the river and as **Sklep** he could change or shapeshift into almost anything he could think of. He thought of many things to change himself into, such as a rock and he tried this but he sunk. He then thought of foam from the water but this did not work either. The one change that he stuck with was a piece of driftwood.



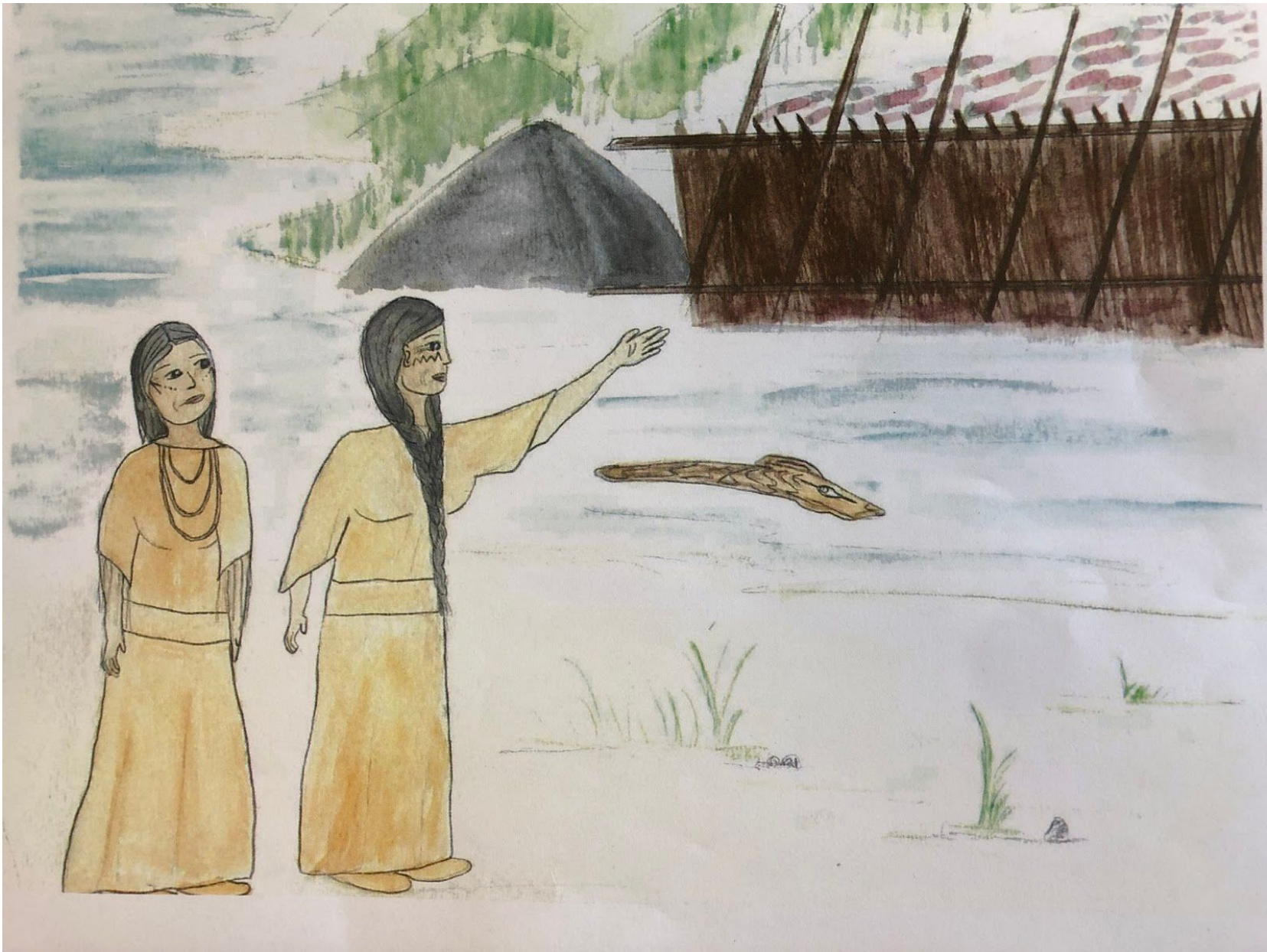
As driftwood he floated far down the Thompson River way past where Spences Bridge is now located. **Sklep** floated until he hit into a huge fish weir. On the other side of this fish weir was so many salmon that he could not count them all and the river was full of salmon as far as his eye could see. **Sklep** said to himself, “all this salmon could feed the people forever if I could find a way to free them.” Sklep used his best powers (Magic) to try and break the weir, he used all of his power and strength but he was unable to. He soon realized why.



He heard two sisters who were medicine women (doctors) coming towards him.

Their power was even greater than Coyote's. So he just remained in the river as driftwood. If the sisters realized it was him, Coyote, they would certainly kill him and make the fish weir really unbreakable.

The medicine women checked on their fishing weir and their salmon.



One of the sisters saw the piece of driftwood and took it back to their camp. They used **Sklep**, or the shapeshifted piece of driftwood, as an eating dish. Every time they tried to have a bite of their food it would disappear! **Sklep** disguised as the dish would eat their food on them.



So they tried to throw the driftwood into the fire, but before **Sklep** could be burned he shapeshifted once again. He changed from a driftwood into a baby and cried out loud! This surprised the sisters and they wondered where the baby came from at first. They picked him up and instantly fell in love with **Sklep** the baby. **Sklep** stayed for four nights and four days.



On the fourth day he changed himself back into **Sklep** early in the morning before the sisters woke up and went down to the fish weir. He used his own magic which was by now much more powerful than the sisters own magic and broke the weir. By the time the sisters arrived **Sklep** was on the other side of the river and the salmon were free to go up the river. The sisters considered killing **Sklep** for stealing the salmon and breaking the weir. However, they fell in love with him, in the four short days and nights and now considered **Sklep** family now. Thus, the sisters could not kill him. They also realized that he was going to feed the **Qelmucw** as well, which is a good thing.



Sklep led the salmon up the river and showed them where they could go to spawn for their cycle of lives for themselves and their future generations. He also told the **Qelmucw** that, “if we want the salmon to always return to feed us, we must look after one another in a good and kind way.” “If we do not, then the salmon will stop feeding us.” The elders of the Secwepemc and ancestors will also tell us that, “today, this is in our power, to look after one another.”



