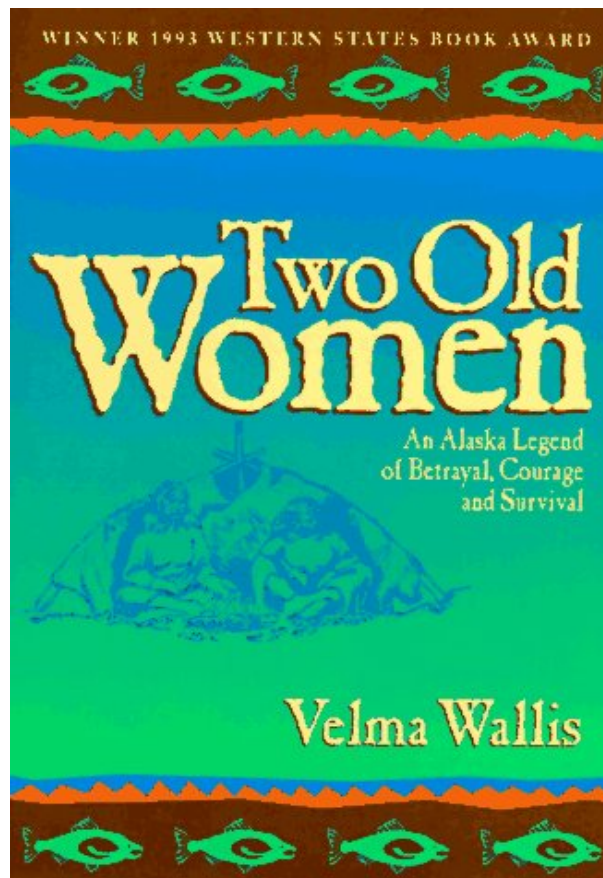
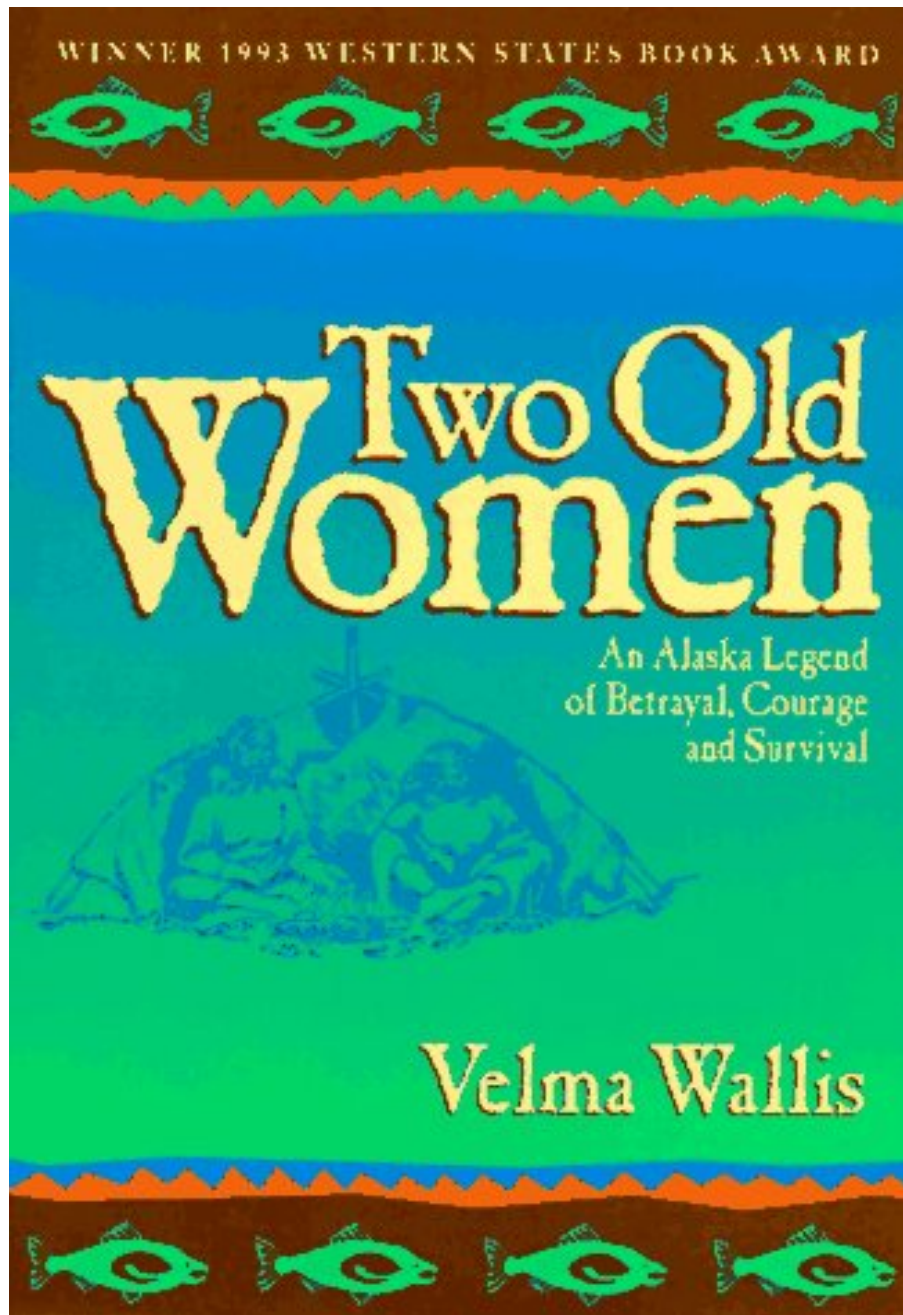


TWO OLD WOMEN: AN ALASKA LEGEND OF BETRAYAL, COURAGE, AND SURVIVAL BY VELMA WALLIS



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From Publishers Weekly

This novel of two Native American women abandoned by their tribe in the Alaskan Yukon won the 1993 Western State Book award.

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From School Library Journal

Grade 7 Up-Velma Wallis adapted her prize-winning book (HarperPerennial, 1993) from a tale she first heard from her mother, an Athabascan Indian in the Alaskan Yukon. Its transition into audio format is impressive: taken from oral tradition, it's tellable and starkly poetic, while the deep rich voice of narrator Russell Means with his Native American inflections does much to enhance its power and authenticity. The story is compelling. Abandoned by their tribe during a brutal winter famine, two old women are left to perish on their own. Although they've grown used to complaining and letting others do for them, the two resolve not to wait passively for death but to fight against it. With trapping skills they haven't used for years and strengthened by their bond of friendship, the two women survive the winter to ultimately come face to face with the members of their tribe, none of whom has fared as well as they. Utterly convincing in its details and resolution, this will offer listeners in seventh grade and up vivid insight into a Native American culture. At the same time, it rises above the particulars of time and place to become a metaphor with a message or inspiration not only for students, women or the elderly, but for all members of the human race.

Carol Katz, Harrison Public Library, NY

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From Booklist

Growing up Gwich'in (one of the 11 distinct ethnic peoples of Alaska) in Fort Yukon, closer to the Arctic Circle than Fairbanks, Wallis had been hearing all her life the legend of the two old women abandoned to die by their starving tribe. Their own children abetted the cruel (not, incidentally, just to Western civilization) tribal decision. Wallis' rendition in serviceable prose of this culturally famous story is somewhere between translation and what is sometimes called re-creation. The tale (which has a happy ending) deserves a place in every regional collection but has a greater appeal, too. Roland Wulbert

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An Athabascan Indian of Alaska's Yukon flats, author Velma Wallis retells a classic legend wherein two old women are abandoned by their tribe during a brutal winter famine and must survive on their own or die trying. A wise and simple story now in paperback. Winner of a 1993 Western State Book Award.

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Growing up Gwich'in (one of the 11 distinct ethnic peoples of Alaska) in Fort Yukon, closer to the Arctic

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Most helpful customer reviews

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

Life Affirming

By Lynne Spreen

I loved this book. I can't wait to give it to my 88-year-old mother to read. It's such an affirmation of the dignity and wisdom of older age. My review may spoil the story for you so proceed cautiously from here.

Two Old Women is based on an Athabascan Indian legend. A starving tribe of Alaskan natives leaves two old women alone in the freezing cold to die, because every mouthful of food is precious, and these two are unhelpful. They don't contribute to the tribe; they take from it. People have to help them. They complain constantly.

Once the tribe leaves them, though, they must decide whether to accept the death sentence or not. The younger woman, 75, says we might die anyway, but if that is so, let's at least die trying to live. So they adopt that motto. At least let's die trying. They manage to avert death by recalling long-unused knowledge of survival skills. In spite of their old, achy bodies, they thrive and bond with each other, but they are lonely and sad.

Eventually, there's a happy ending, which I'll let you discover for yourself. If you're like me, you'll reread it, crying with joy each time.

But the message of this book is multi-faceted. Elders can and should continue to contribute until the end. Youth should respect the elders for their valuable knowledge. All people benefit from this synergy.

Two Old Women is a short book. I read it in one evening. I heartily recommend it, particularly to those who are older and feeling ignored, useless, or confused. This book will get you up and moving, and it will make you happy.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

This is a wonderful book for thoughtful discussions on peaceful so-existence

By CrzGzr

I love this story. It is a wonderful lesson for everyone. In every conflict there is more than one person. The community in the book lives on in harsh conditions and everyone has to be in harmony for everyone to survive. When the animosity between two women becomes too disruptive, they are given a punishment and to survive they need to come together. One woman is the obvious villain but the other has to learn to accept her role in the conflict. On the surface, she appears innocent but after careful consideration, her flaws emerge. She never once tried to defuse the situation or help the other woman. This is a wonderful book for discussion.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Beautiful!

By lanahi

It's a stirring old Athabascan Indian tale. In the midst of a famine, the tribe regretfully decides they must

leave behind those who are a burden for the tribe so that the tribe as a whole can be saved. Two old women are forced to remain behind while the tribe moves to hopefully better hunting grounds. They know this is a virtual death sentence for the two women, but they feel they have no choice or they will all die.

It is not a political book but mirrors what happens with welfare as opposed to those who take responsibility for themselves and learn the self-esteem that comes as a result. These two old women were content to let others care for them and acted helpless while constantly complaining about their comfort levels, so the tribe came to believe that they were indeed a burden to the tribe that they could no longer support.

The two old women, after their initial shock, decided they would not just passively wait to die but to do what they could to survive. They learned new survival skills and honed long-disused skills to keep themselves alive, and in the process, they learned self-esteem and independence, one day at a time.

When the tribe came back in the spring, sadly expecting to find them dead, they were awed and thrilled to find the two old women proudly waiting for them, alive and in better shape than the rest of the tribe. They earned new respect, both from the tribe and for themselves, and a permanent sense of independence.

The story is very touching and profound at a very simple level...one of my favorite books. I've bought several copies to give away as gifts. It's a testament to the human spirit and what it can do. No one knows if it is a true story or not, but the spiritual truths are obvious.

The author states: "Within each individual on this large and complicated world, there lives an astounding potential greatness." The book demonstrates this truth beautifully. Thanks, Velma!

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