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Howard Luke

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Series: Howard Luke Remembers

Bill Schneider asked Howard Luke about talking about early days in Nenana. Luke said he didn't get any schooling. He lost his father when he was very young so his mother was the one who raised him. He said younger people should pay attention to your elders. He said we are having a hard time now because we are going against nature. Every time he started to say something his mother would tell him to listen and then speak. It taught him a lesson. His uncle would tell him the same thing. His chief used to travel every month around and see the older people. The chief would distribute groceries. If someone got a moose they would give the best part to the older people. He said Sam wasn't told this. One time Luke was out hunting and called a moose. He heard a boat stop and went back to his home and found that someone had left him groceries. He taught Sam this. He believes the young need to listen to their elders.

His chief used to go around to see the elders once a month and check on them. The chief would collect groceries and distribute them to the elders. He said this information was given to them in their native tongue. He believes they are having a hard time Outside because they are going against nature. He wants the young people to take over. People didn't used to dump stuff in their water. They showed respect. He saw depression when he was a child. Everything disappeared. He has been thinking about what the chiefs said. He talked about the president [Harding] coming to Alaska. His chief was the first one to speak. He talked in his native tongue. When he was finished the president asked him to speak to his people for him. When the president was finished he asked if they understood him. The chief said he had to use words that the people would understand. Luke said that is still a problem with communication. Luke said he has a problem with his chief now because he uses all the high words. He wants him to talk plainly.

Luke said he goes to the school every Friday to talk to the students. Luke is worried that the students aren't being told information about survival. He said it should be the responsibility of the parents to pass on this information. Luke is asked to do it, but he said it is their responsibility. His mother didn't speak English and he helped her. He talked about problems with global warming and said it is our fault. He talked about showing proper respect for the animal after it is harvested. He is worried that the Game Commission is taking away their livelihood. He said he has been criticized for helping white people, but he thinks we all need to work together. He was taught to do things by his boss. His elders taught him to do things.

His mother told him before she passed away that he would travel and talk to people that didn't understand their language. His mother listened to her mother who was a strong medicine woman. In Nenana they had a big flood. The ice was jamming up and caused the flood. They had a cache above the ground. His grandmother was sleeping there. He woke her up and she said the ice is coming toward them. His grandmother got the ice to stop. That was how strong a medicine woman she was. He said people are having a hard time now because they aren't paying attention.

Sara asked him what were some of the things that happened to him when he was growing up that taught him to be a leader. Howard said you have to pay attention. That is what he was told. He said they had to help each other. If you didn't know how to do something you asked your close relative.

Bill asked him if he was talking about Chief Thomas when he said the old chief. Luke said yes. Bill asked him what else Chief Thomas told President Harding. Luke said he talked about their Native tongue. Bill said there was an issue about the cemetery. Luke said in those days they used to have third chief, second chief and first chief. The second chief goes around to all the villages and talks to people and then reports to the chief. They don't have that any more. Luke said he went to talk to Byron Mallot. He wanted to tell him that people need to pay attention. Luke believes that more of the white people are spoiling his people. Bill asked him why his parents moved to their camp. Luke said they followed the animals. They made a road up from Nenana. People got paid to build the road. He talked about CC camp. Sara asked him if he was born at Linder Lake. Luke said yes. He talked about seeing something he thought was a horse. His mother put him outside to make him tough in the cold weather. At that time they had three dogs to pull the sled. His stepfather would pack him on his back. They came out into an open area and Luke said there were three horses. They were actually moose and they put him down into the snow and started shooting. He used to go down to Minto to see his uncle. He used to walk in snowshoes with his dogs. It would take him two days to get there. His uncle used to tell him stories. His uncle started to tell him a story and Luke said he had heard that story yesterday. His uncle told him to put that story in his head. He told a story about the owl and the wolf.

Luke said in order to be a chief you have to know two ways. He said they have to know the white ways. Bill asked him if he wanted to talk about some of the old timers. Luke said John Silas was the second chief. Sookum John was the first chief. They did the same thing. They would go around to the villages. He remembers when there was a diphtheria epidemic. Whole families would be affected. One man had a team of horses. He was making the coffins. He would drop off a coffin at each home. One of the Native ladies was upset with him for doing this. His mother figured something right because they all survived. He remembers three boys drowning in Minto and how they were found together.

Luke said he tries to tell the young hunters not to throw anything away. If he had blood on his shoes his mother would get upset with him. He talked about leaving water in your boots to keep your feet warm. He tries to share this information with the kids in school. He said they have to look after each other and now that is not happening. He said people will just look at him when he greets them.

Bill asked Luke if there were employment opportunities for Native people on the railroad. Luke said yes. His stepdad used to work on the railroad. He said his father used to get a lot of supplies like flour when

he worked for the railroad. A lot of those jobs are gone now because they are now done by machines. He believes that the computer is taking away livelihood. He thinks when you do things by hand you feel good. He commented about the coming presidential election and political parties trying to outsmart each other.

Sarah asked about the mission in Nenana. Luke said he was happy that he did it. He knew both sides. It didn't affect him to go the white way. He left for the mission when he was about twelve years old. His mother sent him to the mission. He talked about the food that he had at the mission. They had a storeroom for the food at the mission. He wanted to leave the mission. His mother wanted him to stay. He went up to Fairbanks. He worked at the library. He took care of the garden around the library. He then went to work for a contractor and then worked for the railroad. He said he was lucky to have paid attention when he was young.