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Old and young leaders talk about the changing lifestyle in Alaska

Moses Wassillie, moderator

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Moses Wassillie asked with all the changes coming about for Alaska's original people was there a growing gap between the old and the young Alaska Natives? Joe Williams, Sr., of Allakaket and Peter John of Minto are elders with strong views. Joe Williams said back in those days people would only think about what they had to do. The new generation doesn't know anything. They don't have anything to do with the young folks. Peter John said he is seventy four years old. The first time he worked for wages was in 1915. He worked on the steamboats. He was making two and a half dollars a day or 75 dollars a month. He worked fourteen hours a day. He went to school through the second grade. He learned things by himself. Joe Williams said young people have too much money on their mind. They think the only way to solve problems is through money. They have to go back a long ways to understand what is troubling the Native people. Old people never talk about having to owe the bank. They aren't starving either. He feels there is going to be a depression someday and that's when they are going to find out what is going to happen.

Song by Rita Coolidge

Moses Wassillie said Glenn Fredericks of Sleetmute is a young Native leader who has been involved with Chulista Corporation and thinks the old and young leaders can work together. Glenn Fredericks said he has been involved in the land claims since it began. He doesn't think there is a clash between the generations, but there is some problem. When they began selecting land they recommended that the older people should be involved because they know the land. He said people like Cygnus Sikar and Moxey Pete have been here for sixty years and knows this place. They always get advice from them. There will always be lack of understanding or communication because people leave and then return to the village. It is hard for them to understand a new way of living. Now there is hardly time to hunt. Fredericks said he has been working for three years and not able to take time off for hunting like he used to. He said they have to be educated in the way the white man lives or they will be left behind.

Amazing grace Glenn Campbell

Moses Wassillie said John Sackett has undertaken a lot of responsibility in Native affairs. He has a good background in higher education. John Sackett said he spent a year in Athens, Ohio at the university studying business administration. He then attended the University of Alaska. He attended school and became involved with Native politics. He graduated from college in 1971 with a degree in administration and accounting. He was involved with the Fairbanks Native Association and Tanana Chiefs during his first year in college in Alaska. When he ran for the House he was not able to attend school for the entire year. Moses Wassillie said they asked him about urban versus rural life and why he became involved in

Alaskan politics. Sackett said it was obvious that basic needs were not being met. It was a time of awakening for Native people in the 1960s. They had a right to be involved in their own lives. Up to that time other people were making decisions for Native people in many facets. There was a movement in the regional areas. The final culmination was the claims act. He said he faced the same experiences everyone else did coming from a very isolated place and coming into a totally different world. There were new concepts that he had never been in contact with before. He was fortunate to start early in this transition. He finally became adjusted over a long period of time. He said his happiest element is a combination of the two. He enjoys being in a rural setting and he enjoys the city setting. He thinks he may return to Galena which has a mixture of the rural life and the modern. He doesn't think he would be thoroughly satisfied with just one way of life. He said you have to keep your ties with the villages otherwise you lose your perspective and your feeling for the communities, the people and the land. He feels they are all transition people. If you look at politicians and leaders in the Native movement you will find there are various phases. There were phases in the land claims. There was an initial identification of the problem. Then there was the phase of people who worked on the solution to resolve the claims act. Then there are the implementers of the act. And then the development people will come. He sees himself simply as a phase.

The following is a portion of a speech by Morris Thompson recorded at the Alaska Federation of Natives convention in 1974. Morris Thompson talked about Alaska Native's land base. He said as they move to manage land it is a whole new concept in the Indian community. They are no longer beneficial users but now owners and controllers. They no longer have the luxury of using the land for subsistence purposes only. They must now manage the land, trade in it, and protect it because there are many encroachments on the land. Land is a very valuable commodity in a free economic system. There are going to be a lot of pressures put on the regional people to lease, sell or buy land. One of the things that they must remember in management of land is the key that land and your culture are intertwined. If you do away with the land base you will do away with the Alaska Native. It has happened in the lower forty-eight states and it can happen here. His message here or words of wisdom is that learn lessons from the states. Don't dissipate the land base. Don't lease it out to large corporate entities and don't lose it. If you lose the land you lose you and the future of the people. They are dealing with some heady terms in the 1970s and dealing with heady issues ahead. One of the things that he has always been impressed with is the Alaska Native people and the Alaska Native leadership. They are champions. Your leaders deserve your respect. The leaders are proud people. He said to remember who you are, be proud of what you are and stand tall.