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Joe Want

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Joe Want talked about being born in Palmer, Alaska in 1943. His grandparents had moved to the valley in 1922. His mother was born in Juneau in 1921. His grandfather had worked at Buffalo Mine as a blacksmith. His mother and uncle had been raised in a house between Buffalo Mine and Premier Mine. His mother attended school at Premier Mine in a one room cabin schoolhouse long before the settlers came to Palmer. They were serviced by the railroad. He remembers his grandfather's house with guns hanging from the rafters and his uncle shooting a sheep up Moose Creek. They didn't have electricity and used Coleman lanterns. Want was asked what kids did for entertainment in Palmer in the 1940s. Want said they had rock fights, but no one got hurt. They played kick the ball. He bought a 22 rifle when he was 11-12 years old. All of his toy guns were taken away from him at this time. He would camp out when he was in 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Their community was considered safe. He talked about hitchhiking to Eska when he was in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. At this time he became very interested in hunting. Their family had a cabin where he would go on the weekends for hunting. In 1958 he started working for Marlin Grasser. He would take horses from Chickaloon to the guide camp. They were out for 45 days. The following spring he quit school. It was about seventy miles up to their camp. He never remembers seeing a wolf or bear. The hunters got moose and caribou. He said people from Eska Mine would take a hunting trip behind Eureka. Marlin Grasser started guiding in the 1950s. He talked about breaking horses. He then worked for Tollefson at Olga Bay. He talked with Bob Burkholder who worked for the Fish and Wildlife Service about wildlife management. He talked with R.L. Rausch, too. He spent time talking with Dick Hensel and Will Troyer. At that time everyone would talk together and it didn't matter who you were. He said Hensel and Troyer were excellent and it was good to listen to them. There was a lot of interaction between the guiding industry and biologists. They collected specimens for the biologists such as tapeworms. He talked about researchers at Karluk Lake. This was at a time when the federal government was in charge of management. When the state government took over Sterling Miller was one of the first biologists in the area. Want was in military service from 1960-64. The first Fish and Game office was in the old jail house. There was a lot of cooperation between the state and federal agencies. He went to Kodiak in February of 1959 and joined the Marine Corps in 1960. He was able to take leaves from the military and came back to Alaska to work as an assistant guide. He took his guiding exam when he got out of the service and went back to Kodiak to work. He said he was treated well when he worked in guiding. The Tollefsons had been guiding since the 1940s. Want said he knew he wanted to be a big game guide. He remembers as a young boy asking what it took to be a hunting guide. He talked about joining the military when he was seventeen and why he chose to become a Marine. He was based in Barstow, California. He was a marksmanship instructor. He said the Marines gave him discipline and taught him to persevere.

Want was asked about his experiences on Kodiak. During the first winter he was in Kodiak he trapped. He gained an appreciation of the environment. He was trapping otter. He worked at Kodiak for two seasons. He talked about running into a bear on the trail in 1964. The bear took him by the arm and bit him. He was about a mile or so from camp. He was bandaged up and later went to town. He then hunted seals and hunted sheep up the Chugach. He hunted seals 1965-1967. He came to Fairbanks and attended school for a year. He met his wife at the university. They have been married for fifty years and have three children. In 1970 they decided to start a guide business. He chose the Sheenjek to work. He hunted bear in the spring and saw sheep. He guided up there for thirty years. He had hunted sheep in the Chugach for Jack Lee in 1965-66. Want said he hunted in the Brooks Range for two years and in 1965 he went to the Chugach. Looking back he realizes how much he didn't know.

He stayed in Fairbanks. They started their guiding business in 1971 and started taking out hunters in 1972. He did other work in the winter. He talked about his family adjusting to him after he returned from trips. He went up to the Brooks Range in the spring of 1972 and the fall of 1972. In 1973 they flew horses up to Arctic Village. They flew the horses up again in 1974, but it cost more because of the pipeline. In 1976 he took the horses in from the Haul Road. In 1978 he started taking them in from the Ribdon River because it was shorter. He continued to haul horses and mules into the 1990s. He walked in from the Chandalar Shelf one year. It had a lot of tussocks. It took him about 18 days to get in. The clients would fly into camp. His wife and children would fly in. In the fall he would go down to Kodiak until early December. His relationship with the Fish and Game Department started with Tony Smith and Wayne Heimer because of sheep. When he first wanted to take the horses up the Haul Road he wrote a letter to Alyeska to ask permission to use the road. He was told no by letter and in person unless he had a contract. Want went to Tony Smith and told him they needed sheep counts from the Sheenjek and asked for a state contract. Dick Bishop agreed to the idea. He was able to get a pass. He wrote up a report for the Fish and Game. He also did sheep counts in Denali Park and the Alaska Range with Tony Smith. They would drive through the park and do composition counts. Want talked about his relationship with Tony Smith and Wayne Heimer. He said he has worked with quality people in the department and the Fish and Wildlife Service. He talked about working with Dan Reid and others. Want was asked about other jobs he had with Fish and Game. Want said he skinned wolves and did survey work with Harry Reynolds. On Kodiak he worked with the Fish and Wildlife Service. He worked with Vic Barnes and Roger Smith who was with the state. He weighed bears. The bears were hunter kills. He hunted in the spring and fall on Kodiak. He would start out for the Sheenjek in mid to late July. He was asked about his most memorable hunts. Want said he had a couple of outstanding hunters. One hunter from France knew a lot about wildlife. Want said a lot of the European hunters knew a lot about wildlife. He had a lot of hunters who were good to be with. He talked about the attitude of hunters when the hunt wasn't successful. He said their hunts were ten to twelve days long. In the early 1900s hunts were 30-40 days long and the late 1800s the hunts were six to eight months long. He thought the amount of effort people have to put out has changed. He said if people got something on the first day they wanted to leave. They hunted sheep and moose in the Brooks Range. They might also take caribou. He usually didn't have assistants with him. He guided until 2003-2004. He talked about using horses and mules. He did recreational trapping around Fairbanks. He trapped wolves. He said trapping was different depending on the species. He talked about the differences between sheep and goat hunting.

Want was asked about using computers. Want said he first used an Atari and talked about his experiences with it. He gradually became more capable on programs with help from Fish and Game.

Want talked about the historical aspect of information. He said having the public educated has an important influence. A lot of the issues aren't new. He said there is a tendency for biologists to overlook information from other areas. There's a tendency to compartmentalize. He talked about the perception that hunting can't be taught. He said it didn't make sense, you can provide tools for people to learn. He put together a one unit course for sheep and brown bear hunting at the university. They developed a system to explain basic principles. Want talked about weighing bears. He said the hide is about ten percent of the weight of male bears.

One of the interviewers asked him about the drainage named after him in the Brooks Range. Want talked about having one of the smallest units named after him - Joe Want Creek.

Want was asked about the vision for the future of the Fish and Game Department. Want said everything is going in a positive direction. He thinks the changes being done are good. He thinks field time is important and thought the technology aspect is fantastic, but field observations are important. He thinks the people he has worked with have been fantastic. He talked about evolving philosophies such as the attitude about predators. He would like to see a more positive attitude about the good things that are being done by Fish and Game. He said the department should be claiming credits for the positive changes.

Want talked about the time he built an airplane when he was five years old. He went down to the Palmer creamery and picked up a barrel. He spent a lot of time thinking about making it work. He spoke about his ethnicity. His grandfather was German and his grandmother was French. He was able to speak French when he was little and taught himself French when he was older. He said he enjoyed learning things. He is happy with the life he has led. It makes him sad to hear people having regrets about what they didn't do.