

**Summary for H87-82-18**

**Sally Woods Hudson is interviewed by Gayle Maloy in Fairbanks, Alaska on 3/29/85**

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Gayle Maloy interviews Sally Woods Hudson in Fairbanks, AK on 3/29/85. Hudson was born April 14, 1916 in Rampart, AK. She is half Athabaskan and is known for her excellent skin sewing, among other things. She'll be 69 next month.

Rampart was called Rampart at the time she lived there, but before it got that name, its Athabaskan name was G'eleth hadi detonteh (approx.), "where the tanned skin is hanging." If you saw the cliffs there, you'd know what that means—it refers to an old legend.

Her mother was Athabaskan and her father came from Boston, MA; his mother was from Belgium. Hudson says the native people in the Rampart area go back 25,000 years according to the University; that's before the Eskimos arrived. Her father was named Alfred Woods, and he came up with his father and brother during the gold rush days. He was 21 at the time. They left their mother and sisters at home. Eventually, after they didn't strike it rich, the brother and father returned to the East coast. Alfred had already married, and children were coming along.

Hudson's mother's maiden name was Annie Pitka. There were 7 children in the family; only 3 are left now. Hudson was the fifth child, born in 1916.

There was a one-room school up on the hill at Rampart. There was one teacher for all the students, maybe 30 or 40. Rampart was a mining, fishing, and trapping town. Her father fished and trapped. He never took any of the family out to Boston. Hudson never met any of his family until 1952. They'd had contact all those years, but never met.

Hudson says her family wasn't big compared with other families. It was just medium sized. Kids helped out from the very beginning. They automatically learned to do what needed to be done, like fixing the fire, etc.

Hudson spent most of her childhood days with her grandmother. She's not sure when exactly she started living with her. At that time, some of the older people would take in grandchildren when their children moved out. Her grandmother was a widow. She took in a male cousin of Hudson's as well. Hudson says she understands that she would've been lonely without them. Her grandmother was the most important person in her life at that time. Her name was Lily Pitka, a beautiful lady, and the most influential in Hudson's life.

Women fished and trapped, too, and there was no money coming in. They traded furs and fish for groceries. In the early 1930s, older people would get \$20/month from BIA, Hudson believes. At that time, that was a lot of money. Fifty pounds of sugar cost \$3; and 50 pounds of flour cost \$3, too.

Hudson is very well known for her exquisite skin sewing. Way back, everyone did that kind of work, she says, because you needed warm clothing. The mode of travel was dog team, and there wasn't anything you could buy that was as warm as skin clothing. Growing up they used caribou and moose sinew (from the back of the animal). They did have needles (metal I assume).

There were always things to do, that even having a man around still needed to be done, like bring water in, bring wood in, and cook food for the dogs. There was more emphasis on these life skills than on book learning. Survival tools such as preparation and preserving—to keep fish and meats (drying) and berries were the most important things to learn. Meat and berries were the mainstays of their diet.

Hudson's grandmother was a great storyteller. She says for people at that time, from late fall until January was "story time." These tales were history stories, not present-day stories. Many short stories told were morality stories (i.e., why to do things a certain way); others described history or whom you were related to.

Every day in the evening was the time to listen to these stories. You never interrupted the storyteller, but after they were through, you could ask questions. About 2 days later, you'd be expected to be able to recite the story back—it must be retold correctly, precisely the way it was told to you.

Some of the stories went on for days, and others were shorter. Hudson says it's so different today—there are so many questions that the storyteller gets sidetracked from the story.

In 1925, the first flu epidemic hit Rampart. Hudson was the only one in her family that didn't get the flu. She still remembers holding a kerosene lamp, and her mother telling her how much wood to put in the stove.

The whole village was stricken, but Hudson recalls only two people dying. She remembers Timothy Pitka bringing in wood and water, and someone also brought soup. One day she heard a motor and she went to the window to investigate. She said to her mother, "There's something in the air and it's moving." Her mother said, "Oh, that's the flying machine." The plane brought a Red Cross nurse. Hudson wanted to go out and see the plane, but her mother said not to, because she was afraid she'd get sick if she went out.

Hudson's mother later went to Ft. Yukon to stay in or near the hospital there. She took Hudson and her sister there. Hudson stayed on and boarded at St. Steven's Mission for 2 years. She's not sure why, but as a child she was always told she needed to gain weight.

The Ft. Yukon native language was completely different from Rampart's language, and all the children spoke it. So Hudson learned it, and even some of the White children learned it. The school was run by the Episcopal Church, and Dr. Burke and his wife worked there.

Hudson loves the way she was brought up. It was a lot of fun and a lot of work. She was constantly learning; school was not that important.

She was in and out of the hospital to gain weight; she thinks they were afraid she had tuberculosis. After 2 years, though, she was told it was time to go back to her parents, in Rampart. She didn't have tuberculosis; she was just skinny.

Several years later her family said that when she came back she was speaking the Ft. Yukon language to them and they couldn't understand her. Her parents and brothers and sisters always spoke English in the home. Her grandmother, though, spoke only Rampart's native language.

Hudson's mother died of tuberculosis in 1930. In the fall of 1929, Hudson was going into the 5<sup>th</sup> grade, but her mother was ill and someone needed to stay home and take care of the house chores. So Hudson stayed home, until her mother died in March

1930. Her father then said, "You should go back to school," but didn't press it. By this time Hudson felt herself pretty grown up, and didn't think she had to go back to school if she didn't want to, so she went back to live with her grandmother, since learning from books wasn't that important to her anyway. Hudson's father died in 1932.

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Hudson's grandmother taught her not to be afraid of anything, though there wasn't much to be afraid of anyway. One time though, they were at fish camp, and the grandmother needed her butcher knife, which was at the edge of the river. She asked Hudson to go get it and Hudson said she couldn't, because she was afraid of the owl at the mouth of Big Minook. Her grandmother said that it was just a bird and she made her go get the knife. Hudson got the knife, and cried herself to sleep. Owls give her the creeps.

Hudson has that same butcher knife in her house, now. It's an old handmade knife, with a wooden handle wrapped around the blade with a piece of wire. It has been used so much that the wire is embedded in the wood handle. Maloy says it's lovely.

In Rampart, one winter, before 1925, while Hudson was staying with her parents at the mouth of Hess Creek, her brothers built a baseball field. They made a round ball of material, and stuffed it full of moose hair. One of her brothers also built a mandolin out of the boards from the boxes their macaroni came in. He used snare wire for the strings. Her brothers and sisters were all quite musical. Hudson says kids were always looking for different kinds of recreation.

Hudson married and had four children. Antoinette Woods is a very special person to her. She'll be 91 in May, and she's Hudson's sister-in-law. Her father was Alfred Mayo. He, McQuesten, and Harper went up and down the Yukon in their boat. She's the last living child of Mayo. She delivered all of Hudson's children, was the midwife at many other births, cared for ill people, and prepared bodies for funerals.

Hudson didn't know much about having a baby, but she had no fear. "No brain, no fear." When a woman had a baby, there's be other women around, laughing, drinking tea, happy. It eased the labor, Hudson says.

Antoinette Woods brought Hudson with her to learn how to deliver babies. Around 1934, Hudson's sister-in-law, Addie, was in labor. Hudson thought she had more pain watching than Addie did birthing. The baby was a "blue baby." Woods worked on him until she got him breathing. He lived until he was 21, when he had heart surgery in San Francisco, and died from complications.

Hudson moved to Fairbanks in 1947. She had a good friend there, originally from Rampart, Charlotte Mayo. Charlotte took them in and got Hudson started looking for work. That was quite an experience. Charlotte was doing housework, so she got Hudson doing that. They got \$1/hr. Hudson chose to work for people with families, like Gene Emil's family, George Martin's family, and Mrs. Kidney. She also babysat while she was working. She says they were wonderful people and gave her a lot of support.

After a year and a half, she was asked to go to Lucille's Apparel Shop to unpack clothes. It was a very exclusive store. She had fun unpacking clothes there, steaming them, and hanging them. She was then asked to go out on the floor, and she became one of the clerks.

Coming from a village this was hard. She never thought of her father as White—or that his color difference mattered. The people she'd known as "White people" were the storekeeper, the commissioner, and the teacher. They were thought of as "way above us" when she was growing up. So she was fearful in Fairbanks that "she wasn't up to their level" or something like that; it's hard for Hudson to explain. She says to young natives in the audience that they shouldn't be afraid to talk to people (White people) or ask for help, because there are many people who are willing to help and encourage them. There was never a time working at Lucille's where she felt, "as another person."

Lucille Hardebush set Hudson's goals. She learned a lot from her. Hardebush said, "Whatever goes on in the shop, you leave there." Some customers were ladies from "the line." Hardebush said, "Only show them the best stuff." Hudson asked, "How will I know these women?" Hardebush had a way of saying, "Baby, you'll learn." Hudson discovered that year that Indians, White, whoever, all think the same, dislike different things, love the same—that people are all the same.

Hudson clerked quite a bit in Fairbanks. Lucille's was located in or near the old Lacey St. Theater. She stayed a long time with Lucille's, for 6 years. Hardebush got her into her first strapless dress. The clerks had to wear what she carried at the shop. One time Lucille handed her the strapless dress and said, "This is what you're going to wear, baby." So she did. Hudson also stayed a long time working at Co-op Drugstore; that was a very fun place to work. She also worked at a bakery shop, the N.C. (?), Penney's, and Evelyn's.

She was married to Jerry Hudson for 28 years. They married in 1950. He was very encouraging. They built a home in Manley, where she spends the summers now. She has a trunk there that has four suits from Lucille's shop by designer Fred Block, which she used to wear in the early 1950s. One of them cost \$250.00 in 1950. It has mink fur woven in the material. She's still trying to find one of her granddaughters with a 24" waist to fit into one of them.

She feels very blessed to have lived here all these years, and to have 4 beautiful children, 18 grandchildren, and 14 great-grandchildren. At one time she felt that a lot of us wouldn't be here when tuberculosis was sweeping through AK. She says life is short and we should try to do the best of everything in that short time.

She does a lot of teaching about skin sewing over the telephone. She doesn't know everything there is to know, but what she does know she shares.

Hudson concludes by saying that's she very grateful for the greatest time of her life, the time spent with her grandmother. She says she has so much to tell, that she hasn't even touched on, and that she hopes to be on the air again some other time.