

KNOWLEDGE OF NATIVE ELDERS
Jonathan and Rosie David
Summary by H. T. Prentzel, March 1, 1988

Jonathan and Rosie David of Minto taught our class for the first time on March 1, 1988.

Jonathan said that Minto people were moving around in the wintertime, and year around for the most part. They were on the move on the Chatanika River Basin as well as Washington Creek and the Tatalina. They set up tents when they camped. They would stay in place about a week while the men hunt caribou. There were no moose in those days. Some times it was hard to get caribou too.

To dry the meat they would cut the meat into thick slabs and hang them in their house, a big tent. They would later store the dried meat in a big caribou skin sack along with the caribou fat that had been dried. Enough for all spring and part of the summer when the fish come. He and Rosie used to do that long ago, they were raised together.

When there are no caribou they would move and camp near a lake where there are beavers and work on flushing them out. They never tried to flush beavers out of their lodge in the creek because there are too many places for beavers to escape to. They would spend days trying to flush the beaver out. They would cut holes through the ice here and there so far apart all around the lake. Then cut a hole in the lodge and stick a pole in there and say "nideeigho". They would flush the beaver out of the den and into the water. They would hit it and kill it when it came up to breathe somewhere. When they finally get all the beavers they have a feast. They would cook the beavers in a big pot and make a place for the feast by putting down greens [spruce bough] in an area outside. The elders would tell stories after they eat. We children have to sit quietly and listen. It was the way we learned. We cannot forget our grandfather's way.

They talked about the first Episcopal minister they met, Mr. Frederick Drane. He came to them when they were camped near Nenana. Jonathan said he and Rosie were small when the preacher first came. The preacher had a bell that he would ring before he would enter camp. They always knew when he was coming. Later Arthur Wright was their preacher. He was an Athabaskan from downriver, father of Al Wright. He spoke to them in their language when he held service. They understood him real well and still remembered his sermons. His children didn't learn their father's language. Jonathan said that right now there are too many preachers.

Rosie was raised by her Grandmother. She had a mother and father but they had another baby, so her grandmother took her home and she was raised by them. She knew all that her grandmother knew. Unfortunately she had a stroke last fall, and now she has to think a long time to remember, but she is careful not to say things until she remembers them. She had eight boys and five girls. Three girls and one boy are left.

Jonathan told a story about once when people went on a nomadic hunt again and most of the people went with Chief Charlie, who was the head man in the village. Most people "went behind" [followed] Chief Charlie, because he took good care of poor and elderly people. The other elders were Titus John, Adamin ? [Edwin] George and William Jimmy. William Jimmy moved up to Chatanika and Adaman George moved up Washington Creek; Titus John moved up to Six Mile. Lewie Silas moved up Tatalina. Chief Charlie and his group went up in the hills called Bił T'oy across from the village. Lots of brown bears around there. When they catch porcupine they would singe the quills instead of skinning it, then gut and cook it. They would keep the meat in its own sack, because it had been singed it had a strong smoke smell to it. One needs to be careful not to get the smell on ones clothes, because animals will detect the smell when you are hunting them. Before a moose layed down it will make a loop and lay down in lee of the wind and can smell your presence. That way it can detect anything that is following it. Caribou don't do that. They just go straight.

Jonathan talked a little about snowshoe making. He said people in Minto don't make snowshoes anymore. Both he and Rosie said they saw their grandparents use a firedrill called t'áał to build a fire. It was time consuming. Not like now when you just go poof! with a lighter and light a cigarette.

They also talked about how food was cooked in birch bark basket or pot by putting heated white rocks in the cooking pot with meat and water in it. They changed the rocks when it cooled off. They had a wooden forks to handle the rocks.

Chief Thomas was Jonathan's grandfather. He had four wives. When this man went out to hunt, Jonathan joked that all of his wives would fight.

They hunted fox, martin, muskrat and rabbits without traps. They did have bow and arrow and guns. Two different arrows were used. One made from moose horn stuns the animal and the other penetrates it.

The people used to drive rabbits. They would set a row of snares on one end of a small island in the river and spread out and walk from one end toward the other. In doing this they would drive all the rabbits to one area where some would get caught in snares. They also shot them with arrows with a blunt end.

Jonathan told us about flushing bear out of their den in winter time. They have to hit it with a stick and make it mad so it would come out and then kill it. Sometimes they would get more than one. If you shoot the mother bear, the young bear cubs will just walk around. Rosie said to be careful when you cut open the bear, to not rupture its gallbladder, or the meat will get contaminated. Once when the meat was ruined this way, it was fed to a dog, and the dog died.

Jonathan said that young people today smoke too much. He once worked for the Tribal Court and saw a lot of young people drink and smoke. One bottle of beer is not bad, but it's bad

to start drinking. He lost his daughter and his son and grandson. Jonathan said today people love their children when they are young, but not as much when they are 17 or 18. He said his mother loved him and took care of him until he moved out of the house to get married.

People had to learn how to get the fish in the summertime. There is a lot to learn about it. They cut their fish and dried them. They had a certain way to tie the fish in bundles and store it with willowbark. They cut salmon different ways. Rosie says it's good to know how to get fish, because good times like now, might not last, and people will depend on the old ways again maybe, so we better remember what she and Jonathan have said.

In the fall they dug a hole in the ground and made a log wall and lined it with birch bark. They would also put logs and birch bark on the bottom. They would wash the salmon heads and throw them in there and a layer of fish eggs and more fish heads. It gets real sour, and is good to eat in the winter. They covered it with logs so no animals could get in. They cut pike, sucker and other fish for dogs. They also caught fish in the fall and just froze it. There are many ways to cure and store your fish. Yukon salmon are richer than Tanana salmon. There are a lot more beaver now than there used to be, this has an effect on fish by blocking the creeks with its dams.

Rosie's grandfathers name was Williams. They moved to Minto from Old Minto in around 1974.

Today kids don't know what nation or clan they come from. There are five clans in Tanana. People must respect this system to avoid intermarriage. A child always belongs to the same clan as the mother. The clans are:

Bidziyh Ta Khut'ana:	Caribou Clan
Tseeyh Yoo:	Ochra Paint Clan
Ch'echaal Yoo:	Fishtail Clan
Toneedza Ghaltseeġna:	Dentalia (Fish) Clan
Noltseena:	Bear Clan

Noltseena and Toneedza Ghaltseeġna are related. Rosie David is a Caribou Clan. Jonathan David is Tseeyh Yoo Ochre Paint Clan.

Minto and Nenana speak Tanana Athabaskan language. There used to be more villages.