

Jonathan & Rose David

July 17, 1988

Summary by Hilda Chythlook

Jonathan David covered ~~the~~ the class discussion on Athabaskan potlatches. In the earlier days, various tribes gathered together from Ruby, Janera, Rampart and from the other Interior River communities. In those days, the people attending these potlatches walked from their village to the place where the potlatch was being held. The Interior Indians identified ~~with~~ various people attending the potlatches by "tribe or nation." ~~For~~ ~~the~~ instances, in the Athabaskan language, ~~a~~ a tribe means a "fish tail" and "middle part of a fish", and ~~the~~ ~~the~~ "caribou" and "red paint." A person's ^{tribe or nation} ~~can~~ be identified by the father and mother's family lineage background.

~~There are~~ different types of potlatches.

There are different types of potlatches, but the main discussion was on a memorial potlatch which can take up to a year to prepare. Jonathan David said at one time, ~~the~~ people walked all the way from Copper Center or Janecross to see a ~~a~~ man's body at a funeral potlatch. The older Athabaskans know ~~where~~ ~~to~~ holding the potlatch, when ~~at~~ the host(s) start hitting a stick. This means that the potlatch is ready, and ~~the~~ ~~time~~ is time for the various tribes to come to the traditional event. To the various individuals that attend the potlatch, the host(s) give them blankets, boots, mitts, marten and beaver caps. The person(s) who walked or come from great distances are usually given good gifts, such as fur hats, ~~because~~ ^{for} coming to the funeral potlatch. This is the way it's always been - the custom. The hosts pay ~~the~~ the individual a gift for coming, "that's the way Natives do," according to Mr. David.

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Summary by Helen Chythlook

Following the discussion on potlatches, there was a question and answer session which is summarized below.

Question: Do you have potlatches in Minto?

Answer: Yes, we have potlatches. If I lost the best boy or best daughter who lists to me good; if I miss them, I'm going to make a potlatch. If I don't make potlatch it will be on my mind all the time, you can't forget them. I make song out to my boy, because lots of people come to the funeral. We know who come to the potlatch, we recognize them. When ~~the~~ a new person comes back again to the potlatch, we give them blankets, gun, money. ~~That's the way we do it~~ We give money to the persons who come from long ways, such as Anchorage because ~~it's expensive~~ of high travel costs.

Question: So when lot of people come for the funeral we have potlatch, then, and about a year later. ~~or~~ How ~~long~~ ^{much} later do you have the Memorial Potlatch?

Answer: ~~The~~ We have the Memorial potlatch a year after the funeral.

Question: you always have food potlatch after the burial?

Answer: Yes, burial and the potlatch we have -- just one potlatch. Sometimes 3 families are involved in this potlatch for different ^{deceased} family members; ~~for~~ ^{see} such as from Minto, Venans, or Hot Springs. For example, the potlatch made for my son, there were seven different family members involved. The memorial potlatches are usually held on a weekend ~~Friday~~ ^{Saturday} through

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● Summary by Helen Chythool

(Friday through Sunday). Many years back the Athabaskan Indians used to have potlatches sometimes, ~~to~~ lasting a month. Now, because we work for wages, the potlatches are much shorter.

Question: In the video, it seemed that most often, the songs are being sung by the elders, or people over 40 years of age and older. How do you see the songs being written by the young people, or are they?

Answer: The older people do compose the songs more than the younger people in the potlatch.

The young people are learning from us. We teach our kids, ~~then~~ ^{after} the younger people learn the potlatch songs, they continue to pass these songs to their ~~younger~~ ^{future} generations.

Question: [I believe this question pertained to the tribe or nation Jonathan David originated from.]

Do you ~~go~~ ^(speak) go on your mother's side or your father's side?
Answer: ^(Jonathan) you go by the mother's side more. You don't go by the men's side too much.

(Rosie): All my kids come after me - the Caribou... ~~this is [the] Native~~

(Jonathan): ~~that~~ ^{This} is [the] Native way. Her side has more relations... Your mother, too because women's got more Nation; Men is just men.

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Summary by Helen Chughloch

Question: In that picture where they got the moose, that wasn't just one family; that was just a whole bunch of people hunting together. So, when someone caught the moose and everybody share it, huh?

Answer: Yes, after they haul it in, they cut the moose. ~~the moose~~ ^{the moose} distribution is shared to all the people who participated in the hunt. For example, one side get one bone; and ^{the} other group sometimes gets 12 bones and ribs. Sometimes they give me one whole rib. If these guys make pollets, I'll put in with them. That's the way the Athabascans do it.

Question: Does each family have a certain hunting and fishing area? Does the whole village hunt in Minto Flats, or do you have assigned areas?

Answer: We all go together in different places, ~~often~~ ^{often} on this side of Minto. If there's a highway we go all go hunt on the other side, because the season is closed and that's not hunting grounds.

So there's no such thing in a traditional way as a hunting area, everybody shares. It's the land claims and the laws that sets changing.

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Summary by Helen Chytko

Question: In the song, that woman who was a parent of pottatch, her husband was still alive wasn't he?

Answer: Yes, there's two different kinds of pottatches that the Altheeshans make. See, what she was asking was Dorothy made pottatch for her husband, because he was sick all the time, huh?

Sometime around Thanksgiving the Altheeshans make a pottatch. If my wife is sick all the time, I'll ^{make} pottatch on Thanksgiving day, and I will tell a story about it. I'll get up and say, "I'll do this for my wife because she's not well."

Question: And that stick that Dorothy was hitting the sick with...

Answer: That stick they hit it to ^{the sick} person's body. The reason is for good luck. This type of pottatch is for the ill person who's still living. If I don't hit stick, you got to go by the sun.

[Rosie]: When we give stuff away, we make person sit on chair, and we never make the sick person move.

We, ^{also} put gifts all by the ill person. Then we hit stick and then we throw it all away to get rid of bad luck sign. It's like the person you are blessing for good luck. When the people hit the ill person's body with a stick, the person forget about the bad things they were thinking of that made ~~them~~ him or her sick. It's our

Grandfather's way what we're doing. ~~So, there's~~
So, there's lots of meaning behind the different

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Summary by Helen Chythlor

potlatch songs. ~~for hunting~~ There's songs for hunting, fishing, all the animals, all the men, for for, money and, ^{for} everything.

Those are memorial songs, there's good luck song for hunting and different animal songs.

Question: Is there a potlatch for almost every event, i.e. someone's ~~gone~~ gone away, ~~someone's~~ someone's come, etc.?

Answer: This memorial potlatch is a very special event, and there's smaller potlatches when people come to visit. Whenever people come from someplace they informally put food together, all eat together, and sing and dance.

If you come down to my potlatch. I see your face, that's all and you eat. Next time you come back, I know you come back again. You go to my potlatch already. I pay you back because you made two trips to the potlatch.

Question: In the memorial, if a baby dies, ~~or some~~ ^{do} you still give a potlatch for it?

Answer: Yes, they do that down our home. Not a bigger potlatch, more like a home potlatch.

Question: What about children giving potlatches for their parents or elders? It seemed like when the potlatches occurred, that the parents are doing it for the younger generation. Does the younger generation ever do it for the elders? Answer: Yes.

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Question: When they have potlatches is it usually the younger people that do a lot of the preparation?

Answer: Yes, whenever there's a potlatch it's an old village ~~cor~~ corporation and it's kind of a training thing. Young people are always involved in it, ~~but~~ ^{but} somebody is in charge ~~usually~~. The elders are in charge of what's going on. They designate what the people should be doing.

Question: Is there ^a format or ceremony to a memorial potlatch? On the first day are there certain rituals or things that should be done? Are there prayers or any kind of things that you can count on being traditionally done?

Answer: Yes, there's a ritual. There's not any scheduled thing in the potlatches. It sort of all happens. People are coming in and they sing. Every evening there's a potlatch and singing.

Question: In Minto, when they have memorial potlatches, do you sing new songs every evening?

Answer: No, not until we're ready to start the potlatch. Every evening before we quit dance we sing song(s), and the morning when you get up, all the people visit family or friends. Meanwhile the village is cooking and preparing for the evening activities. When the potlatch takes place, there is singing and dancing. They have potlatch in the morning at breakfast. Everybody donates something, anything they got; such as: money, meat, volunteer work, etc. They got one boss; sometimes 1/2 bosses, because of ~~they~~ ^{sometimes} ~~me~~ there's two different places to cook the food. The family hosting the potlatches

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Summary by Helen Chylhok

● reads the contributions donated by various individuals during the potlatch.

Q As for the songs at the potlatch, they've got three ~~songs~~ songs. You got to move with the songs.

Q In preparing the meat, they use big pans, and stir the meat with a willow stick spoon. Sometimes, they use a tee bucket for hot drinks.

Question: Do the men make it?

Answer: During the potlatch food preparation, women hit the dry meat. The women sing to make the meat soft while it's cooking. The lard that goes in with the meat ^{has} ~~got~~ to be white color, before you put dry meat in to cook. The lard fat is made of moose marrow and oil.

● They boil moose marrow bone, then put the grease out. The lard and grease is combined with the dry meat into the cooking pot. During cooking, when you can't stir the meat, you add more grease into the cooking pot.

Question: What type of fish do you use, or can you use any type of fish, for ice ~~cream~~ cream?

Answer: We never use fish. You can't use any kind, you use only dry meat. It's against the law to use dry fish. But you can make ice-cream with fish.

Question: Do you use pike fish and white fish?

Answer: Yes, mostly white fish.