

Knowledge of Native Elders
Johnathen and Rosie David
March 29th, 1988
Summarized by: Zane Wilson

In 1919 there was a flu epidemic in Nenana this was when Johnathen was nine years old. Many people died from this flu. There was five white people who weren't sick that took care of the people. Three of these took care of the sick by taking food around to each house and the other two took care of disposing of the bodies. The whole village was quarantined.

The people were fed tomato soup and vegetables and there wasn't any meat, the old people had some moose meat but that was it. This happened right at breakup so you couldn't freeze the meat to take care of it. The meat they had they would boil and pass out to everybody.

The fever took a lot of little babies and old people who didn't have enough strength to get over it and would often times die in their sleep. Johnathens Grandfather, Grandmother, and Father all died. They hauled the bodies out and buried them up on a hill by Nenana, there is a stone there with all the dead people's names on it. they didn't change the clothes on the dead they just wrapped them in a blanket and buried them in a box. At this time Rosie was in Minto and no one got sick there at this time. Later after it was over a minister went down to Minto and got everybody together and told them what had happened and read off a list of all those that had died. All the people cried when they heard of all the family that they had lost.

That fourth of July all of Minto went down to Nenana in big canoes with all the family in them, they stayed one week and had a potlatch every day, they cooked moose, duck, fish and a lot of stuff that the storekeepers had given them. It was a big funeral potlatch for all the families that had lost someone. A year after it hit Nenana it hit Minto in the spring camp and more people died.

From old Minto to Nenana it would take about two days by birch bark boat, these boats about 2 1/2 feet wide and 10 inches high. People used to make these canoes for travel. Pitch was collected all winter and put in a basket and hauled to spring camp they melted it in a frying pan to put on the boat, you had to be fast putting it on or it would get hard, it would take about one month to build a canoe. Good canoe bark comes off easy and won't break and should be straight. It took three trees to make the cover one for each side and one for the bottom, they were over lapped and sewn together the bark was heated before it was put on the frame so they could bend it and it wouldn't crack and than pitch was put on the joint so it wouldn't leak. You only had to pitch the boat once and then put on some more just in place where it would leak. The boat would last about 5 years if you took care of it keeping it sheltered and tied down so it wouldn't get blown around. It was all made of Birch except bows and slats made of spruce.

Little kids were told stories about hunting, how to set snare for and how to make own snare and to set it right.

They have a lot of songs in Minto songs about Duck, Rabbits, Loon, Moose and Bear amongst others one song is about a little yellow robin singing a song in spring sings Yodo chookoy ts'ega't which means it is hard to swallow pike guts because they are long like spaghetti.

Johnathen told the loon story which goes like this:
There was a blind man and his wife were moose hunting and the man killed a moose by hearing it in the brush, they had to follow the moose a ways in the brush as it hadn't died yet and during this time the woman left the man and hid in the brush. The man didn't know where she was but he heard a loon in the distance and he kept on walking towards the loons call, he finally got to the edge of the lake and called to the loon telling him that he was blind, the loon said he could cure the man if he gave him his white entilia which the man had on. He gave it to the loon and that is why he has a white stripe on his body. The loon then told the man to get on his back the loon then swam out on the lake and dove down with the man hanging on, each time he would dive deeper and the old mans vision started to come back, finally he dove down in the middle of the lake and came up and the man could see. He then took him back to the shore and the loon told the man he could hear someone up on the hill making food bags. The man went up there and it was his woman, he pretended to still not to be able to see as he approached the woman she asked how did you find me? He asked why did you leave me. The old lady tried to lie to him as she had many times before so he went up to her and cut her back and kicked her toward a old rotten stump and she then turned into an ant and lived in the stump.

Noo'o wa the name of the Athabaskan people and there is a story about how a long time ago he caused a great flood.