

INTRODUCTION TO NATIVE ELDERS  
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The very first time I heard about school, the first school we had came to our village of Nondalton in 1926, and I was 6 years old. They used to call that grade school, now they call it elementary school. We were all native kids. The first time we went to school, we didn't speak one word of English. The teacher we had he didn't want us to speak our native language, if he catch us speaking our native language, he'd punish us. The teacher at this time was a discipliner, you either have to learn or else, it was in times up to today I think it was good in some ways, to discipline, but they changed all that. It was going on for years. We'd get punishment, we'd stand in a corner for a half hour, and couldn't turn your head, this was a punishment, speaking your language. But that's in the past. I was 17 years old and made it up to the 7th grade when I quit school, I had to quit school.

My father died when I was crawling around, I didn't even know my dad, this was territorial land the people had to live off the land. No stores whatsoever, nowhere, the people had to live off the land. It was still under survival and all the food that we have today, all we have if we get lucky we'll have a little sugar a little flour. But then we didn't think nothing of it because we had to live off the country. We didn't think about spending money, the only means of making money was in trapping, there was no employment nowhere else, trapping, and the fur was real good at the time like fox and so on. Had good money, about \$60 a skin and in those days \$20 was like a \$100, and you seldom see \$20 at that time. If you got \$10 that's a lot of money. The first store started, they had sugars and flours in 50lb. bags and they were \$1.50 a piece for 50lb. sugar and \$1.00 for 50 lb. flour. There was no candy of any kind except the hard kind, 5 cents a lb. they used to come in barrels. That was in Nondalton. There was no means of transportation except by dogteams. Flour and sugar came by dogteam. The first trading post we had was between Illiamna and Cook inlet. Supplies got there by barge. There was a man who had a horse who supplied the Illiamna area. We took dogteams to his store.

I quit school because I had to bring in the food with my older brother and go trapping. We learned how to go camping, hunting, we learned a lot. I learned this from my older brother. I didn't have a gun but my brother did. Everybody lived off the land, they had too they didn't seem to mind. In 1930s the whole U.S. had a depression, we didn't know anything about it, it didn't bother us because we lived off the land, it didn't affect us. But today if there is one we would know it. We already have an inflation in all this. Seven grade I wanted to go to school, but I couldn't, because I had to do the work. My mother was still living then. In the Wintertime we didn't have to worry about clothing, she made our mittens and fur hats and

boots and it didn't bother us in cold weather. Caribou sleeping bag. There was Caribou around Nondalton, there is more today than it was.

From there on I grew up, started working here and there for wages, first time I went down to Bristol bay to go fishing or work in a cannery, I piled lumber all Summer long. The season I worked I made \$83 the whole season's work, and that was a lot of money, I thought it was. Now today a \$100 doesn't mean nothing, It's the change. Life in the village started changing every year after they started the school. In 1940 they decided to make a new village, so they move a little ways. By 1940 everybody was busy going to school. Before the school started the people moved around in camps wherever the fish were abundant, they had to store the food. In the Summertime they would put up a lot of dried salmon for the dogs. In the Fall time they would move up the upper Lake Clark and all those mountains. They make Fall camps to get caribou, blackbear, or sheep meat and they store them for the Winter. The ladies trap mountain squirrels and pick some berries for the Winter. They were doing that for enough food for the Winter. It was sometimes a little difficult but people didn't think nothing of it at that time. Some days a good day some days a bad day but you had to do it.

Way, way back before when he was young my grandfather was still alive, he used to tell me a story about way, way back when he was young he was still living, you got to survive if he don't, a little boy as soon as they get big enough the father turned him over to his paternal uncle, so the uncle will train him, take him out and tie a string around him and drag him across the river to toughen him. The uncle could be either mother's or father's brother. They toughened the boy up. There were no religions, no religions whatsoever. They depend on survival, nothing but survival and there was no sickness. The boy would go running every morning and had to go with uncle everyday hunting and if he had a tough time going across the river he let him go until he's about ready to drown then pull him out. He had to make it by himself. If he can't learn it, what's the use in raising the boy? I mean it was that way, way back 3 or 4 thousand years ago. If a boy can't learn nothing, you may as well get rid of him, cause he can't survive.

One story in a book I wrote tells about an uncle who went fall trapping and the uncle set a bear trap wind-fall on a mountainside and he had this big boy but the uncle couldn't train him he couldn't learn nothing, he keep on keep on keep on. So they look at the windfall trap everyday. So one day this boy said, "Oh, uncle I'll go up and look at it, you don't have to go." And his uncle said, "ok." The boy said, "What am I going to do if there's nothing in it?", "all you have to do is reach in that deadfall and pull the bait, "ok," he said, and he left. And that's what the boy did, he went up to that fall, pulled the bait in and killed himself, and the man knew it when he didn't come home that evening. His aunt told him now why did you tell him that for? He can't learn nothing, there's no other way he can learn. This story is to tell the kids, the young people, that's what that story was for. It happened. So the story would go on for example for the other new generation. The next day the man went up there, there was that boy, his legs sticking out of the trap, he tore the rocks and everything off, logs and everything. He grabbed the boy by the neck and legs and slung him down the hill. He said, "You're a stupid mistake, your fault, nobody's

fault. It does not sound right but then that's what the native people use to tell this other people; for example.

I started having a hard life, I've been getting sickly I was drafted in the Army, but I had to be rejected because my health was not too good. And from there on I did everything I can, I went down to the lower 48 I was still young. Spent three years down there. I went from cities to cities, different states like Washington, Ohio and New York. Three years I spent down there, working. I went to school in Tacoma, Washington. Vocational school, welding. And I worked in; Cleveland, Ohio one year, White Plains, New York one year, and in three years I was homesick and came back. And from there on at home I was working with the village council and different work with projects. Then I decided to start a Boy Scout, and the people in the village helped me out. I had 21 boy scouts. This was in Nondalton in 1972. There was another 2 scout masters with me. We took them to Anchorage two weeks and they took all the trophies in Anchorage. They went to Boise, Idaho for a jamboree, for a week.

We had the boy scouts for two years and a half. And that was good, I was working with the kids. We had three groups Flaming Arrow, Wolf and a Hawk. We go out camping for weeks in Summertime and Wintertime. We don't carry no rifle or no 22 nothing. Just an hatchet or saw to cut wood, and learn them how to camp out. They see alot of ptarmigans and rabbits and they want those, but we wouldn't let them have them no .22 or small rifle, because there were too many boys you know and you can't trust them. So what we did was train them how to catch a rabbit with snares, just hanging twine or something, and it will never get away. Rabbits, Ptarmigans they started catching rabbits with the snares and they really enjoyed it. And they want to go fishing nextday we had no fishhooks, so we made fishhooks out of bones, caribou bone, you take the shin and you make hooks out of it small or big. And they made bunch of those they went to lakes and caught lake trouts and stuff with it and they were all excited. And then that was gone. We took tents and stuff and you had to make sure they cut enough wood and cleaned the camp everyday. We keep everything clean after we use the place we don't scatter everything. That was our training from long ago to keep our camp clean. They used to tell us not to, you know bones and stuff not to lay around the camp, that was really against native rules, leaving animal bones in the camp, you know. We either throw it in the creecks that was no good, the best thing you could do was to bury it. All the native people, they were strict you know like the fish and wildlife say you can't kill this and that, well the native people was that way, you had to just kill what you could need, what you need and not anymore. What you kill faraway you got to bring it back.

I'm with the fish and wildlife advisory board right now in Nondalton and Illiamna, and we have a meeting two times a year. And then after that I decided to start this bilingual teaching, so I got interested in starting a bilingual teaching, teaching to kids their native language on a board, pictures and numbers and all that. Two years I taught that, I didn't even care too much for that cause they only give us right from the first grade up to the secondary class, the high school. And they only give you 15 minutes to teach each class, and that isn't much. Nobody can learn in 15 minutes, and I didn't kinda of like that. Although all the smaller kids they pick up fast, pick up the language real fast. Lot of them was doing real good right

now, but right now in Nondalton I'm the only one who can read and write, nobody else in that area. We used to have workshop with Jim Kari, I worked with him, we went to Dillingham, they had a big workshop there. Upik and Athabaskan there were about 60 people there, two weeks. I always thought my language would never be written, and today I found that's the easiest language that you can write and read, there's no mistakes no misspelling. In two weeks I picked it up, just started reading and writing it. Mike Crouse he was really surprised that in two weeks. If you want to learn anything you'll have to put your mind to it, really. I go to the school right now and visit the class every once in a while and tell them about land claims and all that. I like to do this work writing books and working with classes. In 74 we had two girls here from home, I was working here and they said would you help us, like this same thing, they interviewed me and they took that back to their class. When I saw them they said we got big points, that was good, that was all right. So up to today, I wrote 14 books all together, riddles, dictionary and a textbook for the classroom for the Athabaskan schools. I made 400 copies of each book, published in Minneapolis. Today I can't find the books in the Bookcache store, I look all over, I can't find any. There should be some in the library here, there should be.

Here's a picture of an old old lady taken in Lake Clark in 1935, she had a home there in Lake Clark, her name was Maryanne Trefon. She had seven children all at home raised at Lake Clark, she was a very active lady. Her husband died when their children was young, and Maryanne raised her children alone. Seven children, she did all the work to raise her children. What they call Nondalton is a native name. It's a little lake beween two big lakes, it means lake between two big lakes. Because there was no jobs, everyone had to trap, the only means of transporation was by dogteam. They trapped all the way back to Melchatina from Nondalton, about 90 miles. They covered many miles by dogteam. They take their family, they had too, that way they don't have to go back and forth. They would be supplied, they had already a lot of stuff, there was a trading post close by, there was sugar and stuff. Sleds were made out of birch like today, the same as used in the interior. The people took tents with them. Long ago before that they used to make mud houses before they go trapping, they don't do those no more, tents and campstoves. They made the campstoves themselves out of tin, gas drums or something, they make good little heaters. It is a Yukon stove. Their sled they used, a 12 foot long sled, so they would carry all their belongings. They hauled traps, no snares in them days. They had a lot of steel traps. They put spruce boughs, green, on the floor of the tent, when they get wet they change them, and when they dried up they put in new ones. In the summertime they used this spruce bark, for like flooring, but when traveling in Winter they would use the boughs. They used to catch wolverine, fox and lynx they used to make good money on furs. Maryanne's garden had a big wooden fence around it with big turnips piled up, the little lady would do all that work with her kids. Alaska soil has really good soil, you can grow almost anything in Alaska soil. I have a little garden back home. We had to pull the cabbage out because they get woody inside when they get too big. Maryanne she camped in the Spring, in a place called Whitefish Slough, she caught a lot of whitefish and pike with a handmade net. People in Nondalton still make handmade nets. The old

pioneers were like one of us, they came in a long time ago seeking gold. There are a lot of new white people in the Lake Clark area.

The only thing I don't like around Lake Clark is getting too many lodges, lodges springing up all over the place. Things are really changing, really bad for us. We can't go without subsistence, we have to have subsistence. The Federal want to cut the subsistence out, but the native people wouldn't, there are a lot of things that they want to you know, that's why they have this Federation of Natives and Alaska natives are really doing a lot of work to keep Alaska, like the lower 48 native people they lost their land, everything. The lower 48 native people would come up sometime to the Federation of Natives and say don't let your land go, don't take no money, if you do you lose your land. That's why the native people are really fighting for everything, otherwise they would have nothing. That's why there is an Alaska claims settlement act. The BIA gave the native people 160 acres for each native, 160 acres of land that you could pick out anywhere you want. So the people of Nondalton did, in 5 years you have to have some kind of occupancy on that land, if you don't they'll take it back. I've got 160 acres in Lake Clark, that's within the park, the park was started 8 years ago, there is no more hunters, that was one good thing because it keep out what we call headhunters. They said the local people could hunt and trap and cut logs and all that, but in 8 years they finally changed too, they said you got to ask us what you're going to do, we'll take your 160 acres cause you don't have no occupancy on it. Where I've got my land is called old Kijik, about 200 years ago there was a village there, some of my ancestors are buried there. There was about 300 people in that village, there's not one today! There's a great big cemetery there. My father was born there. The park wanted to take my 160 acres back, because I didn't have no occupancy on it. So we had a conference, I told the park you're not taking that land it's mine you've only been here 8 years, I've been here 65 years. Kijik, in the area my ancestor buried there, my father was born there, I consider that's my occupancy. If you want to take that land back, you purchase from me at \$10,000 an acre, they changed the subject right there. Now nobody can do nothing with the 160 acre allotment today, we were going to go to court, everything was settled in that conference, so I've got my 160 acres. The people used to go by foot through the pass to Anchorage. They used to have a trail to Kuskokwim. I worked on place names with Jim Carey, there were thousands of places with native names. They give you that 160 acres and within 5 years you could cultivate a little garden or put a fishrack on it or build a cabin on it. Another thing I couldn't understand, if they gave you the surface with that 160 acres, just the surface, not subsurface, because if they think there's mineral underneath, they want that. They give you the surface. I argued back and forth with agencies with the BIA, and said what if I build a cabin on that 160 acres, plant potatoes and that potatoes go down too far, do I lose that potatoes? Really, that's what they want. And I said if there was minerals down there, I wouldn't let you tear up my surface, I wouldn't let you. I can't see that. You just can't find minerals in 160 acres, it will never be done.