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Elder: Johnson Moses from Alakaket, Ak

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SURVIVAL SKILLS

Today we picked a topic from an outline of many different subjects. Survival skills are very important if you are going to live in a rough and rugged country. Today Johnson Moses is going to tell us how it was long ago when he was living with his grandpa and what his grandpa told him about survival skill and how Johnson learned and used them. Johnson Moses is from Alakaket, which is 200 air miles from Fairbanks on the Koyukuk River. He is an Athabaskan Indian.

Johnson started off telling us how important it was to listen to what the elders told them. Long ago he said his grandpa wanted him to meet other people. After fish camp they would go to the village. When they went there, the boys would stay in one cabin, and the girls would stay in another with the older ladies so that they could learn from them. Here are some of the survival skills Johnson told of and learned.

WARM CLOTHING

During the spring time, people made water boots out of caribou hind legs, (diagram last page). They would skin the leg and sew the end for the toe part and add a piece on top to make it longer. Then they would stuff the skin up with a bunch of materials to stretch it, then let it dry. For the moisture that would soak up inside, people would gather dry fine grass from the places where the snow already melted. It would then be grinned up with the hands to be used as a in-sole.

In the winter or any time rabbit socks were made. They would skin the rabbit and turn it inside out. After it dried they would sew the neck part so the toe would not stick out. You could also put two rabbit skins together where you have fur inside and outside. One very important point that was mentioned was that, when you fall through the ice and you mukluks get wet. Make sure you untie them really quick or after you make the fire. If not they get real frozen and would make it hard to take the mukluks off. You might end up having to crack them open.

USING THE WEATHER

When you get up in the morning, you go outside and check the weather and there is a streak of clouds here and there it will be windy sometime during the today. Also If you see dark clouds coming from any direction, and you feel cold air from the pressure, be careful and know what direction the

wind is coming. You can use the wind to help you know which way to hunt, if the wind did not change when you started.

SAFETY ON THE ICE

When you walk on a lake, pack a short dry pole about four feet long. If you go through the ice it can help you and keep you from falling all the way under the water. It also can be used to check the thickness of the ice. If you hear water running under the ice that means it is thin. But on a lake you must use your stick, because you can not hear the water run. If you see dark snow on the ice, it means that there is an over flow in that direction. Don't go in that direction, or there is a possibility of you falling in.

Muskrat push-ups or Muskrat homes are very dangerous. If you cannot spot these houses then there is a danger that you could fall in. There is very weak ice all around it except for one place. You can spot it by the dark moss on the ice. The muskrat carries that up from the bottom of the lake to eat lunch in.

THE CAMP SITE

To build a fire when it is really cold, so cold you cant light the matches, grandparents tell them, use an ax, if you have no ax use a hatchet. Split the wood on top and make shavings. Get some spruce trees, dry bark and limbs from under the big trees. Some of them have a fur type of moss on them that can be really good to start a fire. Roll it up over the birch bark. If you do not have a ax or hatchet to chop wood. Look for the burned trees that are really easy to break off, pile that up before you start making your fire. It should last you the night. Another important thing is to always carry birch bark in your packs. Because they start fire really well.

If you are going to camp in two feet of snow, clear out the area where you are going to sit and make a fire. Pile the snow in the back. Build it up so that it can be a part of the shelter, let it taper down the sides so that it can be used as a wall. When you get the fire started, the heat can bounce off the wall and warm you. When you get the walls done you fix the floor. Use spruce boughs with fine limbs and lay them all in one direction. This will keep the person dry.

CAMPING- CARE OF TOOLS AND CLOTHING

When you walk for eight hours, your cloths are damp from your sweat. Don't dry them close to the fire. Hang your mukluks away from the fire and along with all your other clothing. If you dry them to quick, your clothing will get hard. If you try to bend them they might crack. A lot of people get frost bite because of this.

If you have a rifle. Don't lay it by the fire. If it

gets warm it will melt the snow that might have accumulated on it. When it gets cold again the water will freeze and the gun will not be able to work. A good place for it would be behind a big tree where the heat won't get to it. For protection during the night you should keep the ax or hatchet by you. Just in case a animal decides to come around.

DRINKING WATER

You should never eat snow when you get thirsty. People get sick after about two hours on the trail. To get good water, they should melt snow. They have two places they can get it. One place is from the limbs of trees. This is if they have no pot or any thing to melt the snow in. They take the chunk of snow and place it on a stick and hang it by the fire so that it can melt into a cup or wooden spoon. The other way is the snow right at the bottom two inches from the ground. This is crystalized snow and holds more water than the powder snow on top. When you melt this it produces more water.

In the summer or spring and you have no water. You should always boil your water. This kills the germs and bugs. Long ago people used to drink the water straight from the stream. But so many people got sick.

HOW TO BUILD A RAFT

You must have dry logs. They must be at least ten feet long. You put them together with cross pieces at each end. Tie them together very tight. If you don't then you will not be very comfortable.

STORIES

Johnson says that when his moms grandma was with her three little kids, a bear with her cubs came. The grandma put her kids behind her and started talking to the bear. She told the bear that she had nothing against her. Go some place else to get something to eat. The bear turned around and walked away.

Johnson's wife tells a true story about a woman who had to walk across country in the spring. She got to the river and was going to make a raft to get to the other side. She had a new born baby nearby on a bank. Never heard her baby make a noise. When she looked, there was a big animal, a big grizzly over her baby. The woman had a parka on, she untied it and took it off. The bear took one look at her and walked away.

Johnson says that now today animals are not that way anymore. Animals are crazy today. Because no one talks to them. Long ago they understood each other.

CONCLUSION

Survival was a way of life for Johnson. And the best way to learn it was to listen to a grandpa and other elders. Sometimes it was learned just from experience which was risky. From learning the signs of the skies to sewing rabbit skin socks and the knowledge of telling a story a person can pass on that knowledge.