

ANS 401-Knowledge of Native Elders
Peter and Elsie John
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Starts with how the Athabascan people teach their children. Never have anything written down so have to have a good memory to remember what to teach.

Lot of young men don't want to learn the old way - going to run into something they don't know.

Today it's easy to live with airplane, cars, boats, etc. Peter John knows about living off the country. To do this one must know the animals. Tells story of two young Native boys, he is walking ahead of - tells them he has caught a bear. They ask, "How you know?" He tells of grass on the spruce tree that the bear uses for his den. It's these kind of things that one must understand to live off the country. Tells of now when grocery store is just downtown. He used to have to travel 300 miles and it took 2 days.

They never had anything written down as it is today. They lost alot of children - no doctor or nurses.

Taught how to take care of himself and how to understand the animals. These things very important to the Athabacan way of life. Lot of young people today that don't understand this. Last people Peter John knew these things died in 1923. Nobody left now that understands it.

To go to school/college these things are hard to obtain even thoug got school here. Athabascan indian how they know about the weather - it's things like this I understand - the

snow this morning; they measured it with their snowshoes to know if they can run down a moose. You can call any kind of animal if you understand. I can call any animal, but you have to understand the animal and what to do.

Tells story: He and his wife were on a big lake on one side of it - way across the lake is a fox. He tells of how he calls the fox right over to them and then he shot it. It's things like that the Athabaskan Indian used to live by. "It's wasn't worth anything, but that's only way we know how to make a living."

When you're stuck, when you get up against it there's always a way out, never give up. You have to figure that out yourself. It's the boys that need that, if they get stuck, do something. First thing we do is look for the welfare, but that is not the way. You have somebody on your back all the time if you go to the welfare agency.

Hardest part of our life is to do things yourself. If you do it yourself, you have no boss.

Tells of when he was 15 years old and did not know how to make a sled. Asked an old man who told him to do it himself. Because to do it himself is to help himself. Young people try to be independent. By listening and doing it yourself you know your getting somewhere. Life is pretty easy right now we think, but there is a lot of problems there.

Got to work to make money, but you can make money from building a sled, or snowshoes but you have to know how to do it. You have to know what kind of trees to use. I don't use

saw, I use an ax. Tells of cutting a tree for a canoe. Can be done, but have to know how. Everything is there for young people to know how.

If you go to college - make it - don't go part way and give up. To live the Indian way have to understand animals. Learning is very important thing in your life - dont give up.

People in Minto used to go to Canada to hunt caribou for clothes. Tells of how they use to do this, women go with men etc.

Used to use fur for parka and have to kow how to get them. Tells of some kind of fur and what they were used for. When white people came, strat using clothes.

The way you try to do things and handle yourself is very important right now. Tells of working for Jimmy Duke on the steamboat.

Athabaskan culture stands for any time yu hear old people talk, you listen, try to understand them. What they say is important for the young people. By sharing what they got together - they dont sell each other anything, they just help one another. That's very important to the Athabaskan culture, but they dont do that no more. Need memory when you go to school to understand life. What little we understand today is nothing. Have to get that from the people who lived it. If not going to get it that way, not going to get anywhere. Talks of living through the depression. Anything can happen - have to be ready for it.

Tells of people moving from Minto to Beaver Creek and starving to death. Tells of hunting caribou one winter and losing his gunsight and make one out of spruce brances.

Life all depends on the way you think. Rabbit hunting without snares have to figure out how going to get it. Samething with books - you want a word to put in there have to figure out how you're going to get it.

Dont try to brag about myself. In the Athabaskan culture taught not to brag about yourself, but if something's gotta be done you do it. The way you do it is very important. Tells story of Old Minto and fishcamp and he does'nt have a fishwheel. Whiteman took him to camp and said he'd be back tomorrow to help him make one. Cant wait till tomorrow - made it all by himself, had children to feed.

When I hear old people talk this I try to be there so I can try to understand life and do what they talk about. Tells story of when moose nearly knocked him off the trail.

Tells story of hunting with young boy and they have nothing to eat. Shot two ducks for lunch. Tells of catching 110 muskrat one night because he understands the animal and how to get him.

Had young boy 13 years old that drink too much and not living today.

When you have to do something do it, know how it has to be done.

Tells story of going up the Tolovana River and getting a bear in the river, Elsie shot it. Can be done, main thing is not to get excited. I'm not brave, main thing is I just dont want to lose that bear.

If want to do something, it can be done. Way to learn is to ask questions. It is the way to help yourself, by asking questions.

We pray, I dont tell anybody to pray, it's up to the person themselves.

Mother died when 2 years, father raised him - died in 1918 and he was alone in the world.

Four tribes connected with Minto. Songs that Athabascan indians use today are over 100 years old. Some of the animal songs are 4 or 5 thousand years old. Tells of village at Chena before Fairbanks was here. All villages have an Indian name, tells some of them. Teaches grandchildren these things.

Peter asked about calling the fox - and demonstrates. Asked about looking for different kinds of trees to make different things; like snowshoes....Peter explains about the kinds of trees that are easy to work with for things like making a sled. Spruce tree is special, for when move out and the christmas tree.

Talks about the necklace from the Christmas tree - the shells used for the necklace come from the coast.

Peter John is asked about the songs, when did they use them? Have to be careful not to use medicine man songs.

Tells about caribou song and then sings the moose song that is over 5,000 years old. Tells when they sing it - when they make Indian ice cream - to give thanks to God Almighty. Sings another song. Tells story of two old people - man and wife - and singing of a song to get help. Sings another song. Tells the story of it - brother writing a song for brother that died. Sings a potlatch song. General discussion follows about different potlatch songs. "Even the sun and moon tell you what kind of weather you're going to have if you understand it."

Peter is asked about the people's relationship to bears. He explains about certain things you're not supposed to eat. In order to have a healthy family, there are certain things you're not supposed to eat. Peter explains, like today, woman is not supposed to drink alcohol, same thing...

Tries to teach his grandchildren how to grow up as a man. Important to take care of your body. Boys/men not supposed to eat certain things on a rabbit because are short-winded - tells about moose jaw, glacier water, bear-why woman can't eat bear, beaver.

Things to be careful of in this would are drink and dope - no good, not fit for anybody. It's good to understand people, it might help you in some way.

Tells story of hunting for muskrat - wife tells man not to talk about what he didn't catch.