

Abe Andrew
Native Elders
02-08-90

First Classmeeting with Peter John
on Thursday's Section

The class started off with the students introducing themselves.

Peter started by saying that a lot of people, even from lower 48, have gone to him to try to find out about Athabaskan culture. When he asks why, they say to get a degree in College. He went on saying that Athabaskan culture is dying. It's what he lived by and understands it. And now he is here to tell us of what he knows and understands about the culture. The hard part is that it is not written and not understood by many.

Then he continued about his age and how he got there. He's 90 years old, and he and his wife have been together for 65 years. The way you take care of yourself and your body is very important. Life is tough, but we have to live through it.

Education today is important for the young people. "To tell you the truth, I just went to third grade." Education is important, especially for the Land Claims. In 1964, he went down to Juneau for the Land Claims Act. He says he was offered money to settle the land, he turned it down. He concluded that money doesn't mean anything to the native people. Besides, it wouldn't last long.

Land means a lot to the Native people. To understand the land and to know it, you have to live on it. That is why he was against selling the Land. The things he went through was hard, and it's hard to talk about it now.

In 1937 school started in Minto. He went to Juneau many times concerning the Native people. Why so many Native students drop-out from school? It's hard to understand why. The things he learned was not through school, but he learned himself from the old people. he was asked in Juneau of how much land he wanted. He didn't know because he had no education. That's why education is important to the Native people, and its important for your life.

How do people get to be Chiefs? "I got to be Chief in around 1938." Before whitemen; the first whiteman seen in Minto was in 1912, the Chief was not elected. The people chose the Chief.

There are four tribes in Minto Athabaskan Indians. "Does this connect with anything in life?" Everything, that Athabaskan people did, came out of the Bible. The Chief is chosen to lead the people. People come first, not his family, and not his religion.

The way he got elected as Chief was the whiteman way, he got elected. And he got a lot of help from the whiteman in his life. But Chief Charlie got to be Chief in the old way, he died in 1923. He continued that a Chief looks after the people. Athabaskan Indians hold special roles. If someone says something against the Minto Athabaskan Indians, he stands up for them and talks back for them. "That's the way they did in the old days."

Troth-Yet is the name of the place the University is sitting on, it's the name of the hill. People used to come up to pick wild potatoes, called troth. There are 240-260 names, Indian names that connect with Minto.

Native Athabaskan Language isn't hard to learn if you want to learn it. He talk in Native language at home because he wants his children to learn the Native language.

And if you want to get ahead in life, you have to ask questions. If you want to learn, you have to ask questions. That's how he learned. "By asking questions, look where I am today." He asked questions of how to hunt, calls animals, and to trap. He concludes that he is not an expert.

You have to pay close attention to animals. They tell how the weather is going to be like. And also, you have to know what they can do and know what it's going to do.

Going back to the tribes, the things done by the tribe came from the Bible. There were stories about the flood. But how they got it is unknown. There were 12 tribes in Isreal, and there are 4 tribes in Minto. And the activities done came from the Bible, like for example: Love your neighbors and give what you can give.

How do people learn what they need to know? You learn by yourself. Nothing will fall into your lap. Something you want won't just come your way. You have to do things by yourself to learn. For example: he learned how to make a sled by doing it himself. He asked for help from an old man, but he refused saying that if he doesn't do it himself, he won't learn. You have to learn by doing things and by observing.

How do people in Minto learn from you? He gives them all the chance to learn from him, but they won't go to him. Why? Because there are too many good things in the whiteman

way that are holding them back. But he is willing to give what he knows and he is not willing to charge anything for it.

How do you prepare to go out hunting? You have to know the animal that you're going to hunt. Don't take any chances. Wild animals are dangerous. Once he nearly got knocked off a tree by a bullmoose. And you have to take care of the animal you caught. Don't waste anything.

He continued that we the students are getting something that he never had, education. He says is he had an opportunity to do the thing we are doing, he wonders what kind of a man he'd be right now. But keep up what you are doing.

"Don't try to do the things I did, I don't want to do it again." He crawled into a bear's cave at the age of nine. And went after a wounded bear with an axe. Were you afraid? "I was taught not to be afraid of anything."