

RECORDED INTERVIEW OF HOWARD LUKE  
CONDUCTED BY BILL SCHNEIDER AND CHARLES HAMBY  
IN FAIRBANKS, ALASKA  
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BILL SCHNEIDER: Okay, today is September 12, 1996. I'm Bill Schneider. Charles Hamby is here and we're working with Howard Luke and we're going to be looking at some of the plant lore and use for medicinal purposes. And this is background information that Charles is working on for his project -- master's project. And he's already gathered a great deal of information, but we want to try to focus today on how you learned these skills, and who taught you, and maybe some of the things they said about how to use them and when to use them. That sort of thing.

HOWARD LUKE: Hm mm.

BILL SCHNEIDER: So I appreciate that.

HOWARD LUKE: Well, all these things that I was taught, my mother taught me and then my uncle taught me how to do things. And I used to go around a lot of old people, you know, because I lost my dad when I was really young and in order to get something to eat, to get some meat or fish or whatever I used to go with the old people, you know, and go fishing with them, and then I get -- I get a little that way. And this is how I -- how I learned how what our herbs was, you know. They tell me about these things. Like when I cut my hand, you know, we -- them days we didn't have no band-aid, no nothing. All we had was iodine and nobody didn't want that, because it burns the heck out of you, you know. So nobody didn't -- didn't like that. They said they're -- they are trying to kill us, they said. They're not trying to cure us, so let's do it our way. So that's what they did. They did it their way and they cure one another. Like, you know, like the pitch. You see, I got some on the -- in that can right now. Soon as it thaws out, soon as it melts, you put it on your cut right now, you'll -- put it on your cu -- or something like that and you get healed up and stuff like that. I fell against the stove one time. In the corner of the stove, and they just cut right through my -- the whole thing it just -- You could just see my teeth. Yeah, they just cut right there and there's no scar on there at all, nothing.

CHARLES HAMBY: Now when you say the pitch, you talking spruce pitch?

HOWARD LUKE: Yeah, I got some in that can there now. And what my mother did was she just got pitch, and she just put that pitch in there, just filled up in there, and she put a piece of rag under that -- Rag to stick to that pitch. You got -- there's two kinds of pitch, you know. You got to use that really yellow stuff. The other one, the other brown stuff, you use that to -- to use to -- to -- like your glue, you know, like emery (Elmer's) glue. They use that on canoe. See, I got a canoe down there. You take a look at it after a while and you'll see where that brown pitch, they use that to fill up the holes and stuff like that.

CHARLES HAMBY: Okay, so the yellow pitch you'd use for like that -- ?

HOWARD LUKE: Yeah, yeah, the infection. I had infection. They cut my finger off one time and they didn't take all the stitch out. And I was way out in the flats, I was hunting muskrat, and my hand started getting -- started getting swollen up. And I look at it and it was getting infected. It was just going like this, you know, and I thought of it. I thought of it, so I just I poked it with a needle. I poked it with a needle and then I put that pitch on there. I put that pitch on there and I left it there. I put a lot of it on there. Next morning that pitch just drew that -- that stitch right out. It was sticking out when I got it. And that's what it was. So we used that all for everything.

CHARLES HAMBY: Ok. I'd like to back up for a minute. You said that your mother and your uncle taught you on how to use the plants and all. Was it where you sat and you watched them do it?

HOWARD LUKE: I watched them do it. I watched them do it. And then they told me over and over and over. So I don't forget all these things that what I'm saying that -- At night, you know, cause at night we used to run out of -- we didn't have no money to buy candles or stuff like that. So as soon as we get through supper, we used to lay on the bed and then mom would tell stories and my uncle would come visit us. My uncle was blind. And so he used to come and tell us stories and tell -- tell us things. That's how I learned how to do things. Because them days, they said they didn't want to take it with them. They wanted to leave it. They wanted me to learn that, and that's why they kept talking to me. I used to tell my mother and my uncle that, "You just told me that the other day, now you tell me again." "You never heard it." They said, "We want you to keep that." And a lot of times, my mother, when I don't pay attention, she knows that I'm not paying attention, she put a piece of rag in my ear, just like put a rag in there.

CHARLES HAMBY: So the information would stay in and not drain out the other side?

HOWARD LUKE: Yeah, it would. It'll stay there, yeah. And my uncle do the same, too. My uncle was blind, and he used to tell me stories about the plant and how to hold your luck. Gaalee'ya is our luck. You see that over there? That's the reason I call my corporation Gaalee'ya Spirit Camp. You see that weasel there? That's a Gaalee'ya. And he's the one that -- he's so fast, he tells the other animals not to go there. Not to go there. There's somebody over there with a bow and arrow or something like that. Or it's open water or something like that, you know. And so that's what we -- and he tells me story about them, see. And sometime I'm not -- I'm going like this, you know, and then fool around. And in his mind. He tell me a story about how the -- how medicine men used to do. And people don't want to make medicine, because they hurt each other. They say it's better if you -- you heal yourself. Because if you make medicine, they claim that you'll -- they hurt themselves by doing that, you know, 'cause -- At that time, they didn't say Jesus Christ or God or anything. They just say, Tanakhta (sp?). Tanakhta means "Our Father." And they said, we do that and we wouldn't go to heaven. So that's what they -- they believe in. They say, you've got to use herbs and stuff, and learn how to use that. Use it right, and you gotta believe in it. You gotta believe in yourself, otherwise it's not gonna work for you. So my uncle used to -- I used to go up there, and he know that I'm fooling around like this, you know, and how could he tell when he's blind? I go like this, you know, I

look around, and he just take that cane and he just slam it down, you know, and scared the hell out of me. So I go home and I started crying and I come home and I told mom, "I'm not going to go up there no more." I said, "Uncle is too mean." I said, "He just slammed that cane down." So she told me, she said, "You know, your uncle really loves you. He wants you to listen to him. He knows that you're not paying attention. That's why he do that. He loves you." So I went back up again and my uncle told me, I know you're going to come back. So that's -- that's how I learned, you know. I -- I learned the hard way.

CHARLES HAMBY: I had heard from several other people that there used to be rituals involved in harvesting the plants and things like that. Do you know anything of those?

HOWARD LUKE: Like putting them away, keeping them, harvesting?

CHARLES HAMBY: No, more like were there certain prayers that were offered up when the plants were harvested and used?

HOWARD LUKE: Oh yeah, they -- they do a lot of that, yeah. They do a lot of that. They used to do that a lot of that.

CHARLES HAMBY: What about nowadays? Do you know anyone that is still doing the prayer?

HOWARD LUKE: No, no, nobody does it now, hardly no. Nobody, no. No, nobody don't -- I'll tell you that's the reason why we're losing it so fast right now. We've got to continue doing these things. And I believe in that stuff. And this is why I -- I keep all this stuff right now.

CHARLES HAMBY: Well, what type of herbs do you use here?

HOWARD LUKE: Well, this one here, this one here they call it, in our -- in our language they call it tth'en-menee. And you just boil it up, you know, you boil it up and you just go like this. And you don't keep them in plastic bag or anything like that. You gotta keep them in a sack or paper bag, 'cause if you put them in a plastic bag they're gonna -- they'll sweat and it'll -- like it'll melt.

CHARLES HAMBY: Do you have what this translates to in English?

HOWARD LUKE: It's stinkweed.

CHARLES HAMBY: Ah.

HOWARD LUKE: Yeah, stinkweed. Yeah.

CHARLES HAMBY: And what would you use stinkweed for?

HOWARD LUKE: Well, you use it for everything. If you've got arthritis, you just boil it, boil that thing, boil it up. And you'll get a rag and you just put it over your leg like that or wherever -- your shoulder or put it in there. And that'll work. That'll work for you. But you've got to really believe in that otherwise they ain't gonna -- I use it pretty near all the time everytime I -- I get so bad, you know, and I give my hip in there.

CHARLES HAMBY: Okay, now you mentioned that stinkweed you use for the arthritis. Can it be used for other things like if you have a -- you pulled a muscle or something?

HOWARD LUKE: Yeah, you could use it for anything, you know, like cramp and stuff like that. You get cramp, you know, and stuff like that. Like you say, you pull your muscle or something like that, you put it back in place. But you gotta put it on real tight cloth. Them days, you know, we used to have good cloth. We used to get good wood in them days.

And that stuff just soaks right in there, you know. And they just wrap it up in there like that.

CHARLES HAMBY: Okay, now, what about using the stinkweed as a tea?

HOWARD LUKE: Well, I -- I don't know about that. I never -- I never tried that. But they got regular stuff for -- they -- I got some out here that we use it for tea. They're long and you dry them, too, just like this one. You dry them, and then whenever you want them you -- you got 'em.

CHARLES HAMBY: Ok. What other herbs and -- ?

HOWARD LUKE: And, this one is from the birch tree. And -- and if you got the flu -- and you got the flu and stuff, it's just -- it's just like a seed. You know, they come out in springtime and the seed, it's got a shell in there, shell in there, and you take this, and break it up like that. And I keep that on hand all the time. When I get flu, I use -- I use this one here. And --

CHARLES HAMBY: Now do you make this up into a tea to drink it?

HOWARD LUKE: Yeah, when you drink it, yeah. It's awful tasting stuff, but it's -- Yeah, it'll cure you, though. Any kind of a flu you got, it'll -- it'll -- it'll work for you.

CHARLES HAMBY: Okay, when you make up this into a tea, how much of it do you put into the water?

HOWARD LUKE: Well, it depends on how much water you -- how much -- how much you got. Like a -- like a dipper. You take -- You want it really strong, if you want strong coffee, what you do, you add more coffee to it?

CHARLES HAMBY: Yeah.

HOWARD LUKE: Well, it's the same thing as this one here. You put more. You put about half of this one here. Half of this here.

CHARLES HAMBY: Okay, so if you had real bad flu, you would make a strong one?

HOWARD LUKE: Yeah, mom always carried this all the time in a bottle. In a bottle. Now they got plastic and stuff and that plastic is the worst thing you can put your -- your stuff into, you know. Like your drinking water and stuff like that, you know, that plastic bottles and stuff like that. They said that's -- I don't know how people used to know that this stuff was going to come out. And they said, whatever you do, don't put it in these things like this, you know. Don't put them in there. Otherwise, it'll -- And if you want to pick herbs and stuff like that, you got to go someplace where nobody haven't been. Like, you know, where there's a lake and the water is not running? It's got more herb to it. I mean, more nourishment to it. 'Cause that water is still, you see, and it stays right there. But if you go around out here and you pick herb, it's not going to do you any good, because people walk around there and it takes the nourishment right out of it and there's nothing left.

CHARLES HAMBY: Okay. One day I was reviewing one of your tapes and you had mentioned about using rocks for healing and medicine. Do you remember that?

HOWARD LUKE: Yeah. They -- they used to do that, too. They -- they use rocks and certain kind of rocks. And it's kind of hard to get right now. There's certain kind of rocks you got to get. You put it in boiling -- you just burn that thing. You get it just hot and put it in the water, you know.

CHARLES HAMBY: Okay. Now when you got these rocks real hot and what did you do with them then? You said they were in the water. What did you do with the water? Did you drink it afterwards or --?

HOWARD LUKE: Well, a lot of people used to drink it, used to drink it. But they -- they cleaned the rocks really good at that time, because, you know, them days there was no such a thing as is germs them days. There was no germs. You and I was germs. They used to take their leaf tobacco and they passed around, go around like that, there was no germs. There was nothing.

CHARLES HAMBY: Yeah.

HOWARD LUKE: Because people believe in each other really. They believe in each other. And, but nowadays, if you do something they tell you you wash your hand or -- or -- wash a cup or something like that, you know.

CHARLES HAMBY: Do you know what type of rocks were used?

HOWARD LUKE: It was certain kind of rocks. It's a red rock. It's a red rock.

CHARLES HAMBY: Did these red rocks come from any place special?

HOWARD LUKE: Especially, yeah, especially, they -- I find them up at Novi (Nowitna River). Up there. It's just like -- What they call them? I can't think of the name. It's not like Gallo (sp?). Not like Gallo. It's uh -- I can't think of the name of it, anyway. It's all different colors and they come from way out in the hills. In springtime, they come down

CHARLES HAMBY: Hm. In the springtime, these rocks --?

HOWARD LUKE: Yeah, they come down in the -- in the rivers, you know. Like they come from the hills. You find them up the Novi up there

CHARLES HAMBY: Were these rocks -- around--?

HOWARD LUKE: No, they come up there. They come -- Yeah, they -- No, they come in all different -- They're hard. You can't chip them nothing.

CHARLES HAMBY: Okay. What other type of herbs do you know of being used?

HOWARD LUKE: Well, you see them spruce trees out there.

CHARLES HAMBY: Yes.

HOWARD LUKE: You take that spruce. Would you take that little can off there? Yeah, set it someplace. It's -- it's -- You see you take the bark off that and you take the bark off. You take the bark off and inside there there's a skin about this big, this much, and you take that skin off. In the wintertime, you put it by stove and you let it thaw out and you -- and you dice it up. You can get 'em right now and you dice 'em up and you put 'em in the bag like that. And if you've got a flu or something like that, you drink that. You drink that two times a day. And I'll tell you, it -- nothing would bother you.

CHARLES HAMBY: Okay. I had also listened to several tapes and they mentioned that they had used plants for treating tuberculosis, TB.

HOWARD LUKE: Yeah.

CHARLES HAMBY: Are you aware of any plants?

HOWARD LUKE: They say that you go way up on a high mountains up there and they -- and they -- That's where they get 'em.

CHARLES HAMBY: Do you happen to know what type of plants they are?

HOWARD LUKE: No really, I don't know. 'Cause I -- that I didn't -- Like I say, you know, right now, at that time I didn't pay much attention. You know, I thought I knew it all, so I just left it out, you know, and I never paid attention to it. But as I was growing early, I raced with a guy way back in 1940 -- in '45, I believe. His name was Walter -- Walter John. He's from Stevens Village. And they couldn't do nothin' to him. He had TB. He had TB, so he went -- he went out and he put up a tent right up on the mountain where nobody don't go, and he stayed up there for two months they claim. He stayed up there and he used that herb and he came back and got his health back again.

CHARLES HAMBY: Okay. I had read somewhere that they had used spruce -- spruce pitch for people who had cataracts in their eyes.

HOWARD LUKE: Oh yeah, they -- they do that, too, yeah. Well, that stuff, that stinkweed?

CHARLES HAMBY: Yes.

HOWARD LUKE: They use that too for their eye.

CHARLES HAMBY: Okay. If you make --

HOWARD LUKE: You -- you just boil it up and then you put that piece of rag and you put it in your eye. 'Cause mama had bum eye all the time. She had one -- one side bum eye, so she used that all the time.

CHARLES HAMBY: Okay. Using the different plants and herbs for medicine, can it also be used to treat your dogs or is this medicine just for humans?

HOWARD LUKE: No, it's for dogs, too. You can use it for human too. 'Cause that dog there, you know, I had a fish hook. You know, one of them fish hook. You know, for a pike. It was this long. It was hanging there and like I say, you know, he jumped up and after squirrel, and he just cut -- got it in, went right up in -- It was just little of it sticking out. Went right up in here.

BILL SCHNEIDER: Cut the paw?

HOWARD LUKE: Yeah, cut it. It went right up in here. So I just took a razor. I had another fella with me. I took a razor and I just cut it right out there and pulled the hook out. That dog never moved, nothing. I put that pitch in there. I put that pitch, and then I tie it up like this. Tie it really tight. And couple days, I think -- Right now you look at that thing, he's got no mark on the thing. So you -- you can use it. You can use it on the animal, too. All those things, so --

CHARLES HAMBY: Okay. I had also been reading that when contact occurred, when the first white men came in, they introduced a lot of different diseases and all. Have you ever heard stories of what herbs or plants were used to combat or treat these new diseases brought in?

HOWARD LUKE: Well, at that time really, you know, all them stories come from -- were given. Were given. Were given. You know, where that is, that's Tanana. That's Tanana. All them stories come from there. 'Cause that's where the first white -- white people came when they came down there. And they claim that's when the germs started spreading right there. You know, when they were putting the telegraph line? So they were -- they were coming up this way, and the soldiers was the one that was doing that. So they -- that's when they -- they said, you know, that -- they says some fella cut his hand. Cut his hand. And he had a friend, one of -- one of them soldiers, he got to be his best -- best friend. So

he -- he gave him that iodine. You know, he give him that iodine. And you don't see that no more now, but in them days you used iodine, you know. And they put the iodine and that fellow started screaming or -- It make anybody scream, put that whole bottle of iodine on them. And that's when they -- they says, "No, we -- we can't use that stuff, you know." They say they are trying to kill us, they says. And that -- and that's -- it's true right now, you know. I started thinking about them things right today, what they're -- they're doing. 'Cause my doctor up there, you know, my hip was going out on me and I thought he was going to operate on me, you know. And he told me if it gets bad, he says, 'Oh, we're going to have to do something about it. We're going to have to operate on you.' So I took some of that pitch with me. I told him -- I told him to -- In case you're going to operate on me, I said, "I don't want you to stitch me." I tell him, I say, "You see this pitch I got here." I tell him, "This is the one I want you to use on it. I don't want no stitches."

CHARLES HAMBY: Okay. Do you know of any stories of Native medicine and modern day medicine being combined to work? You just gave me one example of if you had had to have the surgery, he would've used the pitch instead of stitching.

HOWARD LUKE: Hm mm. Hm mm.

CHARLES HAMBY: Is there any other stories or methods like that?

HOWARD LUKE: Well, like a -- like a flu, you know, and stuff like that, you know. And those things that -- I mean that if you believe in them it'll help you. It'll help you, but you got to believe in those stuff, you know. And this what I'm trying to tell people right now, doctors is not -- is not everything, you know. 'Cause them days, they can cut you open, they can heal you up. But that fella just got it -- he's just like a doctor, you know. He's just got to know how to do that. My mother used to be a half -- halfway doctor. She used to go around the village and she used to poke people. I used to watch mom. Like when I was a little kid, I used to go around with mom when they got headache or something like that. They got headache or their breasts started bothering them, started swirling up like that. She knows just where it is. She just feel around the head like this, and like that, and the breast, she just could feel it and she could feel that lump in there. And that's what it is, you know, that stuff in there. And she just burned that knife. Burn it red hot and -- and just poked on people. That's what it is, you know. It's that stuff just going like this inside. No wonder if this driving you -- driving you nuts, you know. I seen mom do that, and she had lot of nerve. Right, today, if I had to do it, I believe I can do it. 'Cause I see mom, how she does it.

CHARLES HAMBY: Now, would she poke in deep or would you just --

HOWARD LUKE: No, just -- just a little bit. Yeah, just a little bit, so that stuff will come out. And that stuff will come out and you could see that thing just come out in balls like -- And that's what it is. It's just that -- it's a headache, you know, and that stuff just started -- just like infection, you know. Like infection. Your breast gets infection, you know, that yellow stuff, it just going like -- it's going like that. It's all that rotten blood, just like that. And that's what it is. My mother used to go around and poke people. So I learned that from my mother 'cause I used to go around with her. And my mother's mom used to be one of the greatest medicine woman there was, because she's the one that taught mom

how to do these things, you know. Mom wasn't no medicine woman or nothing, but I mean she knew how to do these things. She could tell you how to believe in it, you know.  
CHARLES HAMBY: Okay. Earlier you had mentioned that people aren't using plants and herbs for medicine anymore. A lot of this knowledge is being lost.

HOWARD LUKE: Yeah. Yes it is.

CHARLES HAMBY: Do you find that more people are going to western medicine? Finding it's easier to use western medicine?

HOWARD LUKE: Yeah, I believe so. I believe so. They -- they believe it in themselves, you know. Just -- just like I'm saying, you know, that we have to teach our kids the modern way. Right now we're trying to keep up our culture, and now the older people down there now they says, "No, we can't do it. We got to follow them." But I'm saying no, we can't follow them, because if depression comes really hard, we're going to have to do -- we're going to go back to these things. And I'll tell you what I'm telling them right now. I said, "My dollar will be worth more than your dollar, because I -- I got the knowhow." And I'm telling people that right today. But no, they say, "We have to follow them." But one of these days you'll be stuck way out in the country out there and how are you going to go get a doctor? How are you going to notify people and stuff like that, you know. And I -- I believe in traditional way lots, 'cause, you know, owl used to carry message to us. Going to tell you if that person's going to pass away or one of your family is going to pass away or something like that. Or you're going to fall in the water or -- or it's going to be hard times. And that owl will carry message to us and tell us. And I still -- I still pay attention to that yet. Whenever I hear owl, I go out and I -- I listen to him. I can understand them.

CHARLES HAMBY: Earlier you mentioned that you learned from your uncle on how to use plants and all and that your uncle was blind.

Yeah.

CHARLES HAMBY: Was there any medicine that could be used for your uncle and his blindness?

HOWARD LUKE: He didn't -- he didn't want to do. He didn't want to do it. They wanted him to do it. You know, bring his eyesight backwards. He says that's what my father wanted me to be and this is the way I want to be. He said, "I don't want to be -- I don't want to be changed," he said.

CHARLES HAMBY: Do you know what medicines they would've used?

HOWARD LUKE: They probably use that stuff there.

CHARLES HAMBY: You mean the stinkweed?

HOWARD LUKE: Yeah, the stinkweed. They probably use that there. Yeah.

CHARLES HAMBY: Okay.

HOWARD LUKE: And they use all these -- You see these spruce needles, they use that stuff there, too. They boil that up, they drink it, and you put it on your soreness or they use it for a lot of things. A lot of different things. But mostly that herb, they use that -- that stinkweed. They use a lot of that stuff. And there's another plant you get on a -- on a lake or dead water. They're about this big. And they float. They're floating up on top -- on top

of the water. They come from the lake. And those are the strongest herb there is. If you want to get with some really strong stuff.

CHARLES HAMBY: This plant that comes up out of the lake, do you have a name for it?

HOWARD LUKE: No, they just call it -- just -- they just say tth'en-menee. It means stinkweed.

CHARLES HAMBY: Okay.

BILL SCHNEIDER: Howard, can you tell us more about your mother's mother? You said she was a great medicine woman.

HOWARD LUKE: Hm mm.

BILL SCHNEIDER: How do you remember her?

HOWARD LUKE: I don't remember. I remember her just a little bit, but then that's -- And not that much, because grandma used to be -- used to be awful protector. Don't want you to do that. Keep your house clean, have your door -- Don't let your -- your sleeping blanket, take 'em out every day. You see I take my blanket out every day. I don't sleep in that. That carries that thing and you change your -- it gives you good luck and you'll smell better. You go back in the same bed like that, you'll never -- you'll never be the same. You'll go the other way. You're not going to believe in -- And all those stuff, she tells me. She told mom to -- to pass these on, you know. I remember little of her, that's all.

BILL SCHNEIDER: How about traveling with your mother when she was doctoring people? You mentioned that you went with your mother sometimes.

HOWARD LUKE: Yeah, well there was a village. You know, there was big vil -- Nenana used to be a big village one time, and they used to -- they used to just send for her, you know. They used send for whatever was another place and they used to just send for her. There was people like that all over, but they didn't -- they were afraid of themselves, you know. But mom didn't. Mom wasn't. She believed in herself and she know that she could -- she could do it, you know. But a lot of people say, they -- they said they had one in Minto one time, but she was afraid to do it. She didn't believe in herself. She's afraid that she's going to ruin that -- that person, you know.

BILL SCHNEIDER: What do you think gave your mother that type of strength?

HOWARD LUKE: Well, from grandma. From grandma, grandmother's -- grandma and grandpa's the one that gave her the strength to do that, 'cause grandma was a great medicine woman, you know. Only medicine woman there was. And they had another one, but that one down river that -- But that one there, they didn't -- they didn't talk about much, but they talk about my grandma mostly. Like how strong she was. And she's the one that carried the message, you know. Is try to tell people you got to continue doing this and this is what mom kept, continue doing this, you know. My mother used to go around with my auntie. You know, go visit people. And my auntie and them was a lot younger than -- than mom. So as soon as they come in the house down there, she tell -- tell my auntie and them, she says, "Don't sit around. Sweep the floor, wash your dishes, wash his clothes." Mom was the boss, so, you know -- and that was the message, you know, that way -- that way you'll be in good health.

Because, you know, I -- I always think of this. You know, when I shot my finger off and when I had my heart attack and when I went through the river, I know that I did

something once when I -- when I was young to help that one person and he's the one that gave me the wisdom and gave me the power to say what I'm saying to you right now. 'Cause when I went down -- when I went in the river down there, I never got scared or nothing. I just thought about my dad, how he got drowned. And, you know, how fast that current is going. It could have just took us right down there, but seems like when the current come down to us, it just went around us like that. And it goes to show you that something is watching over me. That I did something in my -- in my young days to help that old lady or that old man, 'cause when I was going to school from home, you know. School, I didn't get much school. Anyway, I miss schooled for two days. You know, I tell Mom, "I want to just come back." And she was happy. "So what you learn?" I said, "Lots." So one day the teacher came down and told mom, he said, "What's the matter? Your son never showed up from school for two days?" And she said, "I don't know." She says, "Wait, I want to talk to him," she says. So she left and he went down and sat down and talked to me and told me, she said, "How come you lie to me?" She said, our Father ain't going to take you when you lie like that." She says, you got to sit down and tell me the truth right now," she says. So I told her. I told her, I said, "I see some old lady, old man up there that used -- above the village there. They were cutting wood and they were really old. So I just went and I started helping them cutting wood," I said. And I pack water for them and I stay with 'em all day. And I know when it's time to come home, so I come home, I says. And I've been doing that the last two days. So she just -- she just told me, "Thank you." She says, "Thank you. You did something right right there. One of these days," she says, "that them old people will give you the wisdom to do these things."

And that's what I'm telling you right now. If I didn't do that, I wouldn't tell you these things, you know. And it's good that I carry these things. I remember all these things, you know. But now it's like I get disgusted once in a while, you know, when I -- when I talk to people, you know, on the school or something like that, they're not paying attention, and, you know, it's just like going out there talking to a stump, you know. Just like I say, you know, when we make speech, you know, a lot of people have to have their piece of paper and they have to read it and I tell 'em, no, that's -- that's dishonest when you're doing that. When you're talking, you got to talk from your heart and that way people will believe you, you know.

BILL SCHNEIDER: What I hear you saying is that -- that you received a blessing.

HOWARD LUKE: Hm mm.

BILL SCHNEIDER: From those old people.

HOWARD LUKE: From old people, yeah. They -- they really prayed over me and they -- they really gave me the wisdom. They say, "He's the one that's going to be listened, so let's -- let's protect him." What mom told me. She said, "You've done right when you did that," she says,

So those are the things I say, you know. If -- if they have people come in and some old lady come over, some old lady come in there and all young people sitting around down there and the old lady got no place to sit down, nothing, just stand in there. One of them young people come over and lead him over to the chair and make him sit down. That's giving

his wisdom right there. He wanted to thank -- thank the Lord, you know, for what he's done, you know. Forgive him. 'Cause I know I -- I was forgiven for a lot of things that I did. And I know I did lot of things I shouldn't have did.

BILL SCHNEIDER: So the -- the -- couple things I've heard is getting that wisdom from the -- from the older people because of -- because of your sharing with them, your work with them.

HOWARD LUKE: Hm mm.

BILL SCHNEIDER: And your mother reinforcing that?

HOWARD LUKE: Hm mm. She really pushed me forward. She told me that's the only way if you want to be safe. If you want to look for, like, good weather ahead. Like a good weather ahead, you'll -- you'll -- you'll always be one step ahead of one of these. She said you're going to be doing good all your -- all your coming as you're growing older.

BILL SCHNEIDER: The other thing I -- I heard you say earlier was that when your father died, you had to go out with the older people.

HOWARD LUKE: Hm mm.

BILL SCHNEIDER: And you had to get food.

HOWARD LUKE: Yeah.

BILL SCHNEIDER: And so you had to learn?

HOWARD LUKE: Yeah, I had to learn.

And so in a sense, they helped raise you?

HOWARD LUKE: Yeah, they helped me raise me as I was going. 'Cause, you know, I traveled all over like this fella Jan just told me that they kind of miss me down there for that potlatch they had down there. And I -- I learned one heck of a lot from that old fella down there in Haines down there.

BILL SCHNEIDER: Austin Hammond?

HOWARD LUKE: Austin Hammond. I learned one heck of a lot. He told me story about the flood that they had at one time. And he told me the story about when it was desert in Alaska. He told me all them stories. So you see I -- I've learned from a lot -- lot of different people. And I -- I'm kind of happy I did in a way, you know.

But a lot of ways, you know, like I -- I tell people right now, you know, that -- I tell 'em, "You back up now a little bit." I tell them, I says, "When you're talking to me," I say, "I want you to use some common sense." I says, "Don't -- don't lift up and try to be higher than the other. You want to stay down there." Like if I'm talking, I -- I don't want to be right up there. I'm uncomfortable. If I'm gonna make speech to people, I want to be down there with these people. Because I'm up there, I'm uncomfortable. Because people are thinking, "Geez, he's way up there. Who in the hell he think he is?" That's what I think, you know. And that's what people say all the time them days when they talked, you know. They want to be right there and right in the middle of the people and sit down and talk with the people. So these are the things that I want to -- I strongly want to leave behind, you know. And I think in time to come, this thing is going to come in handy, 'cause this thing is not going to be forever. It's -- it's happening right today, like our water

running out and they're cutting all our timbers off and stuff like that. Now they're going to put that new line coming over by Bonifield. And I'm against that, you know. That's --

BILL SCHNEIDER: Yeah. It seems that you, in your life, that you've been blessed with luck.

HOWARD LUKE: Yes, yes, yes, yes. 'Cause I -- I don't want to be around -- All my life, as I always growing up, I wanted to be around the older people all the time. I didn't go around with my -- my kids. I mean the teenagers and stuff like that. I was alone all the time. I was going with the old people all the time. I was doing something for them all the time, and that's what -- that's what blessed me. You know, I mean, that -- they gave me their power to do these things. Because my mother told me before she passed away, "One of these days that you're going to be doing some great things. You're going to be -- be talking to -- to bigger people and you're going to be traveling," she says. And I told her, "How -- how do you know these things?." I said. "How do you know I'm going to travel? I got no money," I says. She was right, she -- And I -- I did a lot of traveling in my life and I didn't think I was going to be traveling to these things and talking to -- to bigger people, you know. But these things we have to -- we have to carry on, you know. We have to carry on and keep pushing it. Otherwise -- otherwise we -- we're going to lose everything. They're -- they're doing it now.

CHARLES HAMBY: I do have one other question.

HOWARD LUKE: Hm mm.

CHARLES HAMBY: When we had been talking on the plants to being used for medicine, who did most of the treating for wounds, injuries? Was -- Did men and women do it equally or was it more of a woman thing to do?

HOWARD LUKE: Well, it was mostly women's. Mostly women's did that. See the men's -- men send their -- their share. But a lot of men's did women's work, too, so that way they -- they share with one another. But mostly women's did all these about these herbs and stuff, you know.

CHARLES HAMBY: So it was mostly women's who did it, but there were some men?

HOWARD LUKE: Yeah. Yeah, some men. There were some men that did that, because just like today I hear a lot of people says, "That's -- that's woman's job. You shouldn't be doing that. You shouldn't be cooking. You shouldn't be washing -- washing dishes." And I says, "No." I says, "That's -- let's -- let's be equal, you know." And divide. Or, you know, we're -- let's pitch -- work together. And that way things will -- will come to us, you know.

CHARLES HAMBY: In a village or in an area where there's -- was there usually one person who used the plants and herbs or was it each household?

HOWARD LUKE: Well, when they get a -- they usually pick 'em more, like I say, you know, you got to go where nobody had been around. And when they're out hunting, they just pick 'em right there. They pick 'em there. And sometimes when there's a whole bunch they mark it, they blaze it. And then they -- they tell their -- their people to go there, you know. And that's where the herbs are. 'Cause them days was hard. They were hard to come by.

CHARLES HAMBY: So what you're saying is both men and women would pick the herbs and they knew which ones to look for.

HOWARD LUKE: Yeah, uh huh. They know what kind to look for, 'cause you can't go where there's running water. You got to go where the water is still, like a lake. You know, it's not running or nothing like that. You got to go on there and it -- it hold the nourishment. It's just like if I'm going to build a sled right today, I can tell you if it's a good birch or a bum birch. When I was younger, I had to go and test them. It takes me a whole day to find. Now I can just go out and I look at it, and I can tell you, yeah, that's the kind of birch. And you got to get the right kind, the right kind of birch. You can't get it too big. He's too old. He lost his strength. If you get 'em too young, too small, he's too young, he ain't got his strength. You got to get the right kind.

And it's just like if you're out in wintertime, you want to -- you want to drink water, and you want to eat snow. So you grab that snow on top, that'll cut your thirst down. Yeah, it'll cut your thirst down. But that snow up on top, it's too fresh. They got no nourishment. It's just like little baby. It'll work through your body and they just get you so weak. If you want to eat snow, you take that bottom one, that one that got the nourishment. And that's when you want to make -- make your tea or your water or whatever. You use that one. That's why right today people just give up. I was walking with a fella the other day. Bob. We went down river down here and right on -- we walked twelve miles, and I was in good health. And it was getting dark. Every once in a while he tell me, "Howard, you know where you're going?" I said, "Yeah, I know where I'm going." And there was an old cabin there and he went in there. I told him, "Come on, Bob. we --" "Just another mile," I said. "We'll run into the -- Debbie and Luther (?) live down there." "No," he said, "Howard, I'm going to stop for a while." And it was getting dark, you know, so I just kept on walking. And so I went down to Virgil and them. It was 12 o'clock, midnight, you know. And they were just going to bed, and I come and they said, "What you doing?" I said, "Our car broke down. So we started walking," I says. And he said, "You alone?" "No," I said, "There's Bob over there." Bob Keller. Bob Keller. You know, Bob Keller? Anyway, I say, "He's -- he's over there in that old cabin," I say. "He went inside," I says. And I said, "Go over and get him." So he went in there.

You see, that's what they do. They give up. They give up. When you give up like that, you lose your strength, you know. Just like if you fall in water, if you get your feet wet, the worst thing you can do is rinse your -- or take your socks off and rinse your socks out. That's the worst thing you can do. You leave that stuff in there and you put snow over it, and it'll insulate itself. You have water in there, that stuff, will -- it'll take the moisture and keep you warm. That's how come a lot of people freeze their foot. They step in that water and then they rinse their socks off, you know. And that stuff like that. And that's what I try to tell people, 'cause I've -- I've been there, but nowadays people don't want to listen. And that snow is a bad one. There was a friend of mine one time, he went trapping with me and were -- we had about two more miles to go to our sled, you know. And he was eating snow all the time. I forgot to tell him about that. And he just gave up. He gave up right on the -- He said, "Go ahead and go home. Tell my wife I'll be there tomorrow." I went back and he just gave up. He just left the -- And I thought of it. I said, "You've

been eating snow, huh?" He said, Yeah, Howard." He said, "I got so thirsty," he says. "Now," he said, "I'm so weak I can't move." So I tell him, "You just stay here. Just stay there." It was in springtime, you know. "You just stay here. And I'm gonna walk back to the dogs." And I did and I went back and I got the dogs and came and pick him up. And that's what it is, you know. You -- you give up. That stuff is -- It's got no nourishment in there. Anything, like your -- like your water, you know. If you get in a lake where you want to -- there's dead water and it's got a taste on it. Got awful taste on it. You got to boil that stuff before you drink it. And always chew on willow or something like that. They cut your thirst down to anything, you know. They'll cut your thirst down. Oh, there's a lot of things I can sit here days and tell you about these things.

BILL SCHNEIDER: I wanted to return to your mom and thinking about the book and thinking about ways of incorporating that information. Could you describe the respect that people had for your mom?

HOWARD LUKE: Well, mom, they really believe them. You know, them days, you know, when you're a widow -- is a widow, you know. Got no husband or nothing. And people used to -- used to get in together and -- and help each other. Like if we didn't -- One time was in Nenana, and my stepdad got sick. He couldn't do nothing, you know. He had pneumonia them days. They couldn't do none for him. They tried everything, you know, and they couldn't do nothing for him. So them days, they had a chief. They used to have a chief. And that chief used to go around the village all the time, you know. And he used to get little of this one, little of this one, and little of that. If nobody didn't have nothing, these people didn't have nothing, they all go out there and they cut wood for you, and they do a lot of things. And -- and that's what they did. They did that for mom. Mom had all kind of grub and a lot of wood, and I had -- we can have lights and stuff like that. We was so poor, you know. And they respect her for that, because they respect grandma. They -- they knew what grandma did at one time.

Grandma used to help a lot of -- a lot of people at one time, you know. 'Cause she was so strong. I mean they -- they call her the bear killer, you know, 'cause she killed a bear with a ax. They were moving, you know. At that time there was no -- no game. So they were just following the game, you know. Wherever there was a game, they stopped there. They see moose track, they just make camp right there and they just stay there. And the men started going. So grandma was walking way behind. Mom was saying, she was walking way behind. And she had some bunch of little pups was running with her. And them little pups, they started smelling something. They started smelling something. So she just took time off and them pups just started smelling. They smell and they started digging. Started digging. So she went over there. It was a little hump, a little hump there. She went over there and she wouldn't let this -- and shovel with her snowshoes. Take the snow out. And sure enough there was -- there was a bear den there. And she seen it was alive. Because she could tell that warm -- You could tell. I could tell you if -- if there's a bear den -- a bear in that den right today, by the frost. So she knew that. And first thing she did, you get a long stick, you know, 'cause sometimes that bear, he can fool you. He can dig down this way and you'll be poking over him this way. And sometime he'll go this way. So you

always want to get a stick that'll -- it's strong, you know, and it's got a bend on there so you can just drag it. And that's what she did. She poked that bear and she'd sit up there. That bear move. That bear move. So she knew there was a bear. She had a little hatchet and she just stood on top there and clubbed that bear with the thing. How come they call her the bear killer. So those are why people really respect mom. On account of grandma.

Grandma used to help a lot of -- a lot of people, you know. And give them -- tell them not to go there. This is what's going to happen. So be careful, she'd tell people. People used to -- used to look after one another, you know. They -- they had a leader that they listened to. Right today, you know, if I'm talking right now, they can just tell me, "Oh hell, he just -- he just talk. He just -- " And that's why I -- I say today, you know, people don't -- don't want to listen. And it's bound to happen. And I -- I strongly believe in that right today, 'cause you see how I live right now. I -- I got all these things ready. If I need them, I got 'em. And always have big wood pile in front of your house. That's what they say. And always watch out for your -- your -- your friend, you know, and share with them. The more you share with one another, the -- the more power they'll give you. You share with one another. But right now, you know, like I say, you know, the dollar is not everything, you know. You and I -- you and I are the one who got to watch out for one another, 'cause I no more get through talking to you and you walk out the door and you keel over. But that dollar will be still there yet. You follow me?

BILL SCHNEIDER: Hm mm.

HOWARD LUKE: Good.

BILL SCHNEIDER: Any more, Charles?

CHARLES HAMBY: That's all I had. Thank you very much.

HOWARD LUKE: Yeah. Yeah, this is why, is people get excited, you know. Get excited too fast, you know. Like when I shot my finger off, I -- walking back here, it happened right here, you know. And I thought it was -- it was in falltime, just like this -- this month here, just before closing season. So I heard a moose hollering back there. So early morning, I'm going to go back there. That moose would be there, 'cause I -- I called that night, you know, so he'd be back. So I had a brand new .30.30. Brand new one. You see that old .30.30, that's older than I am. That's been passed down. Chief Thomas used to have that gun and his son had that gun. And that barrel is just as good as new. You put the shell in there, it just tight. So I was walking back and I carried that gun like this. You know, I carry a gun like that all the time. My -- holding my finger like this on the -- in the barrel like that.

BILL SCHNEIDER: Barrel down?

HOWARD LUKE: Hm-mm, barrel down, like that, you know. And I was walking the level. Just -- it's just level out here. I never tripped or nothing. And all at once I heard a shot. I heard a shot. See, I turned around. I said, "Quit fooling around. Come on out," I says. I thought somebody shot, you know. And nobody come out. So I walked a little more and I said, "Come on out. Quit fooling around." It was getting late and nobody showed up. So I started walking. I look at my hand, my finger was hanging down. My gloves. I had gloves on and the gloves were hanging down down. I should've -- I never thought, you know,

things happen. I could have got scissor and I could have just cut it off, 'cause it just little of it hanging right there. And I never got excited, nothing. It didn't bother me. I didn't feel it. I didn't have no -- no feeling at all, you know. 'Cause, you know, there's someone's watching out for me. So I didn't get scared. People get excited, you know. So right away I -- I got a piece of rope, you know, and I tied around that. I tied it really tight. I just twisted, you know. Hurt, but --

And airboat come by there. And as much as I hated airboat, here comes these guys. And these guys are from -- from Colorado. They just came in. They just -- Been there just two weeks. So I waved them down. I had a big motor. But that time, you have to pull those, you know. A 22 Evinrude. And I couldn't pull it with my left handed. So, I just stand out there and they wave. I waved and they came and picked me up, and they took me to town. And they knew what to do. These tied me up like this and -- look at me. And I got to town, I come to and it started bothering me. And that's when I said, you know, that somebody was watching over me, you know. That they did this. And the people never knew nothing. They got all -- they got all excited. When they see my finger hanging down there, they -- they almost fainted. The guy was just going like this. He said, going up. And I didn't know nothing about it, because I was just running down when they're going up. So those are the things, you know, that people never get excited. There's always a way. Always a way. This is why I says people have got to watch out for each other and share with each other.

BILL SCHNEIDER: Okay. Thank you.