

*Mendees Cheeg Naltsiin
Keyh'*

An Oral History
of the People of Healy
Lake Village

Annotated and edited by Donald G. Callaway
and Constance A. Miller-Friend

Ellen Demit



Bill
Thank you
for all your
help and
support
over the years.
I always
enjoyed working
with you.
Dan.

Mendees Cheeg Naltsiin Keey
**The People of Healy Lake
Village**
An Oral History
dedicated to all the
generations of people of Healy
Lake Village.

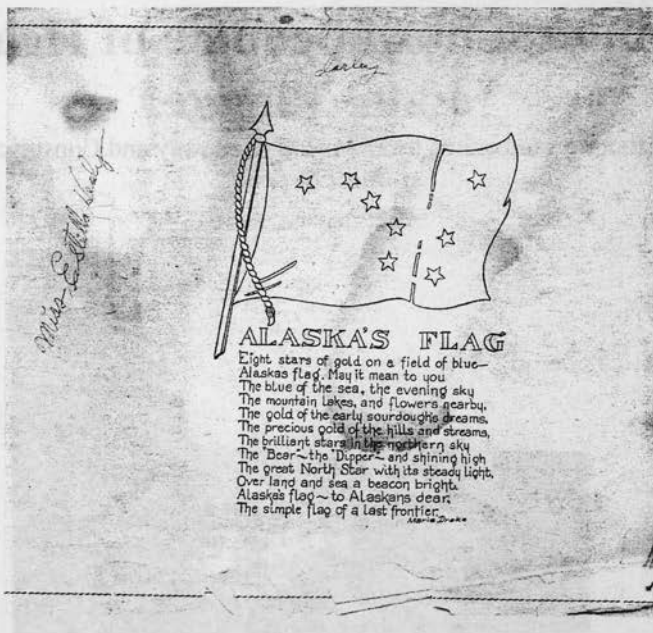
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Healy Lake Village circa 1939



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Below: first page from Stella Healy's autograph and picture album from her high school days at Mt. Edgecomb boarding school in Sitka, Alaska



Abbreviated Genealogy

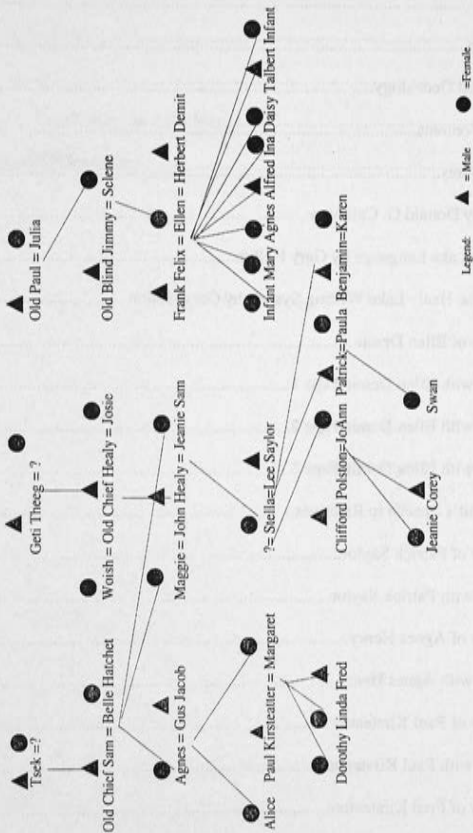


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Healy Lake

Forward:

In 1997 the community of Healy Lake presented a proposal to the National Park Service (NPS) requesting "resident zone status" for their community. Under current NPS regulations all residents of a resident zone community are granted eligibility (in conjunction with other determinations) to harvest wildlife resources within park boundaries. To achieve resident zone status Healy Lake needed to demonstrate a historic and customary use of wildlife resources within the boundaries of Wrangell-St. Elias national park. For Healy Lake, which is dependent on a subsistence lifestyle, eligibility to hunt and fish in the northern part of Wrangell-St. Elias would be of considerable benefit. For example, some parts of their traditional use area have been impacted by incorporation within an air force gunnery range while in other parts of their traditional home range they face considerable competition from sports hunters. Thus the park by excluding non-eligible users provides special protection for the continuance of their traditional lifestyle.

In order to analyze and respond to Healy Lake's request Don Callaway, Senior Anthropologist for the Alaska Systems Support Office (AKSO), and Connie Friend, who was then liaison for the Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC), collected community histories, genealogies and key informant interviews in the Upper Tanana and Ahtna regions. The analysis also relied on public testimony taken and recorded at Healy Lake and early census and ethno-historical data that was recommended and distilled by Bill Simeone of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. In addition, key diaries and written recollections, principally by Lee Saylor, provided invaluable insight into the structure of the community during the last several decades.

It was during this process that conversations with elders and traditional council members indicated the strong need for the preservation of memories and experiences from the residents of Healy Lake, principally through the means of oral histories.

A grant was written to the Alaska Humanities Forum to cover the expenses of conducting such oral histories. These expenses, principally for informant fees and transcription costs, were kindly supplied by the Forum under one of their small grants. Callaway's labor and travel expenses were borne by the NPS, while much of Ms. Friend's time was contributed by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, Tetlin Refuge where she now works as a liaison.

Elders and other informants were paid for their services. In addition they signed an informed consent protocol, which allowed us to publish their contributions in this format or for scientific venues. This signed protocol also reserved, for them, their copyright and intellectual property right in any commercial use of this material.

Connie Friend transcribed all of the oral history tapes. In the case of the elder Ellen Demit, Ms. Friend decided to alter the format into more of a free form presentation that includes some grammatical editing for ease of reading. We, and others believe this approach captures more fully the cadence and meaning of Ellen's testimony. Very special thanks also need to be made to Gary Holton of the Alaska Native Language Center at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks for doing all of the translation, transliteration and editing of the Athabascan segments in this oral

history testimony .Thanks to Ed Merritt, Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge Manager who allowed countless trips to Healy Lake and work hours to Ms. Friend for the project, and lastly to Melinda Rallo whose unfailing support and expertise were fundamentally essential to the publication, to Aleta Lavender, Karyn Barnett, Laura Whitehouse and Chuck Ardizzone in the US Fish and Wildlife Service for assistance in editing and publishing the transcripts.

Don Callaway
Anchorage, Alaska
August, 2001.

Healy Lake, Historic Overview:

The following brief chronology of Healy Lake is provided as a structure to help the reader to place the events of people's lives in an organized temporal context.

Healy Lake prior to the 20th Century:

The archeological record revealed at Healy Lake indicates that this site provides the best evidence for observing the development of an Athabascan tradition within the state of Alaska (Cook 1969). Fred Kirsteater, who found the original lithics that sparked the archeological investigation, speaks of his contribution to this discovery in his oral history. Based on radiocarbon chronology this community and its environs represent perhaps 11,000 years of continuous occupation. Underlying substrata reveal microblades, "Campus-type cores", and lanceolate projectile points (Griffen 1990).

At the time of contact with western culture the inhabitants of Healy Lake were hunters and gatherers dependent upon a seasonal migration pattern that began with the harvest of freshwater fish and occasionally Copper River salmon in the early spring and summer (with ice-fishing in mid-winter), whitefish in the late summer and fall, sheep and bear in the fall, caribou in the fall and winter and moose throughout the year. Other species such as waterfowl, furbearers and vegetable foods were taken when seasonally available. Traditional settlements consisted of winter villages with well-built, semi-subterranean multi-family structures while in the spring, summer and fall nuclear or extended families would split from the winter settlement and set up temporary camps to harvest the seasonally available subsistence resources.

A set of interrelated local families obtained a "band" identity by the sustained use of a particular territorial range over several generations. The Healy River-Joseph band was informally recognized to utilize a section of land of about 3,000 square miles.¹ On the northern boundary of their band territory was the "village" of Joseph, a seasonal caribou hunting camp about 50 miles northeast of Healy Lake. Healy Lake "residents" would often over-winter in Joseph and subsist on dried caribou that had been taken in great numbers by the use of fences when the animals migrated south. Kechumstuk (about 30 miles southeast of Joseph) served a similar function for Mansfield Lake band members (i.e., the Mansfield Lake-Kechumstuk band although the Mansfield and Healy Lake bands sometimes cooperated in caribou hunts in the Molly Creek area). The current year-round settlements of Healy Lake, Dot Lake, Tanacross, Tetlin, and Northway represent a consolidation of a formerly fluid band residence pattern.

Healy Lake: early 20th Century.

This change from a seasonal to a sedentary residence pattern was the outcome of several historical economic and social processes. Beginning with W.H. Newton at Healy Lake in 1907 a number of trading posts were set up along the Tanana River to service the fur industry. As McKennan (1981:567) notes:

¹ For a detailed map of the boundaries of the Healy Lake-Joseph band see McKennan, Robert, A., (1981:564), "Tanana" in Handbook of North American Indians, Volume 6, Subarctic, Smithsonian Institution, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington D.C. 20402

The development of the fur trade not only brought obvious changes in Tanana material culture but also affected profoundly the subsistence pattern, round of seasonal activities, social organization, and demography. Semi-permanent villages (Healy Lake, Tanana crossing, Nabesna,...) grew up in the neighborhood of the trading posts.

Mining in the late 19th century and Protestant Episcopal missions and mission schools (e.g., Tanana Crossing in 1912) all acted as centripetal forces centralizing formerly dispersed residence patterns. Also aiding this process of centralization were introduced technical innovations such as the fish wheel.

In addition, disease introduced by contact with Whites decimated whole communities.

McKenna (1981:566) writes that:

The bands were of such small size that periodic famines, warfare, and later, diseases introduced by Whites could easily reduce them to a point where they were no longer viable. The survivors would be forced to join another and larger band or starve.

Because of proscribed cultural marriage patterns individuals were required to marry outside their band (band exogamy). For example, the 1937 Census lists Laura Healy's birthplace as Mansfield. Laura, who was married to Arthur Healy, is the granddaughter of Chief Isaac (from the Mansfield/Kechumstuk band) while Arthur is the grandson of Chief Healy (from the Healy Lake/Joseph band). Numerous other marriages that occurred during this period link Healy Lake/Joseph, Mansfield/Kechumstuk, and Tanana Crossing residents with Ahtna band members now residing in Mentasta Lake, Batzulnetas, Chistochina and Copper Center. As a consequence of these residence and marriage patterns early census data from 1910, 1920 and 1937 for the community of Healy Lake might list a variety of birthplaces for their inhabitants.

Healy Lake: mid 20th Century.

The community of Healy Lake was disbanded almost entirely in the mid 1940's due to an epidemic that killed many residents. Paul Kirsteater, in his oral history, describes what happened:

Stanley Young was the trader down there at that time. He told me he tried and tried to get doctors in here ... and there was entire families was dyin' and layin' in their cabins. This was uh, my wife was here at that time. She was one of the survivors. Entire families lyin' dead in their cabins and there was no way to bury 'em and uh new white traders and others was, was living down here by the trading post, John Knight, Stanley Young and others was helpin' bury the people and they finally got a doctor in by the next Spring. He came up, an army doctor came out of what is now Ft. Greeley. He came in. Burt Hansen brought him up by a dog team, up here, the doctor and the doctor, by that time the epidemic was almost over. No tests were ever bade, but by the, by the symptoms and all he thought it might be diphtheria and measles together. The Native people had very little resistance to White's diseases.

John Healy, Chief of the band during this period, lost his children. (Bessie, Sarah, Lena, Louie and Marilyn all died). After the epidemic Chief John Healy moved the survivors to the Little Gerstle on the Alaska Highway. In her oral history Ellen Demit painfully documents this move

and the loss of her twins. She also describes how her adoptive father, Old Blind Jimmy, was one of the last to die.

Contributing to this diaspora were BIA policies that forced relocation of families with school age children to Tanacross. As Logan Luke (1999:11) testified "I know I live in Tanacross because somebody named BIA forced my dad to move the kids, otherwise you lose them". Thus BIA policy required parents to move to established communities that supported schools or face the forced removal of their children from their custody.

During this period former Healy Lake residents, along with families from Tanacross and Mentasta, contributed to the founding of Dot Lake (McKenna 1981:566) and also provided the core extended family group in the development of Tanacross.

Despite their migration to other Upper Tanana communities such as Tetlin, Tanacross and Northway some Healy Lake families periodically returned to the lake for summer fishing. In addition, Paul Kirsteatter describes how he established a year around residence in Healy Lake during the period from 1947 to the present.

Finally, the imposition of a western game management regime altered irrevocably opportunities to live and hunt in the traditional lifestyle. As McKenna (1981:567) reports:

Following statehood in 1958 the enforcement of fish and game laws, equally applicable to both Indians and Whites, sounded the death knell to the old pattern of living off the land.

Thus, the opportunity to live a seasonal residence pattern and harvest resources as they became seasonally available was lost. In addition, the formation of the Wrangell St. Elias National Park in 1980 excluded any individual not in a resident zone community or lacking a 13.41 permit to harvest resources in the park. Currently Healy Lake is being granted residence zone status and recent customary and traditional determinations favoring Healy Lake have been approved by the Federal Subsistence Board.

The Contemporary Community of Healy Lake.

A resurgence in population for Healy Lake began in the 1980's. All of the families involved in the reestablishment are related to families documented to reside there since at least 1910. At the time of the last decennial census the population of Healy Lake was 48 people consisting of 12 total families residing in 14 households. Of the 48 people residing in the community, 42 (or 88%) classified themselves as Alaskan Native and 20 of these individuals (48%) were under the age of 16.

The current community of Healy Lake is located about a half mile from the traditional site of the old village. Healy Lake is now inhabited by a variety of Athabaskan Indians who trace their genealogies to Tanacross speakers of the Healy Lake/Joseph and Mansfield/Kechumstuk bands, but also to the Upper Tanana speakers of the Tetlin, Nabesna, and Upper Chisana bands and to the Upper Ahtna speakers of Mentasta, Batzulnetas and Sanford River bands.

Median household income in Healy Lake in 1989 was \$5,841, at the same time median household income for Alaska was \$41,408 and for the U.S. as a whole \$30,056. Median household income for Alaska Natives in 1989 was \$24,152. Seventy one percent of the households were below the poverty level, so even by the depressed economic standards of rural Alaska, Healy Lake is a very poor community.

In 1989 no houses were plumbed for running water or sewer and all of the houses heated with wood. However, since 1990 there have been considerable improvements to the community's infrastructure from a variety of development grants. At present the majority of families in Healy Lake have running water and sewerage treatment facilities.

Although no systematic harvest surveys have been completed for households in Healy Lake, public testimony indicates that a majority of their diet is derived from wildlife resources. Accessible by an ice road in winter and by plane or boat in summer, with no store, few amenities, and very little employment Healy Lake residents in the words of Department of Community and Regional Affairs (1999) "live a subsistence lifestyle."

The Cultural Context of Healy Lake, an Athabascan Community.

The following section provides a brief introduction to Athabascan cultural practices and values.

Marriage, Kinship and Descent:

The area occupied by the Upper Tanana bands (which include Healy Lake) experienced harsh winters and severe fluctuations in the natural resource base that might lead to starvation. In addition, a variety of important subsistence species were not uniformly distributed throughout the region, for example, salmon were not available to all bands, in addition, ducks, muskrats and white fish were locally concentrated and not available to all.

Under these difficult circumstances a number of cultural institutions developed that lowered risk and opened access to resources across band territories. A chief adaptation to fluctuating and concentrated resources was a constellation of cultural practices centered on marriage, descent and residence. As McKennan (1981:572) notes:

Tanana social organization featured exogamous matrilineal descent groups... The matrilineal descent groups were regarded as large consanguineous families that cut across group boundaries, and when in need an Indian could look to his fellow moiety members or clansmen for help or hospitality. In addition to his clansmen an Indian could turn for aid to his formalized "partner," who was often both his cross-cousin and his brother-in-law due to the practice of preferential cross-cousin marriage. Rights and duties were reciprocal between partners and included the specified division of any game taken by either.

What does this mean and what are its implications? A young man from Healy Lake belongs to his mother's clan. A clan in this case would be a group of individuals, related through the female line that specified their descent from a distant female ancestor. These clans existed in a variety of bands from the "Tanacross", "Upper Tanana" and "Upper Ahtna" linguistic groups. These clans were further aggregated into two distinctive "moieties" or "sides". In this case

seven clans formed the “nalcin” [Raven or Crow] moiety and about ten clans formed the “ca” [Sea Gull or Wolf side] moiety.

When a young man or woman from Healy Lake was ready to marry, their spouse would have to be selected from the clans outside of their moiety. Given low population densities the number of eligible men or women was quite small. In addition, all bands engaged in the explicit tactic of establishing ties to groups in more distant areas, a kind of insurance policy. For example, if the caribou didn't come by your residence one year then access to sheep or fish in one's spouse's band's estate would be available. Thus, descent (clan/moiety) and exogamous marriage (the rule requiring marriage outside of one's descent group) established a wide network of kin ties and access to resources across an area broader than the territory of any one band.

As mentioned earlier, these practices are clearly confirmed in the early censuses from this region where genealogies indicate that men and women from Healy Lake are married to spouses from Kechumstuk, Mentasta, Nabesna, or Batzulnetas.

Bride Service:

In addition, there existed the cultural institution of bride service –

For the first few years after marriage the young couple normally lived with the girl's parents or with their band. (McKenna 1981:571).

Thus, after marriage a young man might spend a couple of years working with his father-in-law, harvesting resources, learning the land and becoming a known quantity to his spouse's family. When bride service is over these experiences and ties are often activated on an annual basis. For example, Ahtna informant's mentioned the seasonal use of fish wheels in Batzulnetas by kin from Healy Lake.

Post-nuptial residence, Kinship Terminology and Marriage Preference:

Murdock (1967:102) indicates that the final post-nuptial residence, i.e., the permanent residence of a couple after marriage and bride service was completed was quite fluid. There was a **strong** tendency to settle near the wife's relatives but depending on circumstances (need for labor, the personalities involved, adequacy of resource base, etc..) the couple might also end up living with the husband's kin (in anthropological terms, “uxorilocal” residence was the first preference with “virolocal” residence as a culturally patterned alternative).

The maintenance of these inter-band and inter-language relationships through time was supported by another cultural practice mentioned by McKenna – cross-cousin marriage. For a young man or woman their father's sister's children (i.e., paternal cross-cousins) or their mother's brother's children (i.e., maternal cross-cousins) were a preferred marriage partner. This pattern expanded relationships over time because one's cross-cousin, e.g., mother's brother's children were always of a different clan (i.e., the clan of the brother's wife).

These preferences are reinforced by the existing kinship terminology. Iroquois cousin terminology uses the same term for brother or sister and parallel cousins (father's brother's children, mother's sister's children). Cross-cousins on the other hand are designated by a term indicating marriage eligible.

Language boundaries and mutual linguistic intelligibility across bands.

These broad marriage, kinship and resident connections between Healy Lake, Mansfield, Tetlin, Nabesna, Chisana, and Upper Ahtna are consistent with linguistic patterns identified by McKennan's informants:

Indeed, both Tanacross and Upper Tanana speakers told McKennan that they are able to converse with Lower Tanana speakers less easily than with speakers of Han, Ahtna and Southern Tutchone... (McKennan 1981:562)

Later discussions with informants at Tanacross, Dot Lake, and Healy Lake confirmed the fact that the culture of their group was almost identical with that of the Upper Tanana although their language differed.

Ceremonial integration – the Potlatch.

Ellen Demit and other participants in these oral histories make mention of the potlatch. Ellen, despite living on a minimal income, intended to contribute to an upcoming potlatch that was to occur shortly after these interviews were completed. Simeone (1995:xiii) sees the potlatch as a community ritual that provides "a positive sense of identity through a synthesis of the past with the present." The potlatch is essentially a public distribution of gifts.

Gifts are distributed, for example, on the occasion of a young person's first successful hunt, to celebrate the return of a person after a long absence or recovery from an acute illness, ... Usually the most compelling reason for holding a potlatch is the death of an individual. (Simeone 1995:xvii)

In the activities preceding a memorial potlatch, members of the moiety (see above) opposite to that of the deceased, assume a number of responsibilities including caring for the corpse, building the coffin, digging the grave, and constructing a fence around the grave. Kinsmen within the moiety of the deceased demonstrate their respect and gratitude for this care by **holding** a potlatch. Thus:

Through singing, dancing, oratory, and the distribution of gifts and food, people also show their love and respect for kin who form a web of relationships extending far beyond the immediate family and village. (Simeone 1995:164)

Simeone (1995:162) sees the potlatch as "the most significant cultural event in the life of the Tanacross people". A variety of items are gifted including rifles, blankets and cash. Simeone sees these items being:

symbolically transformed into expressions of emotion and used to create and maintain vital social linkages. What is conveyed in modern potlatch gifts, then, is an affirmation of shared values based on reciprocal obligations... (which) ...are expected to reflect traditional values by placing the welfare of the community above self-interest... Native people see themselves as adhering to the traditional values of kinship, sharing, reciprocity, love and respect, and competence, which are in opposition to the individualistic, self-centered values of non-Native society. (Simeone 1995:163)

Other research has also demonstrated the importance of the potlatch as a region wide ceremonial activity that cemented links among the Tanacross, Upper Tanana and Upper Ahtna speakers. The stability of these links is verified by a series of nine potlatches attended by Guedon between 1969-1970. Guedon (1982:577) notes that the potlatches involved:

speakers of the Upper Tanana, Tanacross, and Ahtna languages. The participants came from the villages of Tetlin, Northway, and Tanacross – the last two including the people formerly at Mansfield, Kechumstuk, Last Tetlin and Healy Lake – and also from Mentasta, an Ahtna s village.

In addition, as Guedon (1981:579) states:

A serious potlatch in the upper Tanana area includes guests from at least all upper Tanana groups and most of the northern Copper River villages of the Ahtna Indians. Upper Tanana Indians are often invited to potlatches given by the Ahtna Indians... In the past, guests were probably grouped according to clans, regardless of the locale from which they came.

A fundamental tenet of the potlatch (although this discussion is oversimplified) is that the guests who are feasted and given gifts are one's "cross relatives", i.e., members of clans that are from the other side (the moiety opposite of one's mother's).

It is evident that except for natural boundaries such as high mountain ranges, it is extremely hard to draw precise territorial limits for these nomadic people. Adjacent local bands often came together for purposes of communal hunting, trade, or potlatch ceremonies ... Intermarriages between bands often took place, as the native genealogies attest. Indeed the small size of the local bands, some 20 to 75 people (McKenna 1969a: 102-103), combined with the clan exogamy that prevailed would make some out-marriages inevitable. (McKenna 1981:565)

The Healy Lake Language

by Gary Holton

The language spoken by Ms. Ellen Demit and others of the Healy Lake area is part of the Tanacross Athabascan language. Tanacross itself is distinguished from other Athabascan languages in Alaska by the presence of high tone where other languages have low or no tone. For example, Tanacross *shtá* 'father' has high tone, whereas Upper Tanana Athabascan—spoken in Tetlin, Northway, Scottie Creek and Beaver Creek—has low tone on the word for father, namely, *shtá*. Tanacross is the only Athabascan language in Alaska to have high tone on words like 'father'.

There are two primary dialects of Tanacross. The Mansfield-Ketchumstuk dialect is the ancestral language of the Mansfield and Ketchumstuk bands and is today spoken primarily in Tanacross village. The Healy Lake-Joseph Village dialect is the ancestral language of the Healy Lake and Joseph Village bands and is today spoken primarily in Healy Lake and Dot Lake. Ms. Demit is one of the last remaining speakers of this dialect. The primary linguistic feature which distinguishes the Healy Lake dialect from the Mansfield dialect is the retention of a final "echo" vowel following words which end in a voiced consonant, such as *tuug* 'fish', which is pronounced more like *tuuga* in Healy Lake. This linguistic feature even permeates Ms. Demit's English speech. For example, Ms. Demit pronounces the words 'our culture' as *our a culture*. The extra vowel in her English pronunciation reflects the linguistic process that associates an echo vowel with a voiced consonant. There are other differences between the dialects as well. For example, Healy Lake often has a *b* where Mansfield has *m*. Thus Healy Lake *k'átbah* 'willow parmigán' vs. Mansfield *k'étmah*. This example also shows some of the vowel differences.

It should be noted that the differences between Healy Lake and Mansfield dialects are not random but rather reflect the geographic position of Healy Lake between the Mansfield dialect of Tanacross to the east and the former Salcha dialect of Lower Tanana to the west. Where Healy Lake differs from Mansfield, it is more similar to Salcha, which also has the echo vowel and the *b* rather than *m*. Clearly the Healy Lake dialect was once part of a large dialect chain which extended along the length of the Tanana river.

Guide to the Healy Lake Writing System

by Gary Holton

The transcriptions of Healy Lake words used in this book make use of the symbols in the standard English alphabet plus a few special characters. The two most significant special characters are the “barred-l” (/) and the “nasal hook” (,). There are also several “accent” marks which are used to mark tone on vowels (á, â).

Sounds which are written and pronounced as in English

Consonant	Example	Meaning	Similar English sound
ch	chox	big	choke
t	tuu	water	too
s	saa	sun	son
h	hêñ	creek	hen
m	menh	lake	men
n	nahog	outside	now
sh	sheen	summer	she
th	thiit	embers	thin
y	yaadiimeey	northern lights	yell
k	kón'	fire	cool
l	laalêel	butterfly	look
j	jeyh	mittens	jay
w	wudzih	caribou	woo

Some symbols represent sounds which occur in English but are not found at the beginning of a word. In Tanacross these sounds can occur at the beginning of a word.

Consonant	Example	Meaning	Similar English sound
ts	tsá	beaver	cats
dz	dzeen	day	adze
dl	Dleg	squirrel	padlock
nd	ndiig	creek	bandage

Sounds which occur in English but are spelled differently in Healy Lake

Consonant	Example	Meaning	Similar English sound
dh	Nadhaay	liver	this

Sounds which do not occur in English

Consonant	Example	Meaning
l	klii	dog
tl	Tlaa	friend
tth	tthee	rock
ddh	ddhel	mountain
x	xos	thorns
gh	ghah	for
nh	menh	lake
yh	aayh	snowshoe

One very noticeable set of sounds which do not occur in English are the glottalized consonants. These sounds are a feature of all Athabascan languages (and many other Native American languages). When the apostrophe follows certain consonants, it indicates a glottalization, a "catch-in-the-breath" sound formed by using the closed vocal chords to compress the air in the vocal tract. Glottalized sounds are sometimes found at the end of English words (for example, some speakers' pronunciations of "back").

Consonant	Example	Meaning
tl'	tluul	rope
tth'	Chitthee	sinew
t'	taath	cottonwood
k	Ka	gun
ts	tseyh	canoe
ch	chox	quills

The apostrophe and the hyphen

The apostrophe (') has a special meaning in the Tanacross alphabet. By itself it indicates a glottal stop, the sound which occurs in the middle of the English exclamation *uh-oh*. Sometimes it is necessary to indicate that a glottal stop is not part of the previous letter. In this case, a hyphen (-) is used to separate the previous letter and the glottal stop. An example is nek-'eh 'I see'. It would be wrong to write this as nek'eh because this word does not contain a glottalized-k (k').

The underscore

The underscore () is used in combination with certain letters and letter combinations to indicate that a sound begins voiceless and becomes voiced as it is pronounced. Thus, the sound sh sounds very much like *shy* and the sound ɣ sounds very much like *sz*.

Consonant	Example	Meaning
ɟ	wuɟiig'	his dog
s	wuʂéeg'	his saliva
th	thét	liver
sh	shfi	in
x	xdelxos	they are playing

Vowels

Healy Lake has five vowel symbols: *i, e, a, o, u*. All but *o* can occur either long or short. The long vowels are written double. The exact pronunciation of long versus short vowels may vary depending on context.

Vowel	Example	Meaning	Similar English sound
ii	fi	dog	me
i	sint'eh	it is	in
ee	'éel	trap	mane
e	sén'	star	men
aa	tsaath	roots	on
a	k'a'	gun	pot
o	kón'	fire	cone
uu	tl'uuł	rope	tooth
u	Tthiitú'	Tanana River	two

Nasalization

Vowels may be nasalized, that is, pronounced with air coming out through the nose as well as the mouth. This is indicated with the nasal hook.

Vowel	Example	Meaning
ī	k'īi	birch
ē	ge yh	dry
ā	ch'et'a'a'	leaves
ū	gu u	worm

Tone

Vowels may also be marked for tone

Tone	Vowel	Example	Meaning
low tone	e	nen	you
high tone	é	nén'	land
falling tone	ê	jêg	berries
rising tone	ě	ts'éd'	blanket

Consonant Chart

		labial	dental	alveolar	lateral	palatal-	palatal	velar	glottal
Stops/ Affricates	unaspirated	b	ddh	d	dl	dz	j	g	'
	aspirated		tth	t	tl	ts	ch	k	
	glottalized		tth'	t'	tl'	ts'	ch'	k'	
Fricatives	voiced		dh		l	z		gh	
	semi-voiced		<u>th</u>		<u>l</u>	<u>s</u>	<u>sh</u>	<u>x</u>	
	voiceless		th		l̥	s	sh	x	h
Nasals	voiced	m		n					
	voiceless			nh					
	stopped	mb		nd					
Approx	voiced	w					y		
	voiceless						yh		

Gah



Snowshoe Hare

Ellen Demit
born May 13, 1913

Ellen was born May 13, 1913 to Eva and Julius John in the old village of Chena, Alaska which is now encompassed by the city of Fairbanks.

At the age of three Ellen was "adopted" by Chief Luke and his wife, Anne from Goodpaster, Alaska, a common cultural practice. Following the death of his wife, Anne, Chief Luke allowed Ellen to be adopted again, this time by Selene and (Old Blind) Jimmy of Healy Lake. Ellen tells her own story of her incredible childhood, of her affection for her adoptive father and mother and their struggles to survive in a hunting and gathering society. Today Ellen is the highly respected matriarch of Healy Lake and her legacy is cherished and emulated by her children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, nieces and nephews.



Interview with Ellen Demit

Healy Lake, Alaska

August 15, 2000

Interviewers: Don Callaway and Connie Friend

This is Don Callaway. It's the 15th of August. It's a Tuesday. We're talking here in Healy Lake with Ellen Demit. My name's Don Callaway. Connie Friend is with us and Ellen's daughter, Agnes is also with us and we're here to have Ellen talk about her life history. Ready.

Ellen: I was born in Fairbanks
in Chena,
old village I was born.
My mother's name Eva John.
My daddy's name, Julius John and
my grandma say Helen.
Helen.

Yeah right.

And she die, she's over 'hundred.

And I grown up in our adopt way at Chena village.

I was adopt way to ...

The creek's name, say Indian name,

Jeez Ndiig and we call, "Camprober Creek".

And Chief Luke¹ and Anne Luke pick me up, adopt me.

The reason I was adopt way and...

Abraham Luke's sister die six o'clock in the morning and
on that even' I was born so he plan on goin' raise me up and then she die.

Then from there maybe I'm two years old,

my old auntie² send message to from Healy Lake.

And Healy Lake and man and wife, husband blind³, pick me up.

I choose to be my dad and my mother.

He brought me up and I got married and I had children.

And all way up to in my life very painful sometime but I go through.



*Salcha 1919 Annie Luke, Old Luke, Frank
Luke and Abraham Luke.*

¹Chief Luke was also known as "Old Luke John" in Athabaskan *Nitaaanchazaa* 1868-1925. (from Mishler, Craig W. 1986:23) He was considered a very powerful medicine man as well as a chief.

²This was Ellen's second adopted mother, Selene.

³Ellen's adopted father "Blind Jimmy" was blind from birth. He was brother to Old Chief Healy.

And some special day...
I don't know what to think, but I made it.
I talk about my history for everybody to listen,
and also I growin' up
with my mother, Seline, and Jimmy.
And once again, my daddy's blind.
I grown up over there and I got married and I had children.
And after all the way through to village and he has sickness come
out⁴



*Healy Lake circa 1920
Selene, Ellen and Jimmy.*

I loose all my children,
and all my girls.
And I end up with...
I move to this village to 1946 with try to save my daughter Agnes and my daughter, Daisy. Move
out to this village.
And from there we moved to Big Gerstle.⁵
We sit way in the back on the tent.
Me and my husband, my two daughters.
We sit in the tent for a while and then one person name's
Alex Joe.
He's already sick, but his wife and sister-in-law take him,
but, take him away from this village, but yet he die at Big
Gerstle.
He take the body back to Tanacross.
Been buried up there.
And me and my husband, we end up with my
two daughters.
We raise our two daughters.
Still have my two daughters.
And I loose my son⁶sixteen years ago, last one.



*Big Delta circa 1900
Alex Joe, Arthur Healy, Silas Solomon, John Healy*

And also we live on the land over there in the village.
Springtime I dig the "gardeny" for my mother and daddy.
I plant seed for my mother and daddy 'cause he's so old to do anything.
After my plant seed and all we got our vegetable.

⁴Ellen and her husband lost three of their eight-children in the epidemic of 1943. Not long after they had moved to the Gerstle River to escape the epidemic her husband became ill and subsequently died.

⁵It is about fourteen river miles from Healy Lake to the Gerstle River bridge.

⁶This was Ellen's son Talbert Felix.

We put it away.

Back days there's no deep freeze, no nothing.

So my daddy didn't have basement.

We put our vegetable in there ⁷ and we live on meat and potatoes all winter.

And from begin my story, the man goin' adopt me, he's, I should say he's kind of like "medicine man"⁸.

But back days, maybe good 'n reason, had to be doctorin'.

I don't know.

But he's the one bring me to my mother and daddy 'cause his wife die and he can't raise me up.

And I have two half brothers and he can't take care of me and I'm two years old and I move to other village where I'm really adopt way.

And with (indiscernible) around Fall time we go out .

When I get grown up, I take care of my mother and daddy.

Turn around, take care of them

with wood, and go out fishin' for them,

pickin' berries for them.

I do lot of things with old people.

I put all my life, I, every one of them over there in the village.

I give a hand every one of them.

I do that 'cause I love them.

And today I don't have even a relative, close relative.

But I have a lot of my niece's ⁹ children

from out there.

All the way through to my life

to grown up.

Like I say alone to Big Gerstle we loose one person.

Out there too we move to Little Gerstle.

And then my husband¹⁰ became sick and I had three kids.

I don't know what to do when my husband sick.

I don't know who to turn to.

⁷Ellen is referring to a root cellar.

⁸Chief Luke of Goodpaster

⁹Stella (Healy) and Lee Saylor's children: Patrick and Ben Saylor and Jo Ann Polston.

Also Margaret (Jacob) Kirsteatter and Paul Kirsteatter's children: Fred Kirsteatter and Linda Erickson as well as their children and grand children. Gary Healy, Mike and Ray Fifer, Minnie Healy's children as well. Ellen is related to nearly everyone in Healy Lake.

¹⁰Ellen's husband was Frank Felix.

And I take my husband in the bus
to Dot Lake, around people.
I thought, "Better way if my husband die with
me all by myself; I don't know what to do."
Nobody around me.
I just sit
with my kids.

I put my husband in the bus and I got three
dogs.
He don't accept my dogs in the bus, so I walk
all (the) way up from the Little Gerstle. I walk
with my three dogs.
All (the) way up I walk
to Sam Lake¹¹
in the road.
I been so tired I spent the night there.
Set my mosquito net.
I rest good.
Next day I went to Dot Lake.
Where my kids goin' go school.

We stay and my kids all finish school Dot Lake,
and my husband died,
Dot Lake.

One little house my friend, she's white woman, her name's Jackie. Her husband die.
She lotta back me up when I need it.
This one gave me little piece of meat, little piece of thing to keep it up.
And my husband died.
Took my husband back to Tanacross.
He buried there.
From there I was out in brush all time.

My oldest daughter, Agnes take care o' Daisy and my son, the one die.
She's always there for me, my oldest daughter.
She's not my oldest daughter, middle daughter.
She's always there for her brother and her sister.

From there I stay Dot Lake.
Some reason I don't want stay Dot Lake.
I take my kids.



Up Little Gerstle circa 1930

¹¹From the Big Gerstle to Sam Lake is approximately twenty-three miles. The place where Ellen camped is about four miles from Dot Lake.

I call some my friend pick me up.
Back to Little Gerstle.¹²

And I was out there in brush all (the) time. There's nothin' my kids couldn't eat.
Sometime I come back twelve o'clock at night.
That's my kids I camper.

Exactly how the Native people's life. It's hard to get, to eat good whatever you want.
We have to know what we do out there.

That's how I raise up my three children.

Many times I got lost out there on the brush....me and my snowshoes.

That many times I come back eleven o' clock at night or two o' clock in the morning.

I goin' tell this story.

This story reach out to someone's life to be strong.

If you have to be woman, you had to be man.

I'm a woman. I go through this lot of pain. But I made it.

I always think I get up, "I can't do."

I always think, "Yeah, I could do."

I go out see my trap line, my rabbit snare. I do anything for my kids to eat. Not for my kids (to) be hungry.

I don't have welfare check, I don't have food stamps like other people do.

I have hard life. I raise up my kids with trap line. Out there on the land.

I raise my children with fish and ducks. Moose, caribou, everything what's in my way, I get it for my children to eat.

Back days we don't have a 'frigerator.

When I got my food I had to stay on my feet round the clock to dry my meat.

My food, my fish, everything. I gotta take care o' my berries the special way¹³.

Too bad, I hope I talk my native tongue, but it's hard for other people, English, can't understand. I'm Native. Here I have to talk to English. I really don't care that much, but it's okay.

I really work hard all parts of my life.

¹²Following the epidemic in 1946 Ellen moved with her remaining family to the Little Gerstle where Chief John Healy moved his people. During her husband's subsequent illness she moved to Dot Lake to be near more people in the event of his death. At his death his body was transported to Tanacross where he was buried among his people. Following her husband's death Ellen was mistreated at Dot Lake and moved with her children back to the Little Gerstle where she supported them entirely from the land. Later she moved to the Tok area and supported herself and her children by working as a maid and cooking in a restaurant.

¹³Traditional Native people are very meticulous about food preparation and preservation.

We go out hunt.
My mother and my daddy go out, line (trapline).
I'm too young. I can't help. I had to stay home.
My mother and daddy had babysitter for me.
Sometimes my mother use gun.
The hardest one right there, my mother, she put gun
in my daddy's hand.
He's blind.
He point that gun to moose and my mother say, "
Ready."
My daddy goin' pull trigger and my daddy goin' get
moose.
The greatest day he got that moose.
My mother and daddy work hard for that meat.
They're both very old.
It's hard for me to talk about my back life.
I force myself even to do this.

Sometime, one day I don't know what to do.
Some in the morning
I just don't know what to do.
Half an hour time I know what I goin' do.
Get my snowshoes and out.
Lucky sometimes two hours I sleep.
I come in and I have to cook for my kids.
Whatever I got I have to cook for my dog.
Take care of my animals best as I can.
It's hard if my husband die, but to me I'm very strong to handle everything.
I always think, "My culture, Native life very precious to me."
We put our food.
You go out in the brush.
I go out in the brush.
I begin learn and I go out in brush I know which one.
If you got no bucket, you know what you doing.
You know how to cook out there.
You got out there and you got no nothing.
You take some part out o' moose. You goin' wash it. You goin' dig the ground. You heat up
you rock. With clean stick you put you rock in that thing and meat already in thin' cook for
yourself if you know what you doing.
You attention, you listen to grandmother and grandfather, you goin' learn.
That's way I grown up.
It is hard to look back.
I goin' skip it little bit.



*Logan Luke, Ada Luke, Lucy Luke, Bentley
McIntosh, Frank Luke, Joe Luke,*

My word it's kind of hard for me.
Some part I have to be quiet.
'Cause when I was small my mother die.
And I don't know I'm just three years old.
Some reason been blessed.
I'm just three years old, my mother die.
This one goin' adopt me.
My step-brother¹⁴ pack me around.
He's not my brother, just a step-brother.
He pack me around. Nobody around.
He's twelve years old. I'm three years old.
His father, Chief Luke and Frank Luke go to Healy Lake.
They both run, father and brother run into some woman.
The old man, his wife ready to die.
He left his wife with us, with his son.
And by time I bury.
Don't know what to do.
We have my mother's body in the back bedroom and my step-brother shut "curtain"
and no fire going. It's cold.
I ask my brother, "Where's our mother?" I thought she's really our mother. I don't know. I'm
just very young.
And my brother told me my mother sleep.
I'm three years old and I can't believe that my mother sleep all time.
My mother make me blanket. Little rabbit robe, crochet.
That's my favorite blanket. I'm not shame of whatever I have to say. I sleep behind stove.
That's where I want.
I got little homemade bed, but I don't sleep in the bed. I always sleep behind stove on the floor.
That's where I want it. Nobody make me do.
And I growin' up.
Later on I asked my step-brother again.
He don't know what to tell me.
One night I want sleep with my brother. My brother's only twelve years old.
I hold my brother's neck. I went to bed. I fell asleep and cried. I want know where's my mother.
I was crying and went to bed.
This part I real don't want talk about but I do this. I try to skip it, but I can't.
I ask my brother again, "When my mother goin' get up?"
He say, "Let her sleep. Let her peaceful." I say, "Okay." And then I ask my brother,
"I want sleep with you."
"Go ahead."
And then I bring my little blanket and I hold my brother.
I went to bed.

¹⁴Abraham Luke

Twelve o'clock night I get off the bed and I drag my little blanket. I go bedroom. Look around, feel around for my mother and dad. My daddy not there. He's gone Healy Lake someplace. This is I talk about is Goodpaster. That's where I goin' be adopt.

All my life all the way through, don't turn out good for me.

The woman goin' adopt me die. Her name's Anne Luke.

She die 'stead o'.

After I sneak out, out o' my brother and I go in bedroom. Feel around. I'm so small.

I gotta touch my mother's face. It's cold. And I take my little blanket and I crawl in with my mother. Try to warm her up.

This is saddest one if somebody listen(to) this.

Give you good life. Straight you life up.

This, this one I talk about it's painful.

I sleep with my mother and covered with my little blanket. Try to warm her up. I can't warm her up.

My brother get up. He look around outside for me. He thought I went out.

My brother can't find me and finally my brother look in the back, here I sleep with my mother.

And my brother take me and my brother cried all day.

My brother take me out. He pack me. He set snare for rabbits.

One rabbit die. One rabbit's alive.

My brother tell me this rabbit die, that's my mamma die.

This one, live one, that's you and me.

And I can't understand. I can't understand what my brother talk about it.

After long time and Frank Luke and his father come back. I told my brother, "Make me little stick." He asked me why.

"Nothing, I want play with. I want real pretty one." (I) play with my little hand. I do.

And my brother make me a little stick.

"Why you want that stick?"

"I just want play with. I want long one."

And then he don't know what I plan on. I'm three years old.

Abraham Luke told me by time I'm three years old.

Old man and Frank Luke come back.

Old man go bedroom and old man cry.

I'm just three years old. I club that old man down. I told, "You throw away my mother.

My mother die without eat." I thought my mother die nobody feed, but it don't turn out like that she just goin' be gone anyway.

I club that old man down, his leg and everything. He just run out, never bother me.

Old man understand why little one think.

So he run out and he go out hunt.

He bury her over there cemetery. He don't even dress her. I 'member just like some reason just like I make picture.

I win the land for this story.¹⁵

Later on he have potlatch.

Even back days my uncle go round from village to village.

Walk

Right now Fish and Wildlife gonna have car and everything fly, but don't.

My uncle walk.

Boat to village to village, my uncle go.

My uncle, one day my uncle came. He bring me some little good in his pocket and little mukluk and little mitts and I show my uncle to meat cache.

'N (inaudible) old man and old man half-brother in trouble.

One of them still teasin' me before he die.

And when he gave me cane, his cane, he goin' be die tomorrow.

He told me, "You and me, we got two different mother.

And you good friend of mine.

We not related to each other.

My name, my clan's name different. Your clan's name different," he told me.

And I say, "I understand, but I like for you be my brother, 'cause I don't have brother."

And that from there he have potlatch;

Oh and all potlatch all over and then Frank Luke moved over there and married Lucy Luke.

That's his wife and Chief Luke married to Mary Healy¹⁶.

But me, from Goodpaster go right straight to where my new mother and new daddy.

Covered me with brand new blanket he hand to me to my mother, Selene.

The boy thought to be the day, and by time all my relatives come along meet me and he had dinner with me and all that, adopt me.

Back days you just don't grab a person.

You gotta have big dinner.

You gotta get together and chief. They goin' talk all to chief.

And then this chief say, "No", it's goin' be no, no.

Chief say, "yes". He asked chief.



Old Chief Healy

¹⁵Here Ellen is referring to testimony that she gave in a Bureau of Land Management documentary hearing held in Tanacross in 1991. Her testimony was part of the evidence to win an allotment in the Goodpaster area for one of her relatives.

¹⁶Mary Healy was the daughter of Old Chief Healy and sister to John Healy who succeeded his father as chief of Healy Lake.

Chief Healy say, "It's okay. You guys don't have kids. Bring her up good."
So that's how I brought up over there. I grown up over there. That's my village.
It's real where I'm belong over there.
Every time I come home, this village just peaceful life for me.
I did so many things woman can't do.

One time we out of food. Our chief ¹⁷go out and trap all time. Summer time he work on boat.
He have bunch of food. He share all whole village: rice, sugar, whatever people need. That's
our chief.

We real help with chief in this village.

People never hate each other either. We got little food. I don't care what time of night we get
together. We eat.

Our favorite food are the moose stomach.

Everything what's we favorite food we eat.

We lucky we eat sometime fresh food when plane land.

On the lake, sometime he bring us fresh food. But we don't care about bacon and eggs.

We live on the land. I still do. I don't care about anything I just want to eat my meat and soup.

We get old we want eat our own food.

And I always think in my mind I don't know why Fish and Wildlife look at the people, 'specially
this village.

To me sometime I really don't care that much

Fish and Wildlife, but that's their job too.

But this village, people live on the land.

All fish, ducks, everything.

From there to I moved to Little Gerstle.

My niece,¹⁸ we got little tent out there and me and my kids stay there
and with me and my niece and her mother.

Her husband die too.

We both have a hard time.

I remember we, her and I, we always go out there in the brush after I go Little Gerstle.

We make company to each other.

Sometime we don't even eat decent.

What we goin' eat, what I goin' eat I give it to my children, 'stead of.

Better my kids eat 'stead of me.

Why should I goin' eat? I don't want my kids hungry. I never shame of my story and my
history.

Sometime I make my flour mix.

Make little bit sug...

¹⁷John Healy

¹⁸Jeanie Healy

I go out, I dig it out roots. You guys don't know about roots. I dig it out roots. I wash it. I chop up and I boil.

Tastes just like potatoes and I mix with little bit o' rice.

There's little dinner for my kids.

Maybe little bit of biscuit.

Sometime my kids never....We don't eat good sometimes.

I'm a woman I gotta work. I gotta stand on my feet. I think all part of my life I real work hard. Forty-five years I work in a job. Anyplace job I have to walk. Sometimes I walk two mile to get my job. Right now all people got job so easy life. They jump in the car and takin' off. Still say woman, " Ah, I'm tired." I don't believe that. Some think, " Oh, I'm so old, I can't do nothing." Me, I don't believe. Gotta go out do something. Don't think about you own body, you so tired. We have to do a lot of things in this village.

We move to Dot Lake some reason. I can't say how he treat me.

I not talk about it.

And I move back to Healy Lake and Volkmar¹⁹, our trap line.

I put my kids on sleigh and I take 'em out.

From Little Gerstle and my three kids, we all walk back with our feet to Big Gerstle²⁰.

All the way down we follow river.

Where my husband used to have campfire for us, we make campfire.

And I put little bit up no matter winter time.

Make sure my kids warm.

Make sure my kids eat good 'stead o' me.

We walk all the way back from Little Gerstle to down there where our tradin' post.

The boats been left quite a while ago in there.

I go out, I pick all those pitch;

and I melt it all the pitch and I fix all the boat.

And I let the boat dry little bit and I put that boat in the water and I test the boat.

No water in there.

Either way, no choice or else I have to go without eat for my kids.

No choice for me, I put dog and my three children

I let the boat go..

I'm in the boat with pie pole.

I made it to other side.

My boat gonna sink down. I throw my kids in the bank.

They're in water up to my waist and I pack my baby.

We got little house there.



Dzanh/Muskrat

¹⁹The Volkmar River is about four miles into the bush from Healy Lake.

²⁰This is a distance of about five miles.

Native people say, "ts'edoghanih".
"Ts'edoghanih", it's mean "You gotta prepare". Gotta prepare.
No matter where you go, you gotta prepare.
If you don't, every way you gonna be hungry.
Where I always go, I put rice or flour, anything.
Just put it in a can. Have it for something.
I did.
When I get back to house, we eat good.
Next day I go to other side to Healy, to Volkmar where my mother left the house for me.
My aunt. My aunt gave me that log house before she gonna died.
She told me I could have that house.
I stay with my kids all winter.
My oldest daughter take care of brother and sister.
I was up there, trap.
Fall time. Even Fall time I go out, trap for rats.
I do that for meat. I use skin. I tan.
I make my kids 'n little moccasin and mitts.
My daughter, I make little rats²¹ coat for her.
Don't know what happened to.
Lot of things.

I go out up there in my winter time I use my snowshoes.
I told my children, oldest one, I say, "When you guys have eat, careful.
You brother and you sister goin' choke with food."
She's very good with her sister and brother.
She always there when I was out there.
One time almost I never make it home to my kids.
That day if I never make it home, I don't know what happen to my kids.
My two kids. I got lost out there. Dark, I don't know where I'm at.
I don't even protect myself with flashlight.
I have matches in my pocket everything.
I know I'm goin' build fire but yet where I'm at and I worry about my kids.
I don't know what to do.
I goin' round and round and round that one island.
But somehow I stop. Stand up in the road.
That time, I don't know. People pray.
My mother pray lot when she die.
My mother's very good Christian woman.
She brought me up.
That's why I had good life. I don't want...
I don't want feel bad towards to people either.

²¹ muskrat fur

I don't talk about people's life either.

I stand in my snowshoes. I gettin' freeze. I know my whole body gettin' shake
and in the end, I don't even have strength to move my hand. My feet just like ice. Too cold.
Sweat. Walk all night.

It close to three o'clock in the morning. I stop.

I ask.

I ask people pray and I say, "God help me. God help me. Take me to my family, my children."
That's my biggest pray. He did open up for me. I find my trail. I take it home.

My kids, 'n had candle. I never say nothing. I just walk in. She always had tea for me, hot tea.
Twice I almost loose my life out there. Had to feed my children.

But I beat it. Today they all turn around, baby me' round.

They always spoil me. Whatever I want, I get it too.

My daughter never tells me, "No".

My son used to treat me like that. From Northway, come down. Bring meat, fish, anything what
I wish it, brings it. And my son's gone All my grandkids treat me good.

Today I make it up, I real have good life. I not wish for nothing.

It's hard. If we don't try in our feet, we goin' be hungry. We can't do nothing.

We have to real try to be understand what we do.

After close to Christmas, I got new worries too. Gettin' snow.

I got little bit of flour, little bit of sugar. I sell my stuff, sewing stuff.

Buy 'nough groceries, go back.

I told my oldest daughter, I goin' make a trail.

I told her what she goin do if I never come back.

"Even you see plane up there, you gotta go out, showing something".

Middle nowhere out there, just me and my kids.

I start to walk three 'clock in the morning for I make snowshoes trail.

Next morning I hitch up dog.

He stand behind sleigh and was set off with snowshoes, pack my little baby.

We made it to other side and our house.

Next day I make trail to Big Gerstle and I come back three o'clock in the morning for my kids.

Sleep couple hour and takin' off again and we made it to highway.

All my fear.

I just stand in road and I catch ride and I bring back my kids clothes and food.

Then, after everything's settled, Christmas come up.

I can't even afford a buy something. I make little moccasins for my three children, my two
daughters and my son. I just put it, hang behind Christmas tree.

My kids used to stand in front of Christmas tree same way, so happy.

After we stay at Dot Lake for long time...

Some reason I just can't get along any place where I go.

I don't know why. Just nothing the same like before. After I move to my own village.

Tanacross they have Christmas and that time I was got job, got little job.

Five dollars an hour I got paid.

Eighty-one dollars I save. I don't spend my one dollars foolish way.
I put that five dollars...

The house I stay, no door, no window. Winter time so cold. I cut wood 'round the clock to keep it warm.

I go someplace, somebody's dog come in my house. Eat my little bit of food. I end up nothing. I tell them, "You guys' dog, tie."

Nobody say nothing. Sometime just for that we go hungry.

I get a job. I save money. I save money. I don't mess around with my money. I real careful.

These guys stop. I order all supplies for my house. Everything.

Once again Fred gave me hand. I work right along with them. I help him work and we had nice little work. Warm house.

It's Dot Lake. And then I move up to Tanacross.

We stayed Tanacross for while; not too long.

And I went up to Northway. Stayed there for while.

And moved back to Forty Mile. I was workin' seven days a week Forty Mile.

My first job is at Dot Lake.

I not educated. I just came from a little village and I went there, to Dot Lake.

When kids go school, my first job's there. I got hotel room out there 'n take care.

That's '52. That's my first job. Ever since I work 'till two years ago. I'm retirement.

That five dollars an hour I worked for it.

Even though I just take care my money. We live a good. After all we live a good. I (inaudible) ever I do.

And my first grandchild 's Mary Lou.

And my first grandson's Lee Henry, n' Mary Lou Paul. The first grandkids I got.

Me and my daughter, we think of in the world my other daughter, Daisy, she think the world of her nephew.

I started off with two, one girl and one daughter.

I don't stay very long where I move, but I work Dot Lake.

He put me work in Children Home. I work Children Home, hotel room, kitchen, bake.

I don't go school. If someone listen this morning, you not educated, don't you think you not educated.

You know what you doin' and what you do, what you had to do, you gotta think about it.

You don't have to think you can't do. I don't. I never think like that.

In the morning you get up, you prepare for what you goin...'

My boss taught me just only one day and I catch on.

I work from there, I work all summer.

Don't know how long I work there. It's little bit too cheap for me so I asked this missionary,

Bob Green. I asked if he could find me job. Then he went up to Forty Mile.

He asked Mabel Scoby and Ray Scoby and, "Yeah, we need one."

They tell Bob Green if I'm a good worker.

Bob Green say, "Yes."

I went to Forty Mile (Forty Mile Road House)²². I went to work. I had room and board.

I had everything what I need there, and he set me up real good.

The wages not very much, but it's good.

I had room and board, everything.

I use free electricity and oil and my boss pay for it.

I work there almost eight years. Seven days week job.

I work long time and I send my son to Edgecomb school and he finish Edgecomb school.

He graduate that, my young son.

And my other daughter go to Anchorage to college for three months and she, some reason, she can't make it so she come home.

And from there I was work for Scoby and from there I got a job Northway.

I work for man and wife hotel room and kitchen.

Both way I work.

I work there two summer for Miller and his wife.

From there and I don't care that much to work there 'cause he have bar there.

I don't like people drinkin' So I .move back to Forty Mile and I work little bit again and then I move back to Tok

'Sixty-four, I move back to Tok, and I work there, there, there, there, and my last heavy job's a pipeline camp.

Once again cookin' kitchen. That's my last hard work.

From there I work, go back to Tok. I go to work to Rec. Center.

With old people I was bus aide twelve years.

All together, twenty years I work for with old people.

And I in kitchen. Every job I got, I gotta be in kitchen.

That's why I say you don't need educated to work.

You gotta know what you doing. I know what I goin' cook. I know what I goin' prepare.

I take care of myself for so many, many, many years.

I used to operated everything whatever.

I don't need, I don't ask somebody to do for me.

Now I need a lot of help. Can't do that much anymore.

I real careful for whatever I do.

I just gotta careful.

From there I settle Tok. Ever since 'sixty-four I live in Tok.

Still today, but in the future I want move back to Healy Lake.

I have mind where I go through.

That's what I want for myself.

Lot of thing we could do.

²²This is an old landmark roadhouse at Tetlin Junction where the Taylor Highway begins. It is twelve miles east of Tok Junction.

And my young son, married to Northway²³
He had three lovely children, one adopt daughter.
Got two girl and two boys Northway to where my son.

My history story far as Northway, Tok, Tanacross, Little Gerstle.
We started off with Big Gerstle, Goodpaster, Old Chena village.
I had to cancel some. Some very sad.
Maybe some other time, makes up my mind, I might talk about it. But not now.



Rosehips

But right now I goin' tell little bit story from the village.
I goin' talk around our chief.

Our chief, he work in the boat.
He's very good huntin'. He's very good trap line.
That's Pat and Jo Ann's grandfather.²⁴
Their grandma live with.
Not too long ago my cousin Jimmy pass away.
We all related to each other in this village.
We not different from each other.
Our chief, he go store. He bring back load of groceries
with sleigh.
He pass around flour and sugar to village.
Sometime he go Fairbanks he bring back truck load to Little Gerstle.
Bring with dog team.
He's very good chief.
Just sometime I just want a he live with us today.
But he left a lot of good grandkids to us.

Down fish camp that's where at this time we gotta move to fish camp. We gonna have fish trap.
We gonna have fish for our survival all winter.
We gonna smoke fish, but our fresh fish goin' be, we smoke it little bit, whole fish, we smoke it
little bit and we put it away in the cache.
Grease, moose head we goin' chopped up. We goin' make grease out o' moose fat
Sometime we put berries
and fish oil. We gotta fix it. We boil fish oil. We put water in there. We boil it
It just tastes like, come out like bacon grease.
And we mix with dry berries, blue berries. It's for old people.

²³Talbert Felix, Ellen's son married Lorraine Albert from Northway.

²⁴John Healy

Rose hip, you got your porcupine. You cut up porcupine fat. You get grease out o' porcupine.
You mix with rose hip. That's just vitamin C. And we make dry meat.
But then we take moose stomach, whole moose stomach, we take it out.
We dry, and we have lot dry meat.
We pound that meat soft.
We put that moose stomach inside the ground. We put stick around. We put grease in there.
After grease cool off, we put our dry meat.
That's real special food.
We never eat big either, just little piece. That's enough for last up.
Old people real careful for their food. Never eat all time just gotta eat good.
Used to tell us, "Eat good breakfast."
Maybe we eat good dry meat, maybe some kind of fried potato with moose grease.
You gotta prepare everything: blueberries, cranberries, high bush berries, all kind, wild rhubarb.
You just know what you doing. You gotta put it away.
I think lots this Healy Lake.
Every time I come down and here the kids 'n come with meat 'n just every time I come Healy
Lake I gain weight.
That's why I got smart.

While ago Ray²⁵ bring me good moose meat, whatever I'm hungry for.
Us Native, we gotta have our fish, ducks, meat, moose, caribou, porcupine, anything on the land
we hungry for.
That's where we loose many, many, many people without the food.
I live in Tok. I don't eat all those.
Pat and Jo Ann, they always bring me dry meat and whatever, ducks, everything.
Right now I not hungry any more. I don't wish for meat anymore 'cause all my niece family 'n
grown up.
They all keep tryin' to help me.
I real proud of my village and way I want kids run.
Compare to other village, people live on those easy money. Make you lazy.
You just sit on you butt in chair.
You bring, money come to you. You depend on so much.
Mostly that right now I waitin' for my social security.
My little retirement check not very big. I don't have a lot of income like other people.
I had two-fifty in my little retirement money. It's not enough.
Right now oil cost too much. I don't know if I gonna survive or...

My daughter 'n always help me. But we have to be strong for that. We don't go hungry.
The reason I say this, I want this one, young children here in this village...
Fall time
Nan tet tanh. That's mean, Fall time, leave turn to yellow. Leave gettin' old. Fell down here.

²⁵Ray Fifer, Healy Lake resident, Ellen's nephew

You young , you gonna sleep.

That's no good. They don't let us do that, Fall time. It's no good. She don't let us do that Fall time. Fall time he just treat us bad.

We train just like army. We never talk back. We never nag to nobody for that. We gotta do. Believe it or not, we go out camp. She camp mile from creek. Little bit of snow out there. We gotta run.

Native people don't believe on drink overnight water²⁶.

Other day, my daughter talk about. Gee, I just bust up with laugh.

How she 'member that?

My mamma, me and my brother we pack water and me and my sister we pack water.

My mamma spill it in morning time early.

My mamma tell us pack water and we look at each other. We don't say nothing.

We get water and she tell her granddaughter just , "Gee, here all forget it". We go down without socks. We go down by the creek. "You goin' have wrinkle on you face." We wash our face with cold water, ice water.

We had to do our hand like that and show them our wrinkle.

And we bring back fresh water and boys go out and get fresh wood.

Native people are tough. Don't have easy life.

That's where Pat learn from, his grandma.²⁷ I guess his grandma talk to.

Pat don't have easy life. He go out pack in his wood, paddle canoe, get fish.

I not brag about it, but I real proud of Pat way he keep his life up.

He make lot o' little good stuff for his relatives too.

He put little bit of food on the side for us.

Even taste. Very proud of.

In the village over there, we go out hunt. We got moose.

That Friday night we get up and we all eat together, fresh food.

You go out campfire, you gotta have stick to cook you meat.

You got no pot and pan, but you still gonna cook.

You still gonna eat, maybe you gonna drink water.

You got lost and you real got lost, you know which one to eat out o' moose.

Little bit o' (indiscernible) give you strength.

All those I know. That's a real about all I know, I 'member all the story.

My grandpa and my mother and daddy pass me on all I know.

And I got lot of things to talk about it.

²⁶Tanacross elders also share this view. The water becomes stale having sat overnight. In the villages of the Upper Tanana the children were sent to the creek to wash, to bring fresh water and to pack firewood for the household early each morning. This was part of their training for becoming adults.

²⁷Ellen's nephew, Patrick Saylor, Chief of Healy Lake. His grandmother was Jeanie Healy. She helped raise him after the death of his mother.

Lots sacred way we take care ourself. Lot o' good way we can do.
And sometime, don't turn out good. We goin' get together, we goin' talk about it.
I always put my grandkids together. I live with them, I pass on to my life to them.
Some my grandkids don't listen.
I ask one my grandson I'm strong. That's Robert Paul. Let's go down river. Go with me.



Tsui't Porcupine

I goin' show you how to work for food.
"No, Grandma, it's too cold. I don't have patient for those."
I thought, "Gee, what kind o' kid's that?" Hum, I don't taught grandkids any more.
But right now I really work hard with one.
At least one I want to learn out o' me to pass on to other one.
Old people talk to young people, just don't ignore.
You better stop listen that.
Old grandpa, old grandma say something, you drop everything for them²⁸. Respect. Listen. You goin' learn something out o' them.
Maybe this person, maybe this woman, maybe she don't know.

Maybe she goin' learn something from this tape.
Maybe someone goin' be strong from this tape.
Whoever goin' listen to this tape goin' be strong.
"If Grandma can do, we could do."
The pain sometime we run into bad pain.
My mother and daddy told me, "Don't run into that sharp pain.
That trail you walk, sharp stick goin'...stick like that, you goin' run into."
You know what it mean? That's not stick.
You go run in to you real hate on you heart that sister and brother.
You run into the trouble. You can't back up. You already there.
All these that we have to understand, we have to listen.
This village, quite a few children out there.
I want this tape, I want them kids listen, learn something from all out o' the campfire, all I talk, campfire cook.
You could cook your dry fish in campfire.
Moose fat, you gonna cook moose fat. And you gonna eat moose fat and dry fish together.
Maybe dry meat.
You heavy food you gonna boil. You drink soup.
No junk in there.
I want my soup, no salt, no pepper, no nothing.
I don't want no ketchup in my food either.
I want eat my porcupine. I want it been clean, burned, just like old day. You don't skin porcupine. Take flavor out.

²⁸All of the villages of the Upper Tanana region share the traditional value of respect for elders. This was and is manifest in special food delicacies set aside for them, consideration for their warmth, comfort and safety and in gift distribution at potlatches.

You don't wash you stomach moose stomach just pure white, you got flavor out. I'm Indian woman I want my food just perfect way I grown up.

This one, I want young people listen. He always wash food too much and flavor out. Ruin that food when you wash too much.

You got you fresh meat up there. Leave on meat cache. You smoke it little bit and go ahead work on. Put it away.

You don't wash you food too much. Us native people, we don't like that.

Make sure you cut you meat good. Clean.

Make sure you gotta have something under you moose before you skin.

Make sure you prepare. Make sure whatever you goin' do

Fish, what's out there on the land, rabbits, I think I still 'member all how to take care of food. I could. I take care o' your rabbits. You goin' eat you rabbits all winter without 'n freeze, without 'n spoil. Guess I gettin' so tired so....(laugh) 'till tomorrow...

Interview with Ellen Demit
Healy Lake
August 16, 2000
Interviewers: Don Callaway & Connie Friend

This is Don Callaway. It's August 16th and we're continuing to talk with Ellen Demit. Ellen, go ahead.

Ellen: Okay.
Over there in old village.
That's my teenage days to where I growin' up,
and I gonna talk about this morning
over there old village.
The name that's Indian word, *Mendees Cheeg* That's Healy River.
He had biggest potlatch²⁹.

People come from all over:
Copper Center, Tazlina, Northway, Tanacross, Tanana, Nenana, Fairbanks. People all
over .
The back days you never jump in a car and a boat. Big boat, people
travel around to village over there.
Up there where Paul & stay that's where big boat land.
I was young.
I thought that's war gonin' be.
Whatever people

29

This was the "Famous Potlatch of Healy Lake" in 1927. Old Chief Healy and his small band decided to hold a memorable potlatch and invited all of the bands of the Upper Tanana and the Copper River area. The Copper River Natives were wealthier due to their rich salmon resources and far more numerous. However, Chief Healy was not known for being shy or particularly humble and so the invitations were sent out. come and "Have tea with me". The "tea" cost Chief Healy and his small band of approximately eight families between \$15,000 and \$20,000 in blankets, rifles, ammunition, tobacco, coffee, tea, sugar, flour, rice, raisins, canned fruit and a host of other gifts and provisions for the invited guests, by far one of the most elaborate potlatches held in the Upper Tanana region. This amounted to the total depletion of all their worldly goods. (Endicott, H.W.1928:104-105 and Simeone, W.E.1995:39).

I thought they goin' shoot us out³⁰ but it didn't turn out like that. That's potlatch.
Potlatch, people goin call *sol chee*.
That's the people goin' come visit us.
Share the love with us.
Biggest potlatch I ever see
when I was small.

Okay I gonna start it all over again.
I makes up my mind to talk.
We had beautiful five days
maybe two week potlatch,
and we had all those native food.
Who makin' potlatch?
My mother and Daddy,
Chief Healy, John Healy,
Paddy Healy, Mary Healy.
And he all get together
the potlatch.
Back days they don't bring stuff inside.
(I had to use some my native word between and I gonna explain my English word.) .
They have (inaudible) that (inaudible) all the way to hillside.
(Inaudible) he have blanket, gun, beaver skin, fur, moose skin, moccasin, skin coat,
jacket, everything, moccasin, everything.
He put it there.
During the night he covered.
Very *injiir*³¹

30

The customary greeting when two bands met was for the approaching band to fire a volley of rifle shots and the hosts to fire a volley in response or vice versa. Ellen, being a small child at that time mistook the greeting for a signal of war.

31

For traditional people of the Upper Tanana supernatural forces or spirits (both animal and human) were powerful influences not to be ignored. To hold a large

That's superstitious.
He have a stick.
Clean special stick go for all the way up to the hill,
the one each place potlatch.
Each house
end of that stick,
lot of stuff,
almost half an on top the hill.
The stuff, every one of them makin'
potlatch and he all work together.
Each house he cook dry meat, fish.

Woman makin' biscuit.
Back days you even use moose grease to makin' your donut.
Even back days I remember he makin' donuts with moose grease,
even though he have lard from store and everything.
But that's way potlatch.
And if we are Native, we have to use our own food to cook.
I 'member almost two week and he take it down.
Back time our chief, Chief Healy cut all his hair off³².
He shave his hair off.
know why he do that?
He's so.... happy his relative from all over visit.
One of Walter Northway³³ ask,

potlatch was an enormous responsibility both materially and spiritually. There were many rituals and taboos involved and these required strict adherence or catastrophe could strike.

³² Hair was sometimes cut or singed by the Upper Tanana Athabaskans as a physical sign of grieving or to drive off evil spirits as in the case of bad dreams or sleepwalking.

³³ Walter Northway who lived to be well over one hundred years old was chief of Northway village. He maintained a close relationship with Healy Lake throughout his

"Gee, *shee'eh*, why you do that?"

That's mean, "Uncle, why you cut your hair?"

That's what it means, "*Diigha t'inde'ən shee'eh*".

Chief Healy say,

"Ts'i'naa'əḡ". "Ts'inaa'əḡshaa nahdeedl"

In my English say,

Chief Healy say, "Thank you to come to have a tea with me."

He don't say potlatch,

no.

He just gonna say, "Have a tea with me."

He have a tea for two weeks

and no more boats.

Close to Fall time.

After potlatch, two week potlatch,

he gave dry meat, dry fish, everything.

And some boat go through to even to very cold.

Some go back with boat with a gift of gun, blanket, moose skin, all native work.

He had a very long potlatch.

People danced every night.

One night some people say,

"Alaski fire fires,"

and you know what's it mean?

He wants "chew."

So what my daddy did, he got case of snuff.

My daddy open little bit.

This is funniest part.

It's not real funny but to me.

Back days I'm teenage days.

He opened each can snuff, opened little bit and he say, "Alaski fire fires"

and my daddy just throw out there on the floor.

Some open.

People sneeze, sneeze, sneeze.

And us we peekin' from out there.

We peek little thing mouth,

and we look through

long life.

and we just laugh, laugh.
Nobody see us.
Out there bunch of kid.

And the back days you real strict.
Pretty strict.
We never go out there where people cook.
We never ask for food.
Nothing.

All this village, they all get together.
Makin' party for the uncle, brother, the one loose loved one been gone long time ago.
All take it out.
Right now you're goin' have more than potlatch.
Once again I have to use my own language.

*"Naniidq' q' tah etts'aay 'iin ey 'iin xxaadaxuxda' aaf'xunadet'ey elt'ey ch'axoxtahdiil
ts'axoxdey'".*

That's mean I say,
"You dig it out that person die long time ago.
The hurt inside so bad³⁴.
That's mean lot o' tear run down to your cheek.
Right now young people growin' up can't understand what potlatch.
People makin' potlatch, but yet no one perfect.
No, myself, I still learn.
I learn from my mother and daddy and my grandfather.
And our chief.

³⁴

Cf Lee Saylor's statement, p. 144 *"I've got a little notebook with someplace that Arthur Healy had written in and it was May 1943 and he was saying one place, you know Belle Sam died that day and then Selene died and you know just little notes in that . And you know he was sick at that time with TB. So this uh, that that thing kind of has, I think it's marked all the people in Healy Lake and what's been passed down on it ..."* High mortality from epidemics, forced relocations and the grief that accompany these traumas are all contributing factors to the high incidence of substance abuse among Alaska Natives today.

That's where all I learned these ever since my young days
I growin' up.
I grown up with love.
I reach down to old grandpa and old grandma.

I goin' put this little story for what's love mean
But I want finish this potlatch.
There's quite a bit,
little bit story,
long time story.

After two weeks the biggest cook,
Whole village.
Maybe fifty pound flour been cook..
Biscuit, oven biscuit, donuts, dry meat, lot of native food, special food.
Right now we never think fix special food.
I would.
I still remember how my mother and daddy passed me on to me.
I could do anything with native food.
Special way, special food I could fix it.

This potlatch,
after two week each one who goin' make potlatch talk with our chief.
"We're goin' do this, we're goin' do this,
okay with you?"
Chief not goin' say nothing.
He don't answer.
That mean, "Oh oh."
Then later on he think, he say,
"You gotta do this, you gotta do this."
"You have to do this".
So everybody all get together.
Everything okay.
Back days one gotta get up speech.
From our village,
other place,
other chief from other village.
Back days you just don't just come in to village potlatch.
No.
I still respect.

If Tanacross people invited, Tetlin,
all, every each village the chief gotta go ahead of them.
And little ways from village they goin' shoot.

From village our chief goin' shoot two time.
Other chief goin' shoot two.
That's four shot.
And then he goin' meet.
This is really bad too part I talk about.
He goin' meet each other chief.
He goin' speech out there where he meet each other.
Other one from other village and other one from this side.
They goin speech.
They goin' talk over.
If everything's okay , then they goin' come to village.
They goin' bring all that thing into village.

Back days, like yesterday I talk about little bit but not whole.
Today I goin' finish it talk about this potlatch deal.
They have a all those things.
Everything prepared and they all goin' get together.
People dance.
They have hats on.

You lose loved one in the morning time you get up early.
Sadness, you go for walk.
Maybe you see moose.
Maybe fox.
Anything ahead of you go through. You just stop stand.
That's where music come out.
Very hard to make music.
Not that easy.
You have to make song for big person. You gotta put lot of word in there.
You just don't make it any way
Don't make song, no.
You gotta take a your time to make song.
This is I talk to Healy Lake potlatch way I don't know how many years ago.
I 'member what year, but I can't ,I don't want to make a state(ment).
That's biggest potlatch we ever have for me in my young days.

Also I want keep this village exactly I growin' up.
I gotta talk about.

Put all the kids together before we're goin' have this little potlatch for my nephew.
We're goin' feed children outside.
Just old people are goin' stay inside the community hall.
We gotta do it and we gotta keep it up our a culture³⁵.

We don't have to give up our a culture.
We don't have to act like we different person, no.
High school, we gotta keep our a culture.
Our a culture is more than everything and good for the children and the future.
Our kids goin' learn.
Kids listen.
Me, I couldn't do.
That's why I guess we have tape recorder.
I had lot a pressure for this thing when done I run into.
Lot a sad.
But today I'm very strong for that now.
Yesterday was real hard for me.

And when potlatch ready each house he bring that stick.
He take it down.
He bring blanket.
Everything.
Inside community hall,
inside community hall he put...
He don't put blanket in there.
He don't put blanket in there.
He put caribou skin,
tanned one,
sewing together make like huge canvas.
Right now he gonna use tub and everything, visqueen,
but back days chief makin' potlatch.
Chief's son makin' potlatch.
Sew caribou skin, tanned one he sew all together.
He put it on the floor.
Each one that place he gotta put skin in there

35

This is Ellen's word for "culture". See Gary Holton's "Healy Lake Language" p. xvii

and put blanket and gun and arrow³⁶
and moose skin, beaver skin, lynx, all kind animal skin out there on the land.
That's what we try to do in this our village.

I doin' the talk lots with this my grandkids, my niece and his kids.
I got talk with them all time.
They don't do right I say, "Stop".
The word not right for me I say, "Don't say that."
We have to help each other.
Other one don't do good you have to softly say,
"Don't do that. I don't think it's right."

Gotta respect for the one you not related and *Naltsiin*.
This village is *Naltsiin*³⁷ village.
Is very special village.
Very strong.
Strong village.
And I don't brag for my village but only I know very strong people used to live over
there.
Big people.

Chief makin' potlatch.
No one bring that stuff before chief.
Chief gotta tell all her son and bring her stuff.
That special gift he wanted she go out and bring herself.
She bring it all that potlatch stuff.
And then he goin' tell one of son, one of daughter.
My mom and daddy they all bring that stuff.
But you never come before chief.
You gotta respect.
And she bring all stuff and that community hall, biggest community hall we ever had.

³⁶

Chief Healy was known for being an outstanding hunter, trapper and provider.

³⁷

Naltsiin is one of the major clans of the Upper Tanana. Ellen takes great pride in her clan and in her village.

That's first community hall I growin' up.
The chief he decoration with fur.
Inside community hall I 'member lynx skin, beaver skin hang on the wall, fox.
Rosa just tan one.
That's what we doin' right now.
Whatever we do right now goin' go down to all my family and my grandkids everyone
of (unintelligible).
I want even though I have to use somebody community hall I still goin' do and my own
a culture from this village.

The one come visit you, you real gotta treat them good and show the person that place
to sleep and eat good.
That community hall all full people, got no room to sleep.
Some and people invited the house,
but no matter old man, old granny you have to treat them right.
Old grandpa, old grandma, this one goin' give you good life.
Right now you think you young.
It's okay, but that word will come out,
hit you sun's goin' down.

Nasaatee' aqade' sheg de', naasheg taatuuxatatiif.

That time it's too late.
The one try to touch you.

You ignore.
It's too late.
Maybe that person goin' be gone.
This one all I growin' up.
Today I prepare for this one.
That's why I have to tell whole story.
I don't want make a (mi)stake.

After two weeks people go up Healy River.
We pack the gift: dry meat.
No more boat.
People walk up all way up to Healy River.
It connect with Ketchumstuk, Northway and all go back walk.
Even young girl and go with her husband.
They all walk.
Some pack baby.

Connect with they call *k'aay kəp*³⁸.
That mean native word,
but that one I don't know what's it stand for *k'aay kəp*
but later on I goin' think it out and I goin' speak it out.
But it called *K'aay kəp*.
At Tanacross, Ketchumstuk and at Healy River
people pack the stuff, the gift all the way back to Tanacross.
From there all, everybody go home.
Some and go home.
Show direction .
Some go home boat.
Take good maybe six days to come back to that village.
And it's long walk.
On the way sometimes they kill moose and have a good time.
Sit together and talk about potlatch deal
And its lotta thing.
They all, it close to fall time everybody all come home from this village.
All over.
In the end, chief ,when all people go home,
chief he put necklace on everyone of's neck and tell good-bye,
shake hand each other,
hug each other with necklace.
Back days all kind necklace real pretty expensive.

The chief did.
Everyone of them he told , "Thank you very much."
And they end this potlatch,
Healy Lake potlatch.

And the other hand from there I goin' talk about other things.
And this village, it just seems to me a lot of respect.
I still do.
I hope these young children in the future listen to this tape learn something about it.

Kaay kəp literally means "marmot den". It was also a place name for Old Chief Healy's camp about twelve miles up the Healy River from its mouth at the Tanana. (Mishler, Craig W., 1986:123)

Nice to have things like that to remember.
We tape a thing, new sound, make new music.

In the summer time you could do a lot of things for you out there for your own food.
Prepare.

And right now I goin' talk about little baby, newborn baby.
Mother and father of the baby think two questions.
Back days I really listen my mother and my dad and my grandfather.
Whatever my mother tell me to do, I gotta do.
I had to train my baby.
I don't feel sorry for my baby.
Even my baby...
Many people think their youngest daughter is one of precious to them.
It's not for me anymore.
Even my youngest daughter.
Always talk very strong with her.
We have to taught them.
Right now young kids sit on TV.
Have short on. No socks.
I see lots my grandkids do that.
I don't let Darrel³⁹ do that in my house.
Darrel, he had to get dressed early in the morning whatever I say.
I throw them out of there in the snow.
I tell them run for one block.
I don't make this story.
That's what I did Darrel, 'member?
I throw them out.
Go out and run.
When you come back, don't stand next to stove.
We don't baby our baby, no.
We got taught them.

39

Darrel Felix, Ellen's adult grandson, son of her daughter Daisy Northway and Harold Northway. He lives with her occasionally.

The one we spoil them , if we gone how do that baby goin' be survive?
How do that girl goin' be mother?
How do that girl goin' take care of her kids?
But she don't listen his mother.
He don't listen his daddy.
He don't listen his grandfather.
Nothing to pass on.
Sometimes I don't even want see my grandkids and just too much TV.
Sit there all day just like nothing to do.
"I'm bored", kids gonna say.
I wonder what's it mean, "I'm bored".
I can't understand.
Lot of things to do.
Us women too got lot of things to do.
We go out pick berries.
All out there on the land we gotta ready.
The husband gotta go out hunt for wife and the family.
Hunt moose, anything.
Bring back that food.
We gotta work for.
Make sure our food don't be spoiled.

This word goin' be really tough word.
I goin' talk about whoever listen.
Sometimes kids gets mad; mad at the mother.
Some maybe little bit of change.
To me that guy , whoever, should go out work.
My grandson come home.
He's thirty-two years old.
He ask me, it's okay he spend time with me.
Nobody visit me so I accept him.
But I make him work for room and board.
He cook for me.
Sometime he clean house for me, best he can.
And meantime I preach to his ear all time.
When he go out, he goin' go some place, I told,
"Grandson, I love you.
Don't run into the sharp stick.
Stay away from the sharp stick.

Don't run into."
That's mean you don't run into trouble.
Keep you life clean.
Don't make story, the one you don't know.

If I don't know something, I don't have to talk about.
This is my a culture I talk about , the whole village.

The baby, even newborn baby,
if snow out there, we have to grab a baby.
Run.

Run one mile.
Huge branch out there, just wet, freeze, we just put out babies when run.

We don't walk slow either.
We don't worry about baby goin' get sick.
Maybe two mile when we get with the babies.

Train.
That's way when cold weather, our baby already been train.
You don't have to worry about your baby's goin' be cold.
That's what it mean, "You gotta train your baby."
Gotta make sure your baby eat good.

Make sure it's clean.
But you have to train.

I do got train,
that's why right now I still take care of myself.
I never let ignore my mother and daddy.

When he talk to me, I just sit down and listen 'till I fall asleep on them.
The best time that we learn from grandfather and mother and father and the baby,
we bring them back, we goin' bathe them, dress them, feed them good.
Three time we goin' do that.

And then, the diaper, we cut little piece.
We goin' put it on caribou trail and caribou trail we put little piece of diaper.
Caribou walk 'round.

Caribou's light.
Caribou's not heavy.

And mile, mile why we do that.
Our little baby when he grown up he started doin' her own life .
That baby we train already, she not goin' be tired.

Maybe how many mile, mile that whoever we taught goin' work, get the moose and
the food. That's why we do that.

And then at home we cook ling cod.
Out there on camp fire, we have a dishpan under.
We get the ling cod juice
and if little boy we goin' wash the legs, all both of them.

We don't worry about babe.
Little boy goin' be stink.
We bathe them with whole that ling cod juice⁴⁰.
And then we let them stay
maybe couple hour then we goin' bathe them,
dress them.

The moose goin' be sad, real sad.
This one we wash with ling cod juice, he go out goin' be real sad.
The moose goin' be sad.

I really believe that 'cause I talk lots family like that.
And you go out, you hunt, you know which one moose fat.
Just look.

You know which one's fat.
You know which one's skin(ny).
And we taught baby like that.

And beaver, beaver we don't train our family for 'cause they live on dirt.
If we use beaver too much, our little baby goin' be poor.
He not goin' make money.
He goin' be lazy.

So we take little part out the beaver bone, shoulder bone,
and the baby goin' be real, real strong.
No one goin' beat that baby if you train with beaver bone to your baby⁴¹.

40

The practice of enhancing an infant's abilities as he grows into childhood and manhood is a part of the traditional magico-religious beliefs and practices of traditional Athabascan cultures. In this case the juice of the ling cod would help to make the child swift and fluid in his hunting which would make the moose "sad" because his chances for survival would be lessened (a form of anthropomorphism).

41

Cf. Fred Kirsteatter interview: p. 137

That boy goin' protect himself.
Goin' be very strong.
No one goin' beat that little baby with train
with beaver bone.
But this is story for little baby up to grown up
and beaver bone we use is strong.
And moose, too heavy; too heavy.
We don't taught our kids with moose.
We just train our kids how to get moose real
easy,
but we don't taught our children with baby
moose or
Baby moose, you make a steak.
You real hungry.

Nothing to eat.
Make a steak.
You got a cow, you gotta get that little baby
moose go right along with mother.
You don't let suffer that little baby moose.
And old people, old grandma and grandpa
eat that little moose⁴².
Young people never eat perfect moose,
too heavy.
He never run fast like caribou.
Caribou's light .
He goes a mile, mile, but not baby moose.
So old people it's all eat.
And superstitious, and you don't... Young teenage begin woman,
you don't eat moose whole work,
whatever,



Moose Calf

42

This is an example of the Upper Tanana Athabascans' respect for elders. The baby moose or moose embryos were reserved for elders. It was considered *inji* for anyone else to eat these delicacies and of course the meat was soft and easy to chew.

moose heart.

Good part you never eat.

That's superstitious⁴³.

You gotta believe that.

And that moose quarter, inside soft one it one you gonna eat.

Maybe it good three weeks, maybe one month sometime.

You're not goin' walk around.

You're not goin' walk around ; you're not goin' even touch man.

That's very superstitious.

You gotta respect for man if you begin woman.

You really gotta treat yourself.

You go out special branch, use by you bed even though blanket gotta be.

Under blanket you use that special branch to sleep on.

You train yourself.

He put a special tent.

I want this so some young girl gonna hear:

He put...

When we begin woman we never stay inside.

We go out.

He let us move out , out of the house.

Our mother and daddy he get us tent.

43

Cultural taboos applied most specifically to young women and hunters. For a young girl her first menstrual period marked the beginning of her womanhood and her availability for marriage the following year (Vanstone, James W., 1974: 80.) Alone in the menstrual tent or hut she was required to observe a plethora of taboos and she was also expected to sew and perform other small tasks with little light. She was required to sip her water through a special swan wing bone straw and she may have counted the days of her confinement by knotting a strip of moose skin daily. Upper Tanana women were kept apart from the band for a lengthy period of time: anywhere from two to three months (Vanstone, James W., 1974:80). Even today traditional hunters are very particular about having young women near their hunting equipment. Young girls and women must watch where they walk, not stepping over any of a hunter's personal belongings or hunting equipment.

Sometime mile out from the home.
Inside the tent he put mosquito net, kind of like mosquito net.
Pitch dark we gotta sew.
No light we just put little bit few little stick and little light come in that's where we sewing.
We make lot of sinew.
Back days you gotta sew with sinew.
Even though you got thread and you gotta make lot of sinew to sew.
Right now maybe they goin' call antique that sinew.
I still use sinew.
I still make it my own.
And the young girl, maybe three month, never look around the country.
Gotta have head scarf.
If man hunt, you don't watch man goin' shoot.
That 's *inji*.
That's superstitious, English.
And I'm glad today I use that.
I still take care of myself.
That's what this *inji* mean⁴⁴.
When you young, you don't listen to that *inji*, when you get old you gonna be cramp.
You whole body gonna be cramp and suffer and pain, but time it's too late.
You just think you should listen to you mother and daddy.

You don't wash man's clothes with woman.

44

Inji, something that is forbidden or taboo permeated the lives of Upper Tanana Athabaskan in order that they not offend the spirits of animals on whom their lives were dependent or on supernatural beings or the deceased who were capable of bringing blessings or causing harm such as illness or other bad luck. Every aspect of one's life was affected by traditional values which included rules of conduct regarding birth, death, puberty, menstruation, marriage, potlatch, all of the passages and daily activities of a lifetime. (Cf. McKennan, Robert A., 1959:166-169) *Inji* is still frequently heard as a warning or a comment on somebody's behavior in the Upper Tanana region.

You keep your husband clean.
You keep your husband's clothes separate.
You cook for your husband very clean.
You children before your husband.
You husband's the head of the house.
You have to cook for your husband first.
Then you goin' fix you children.
This is real hard ,hard for young people right now.
But it is good.
If someone use it and you husband have to gettin' old.
You gotta respect for him,
what he done for you,
what he share her love with you.
You had children together.
And your husband had to be all before you.
You have to love him.
You have to take care of him good 'till the end.
I did my husband.
My husband paralyzed .
I never get mad at him.
Even though I take care of my children, cut wood.
My husband's s'posed to do for me.
I end up cut wood.
I end up trapline.
I end up do anything 'cause my husband's paralyzed.
I never mad at him.
I never tell him he's just sittin' around for nothing, no.
I'm glad I did.
I never hurt his feel 'till the end.
My husband died.
My son two years old, my oldest one twelve my other one three years old when my
husband died. You mad at your husband,
you don't treat,
when he's gone you gonna be empty house.
No one goin' do heavy job for you.
If you ready for that one.
Nothing is hard for me.

Me, I work just like man.
And I raise three children with on the land.
I don't ask for thing.
I never go next door ask for "I want this one", no.

I don't raise up myself like that.
My mother used to tell me, "Don't ask for food."
The one you ask for food, he might gonna get mad at you.
You hungry, do something.
Summertime you could go out get your fish.
That's what I did I growin' up.
I do so many thing, nothing hard for me.
It's still right now.
I always laugh for young people.
Young people, young girls they say,
"Oh, I'm so tired."
"Oh, I want sleep little bit more."
For me I just, I always laugh for them right in the face.
The person that have a little bit of pain wants lay down,
maybe little bit of headache wants lay down,
I don't believe that.

I don't believe a run to doctorin'.
You go out. You use you native medicine.
You know which one to take.
You know which one to make it.
You know which one to make tea.
You have to do thing out there on the land.
He have native medicine for TB.
He have native medicine for arthritis.
He have native medicine you headache so bad.
But you have (tape malfunction).
I drink right now my native tea at home.
I pick it from all over.
I know which one to get it.
Even right out there, I see lot of medicine right out there.
People don't know.
You walk around on good medicine.
Some taste like sugar.

Rose hip, you vitamin C.
Rose hip you could mix with cranberries and maybe little bit of sugar.
That's you vitamin.

And the young men and the young young lady come up.
Man, we gotta train them different.
We train woman different.
And we gotta work real hard with man.
If father die, you gonna be mother and father, both.

I did.
I raise up my son.
I use his daddy culture for my son, my culture for my son.
"Don't do this. Don't do this."
My son's married when he's thirty, th-, thirty years old.
He's married.
He have beautiful children.
Still have a time to take a you time to be married.
Too young you get married, you goin' divorce.
You goin' suffer your children.

All those don't believe, there lots thing you can do.
Like two week ago we get together in this buildin', community hall.
We get together and we eat together and we have real wonderful time.

You have potlatch, you never talk about again.
Superstitious, you don't talk about.
You don't brag about how big potlatch you got either.
No.
My mother used to tell me, "Don't go potlatch all time."
Her native word she say, "*Nts'e'ek'eeitdiil gha che?*"
Goin' go potlatch.
That's mean if I run to potlatch, maybe I goin' have gift, gun,
but I when I, my turn to makin' potlatch someday, seem like I gotta return.
Not same person, but I gotta return to other relative.
I goin' give a gun.
This is potlatch.

I talk about there and there.
I can't talk 'bout same word long time.
I put each word little bit.
Maybe some day, maybe I goin' make it whole, whole.

(Here Ellen shares the Athabaskan place names of her land.)

And he call this lake "*Mendees Cheeg*".
That's *Mendees Cheeg* go for Healy Lake.
And he call way over there close to river one lake he call "*Taagos Menh*"
and my English that's Swan Lake.
Taagos, that's swan, Swan Lake.
And he call that one place Healy Lake he call "*Ch'endaag*".
Ch'endaag Menh,, that's mean where moose come, eats all of,
all of special plant.

Moose eat her food.
That always moose have a trail and all the way down to lake you can see.
It look like ball field.
Healy Lake boys call "ball field".
What he call "ball field" that means *Ch'uxeel*.
That's uh back, back days they call basketball. *Ch'uxeel*.
That's basketball.
Right now they call basketball English so he call English that hill and ball field.
And just like he play basketball.
The way in the back the person never didn't top that *ch'endaag* where moose always
come down the hill.
The man's name, back days they call this man real funny name, back days.
They call *Ch'uxeel* this person.
I guess back days he's big man, I don't know.
That's way before this, my grandpa tell me this story.
I used to laugh for all time.
Then my grandpa gets mad at me, I don't laugh anymore.
But that's what it mean *ch'uxeel*.
That's basketball.
Ch'uxeel Ddhel.
And he call right now Healy Lake moo-. *Dendiig Ndiig*.
And other one's *Ch'endaag*.
That's where moose eat.

Whatever moose eat, special food, dirt, the moose come down.
Maybe salt in there.
We don't know.
Moose just eat all the time there.
And this other place you call moose *Ndiig*.
That's where our huntin' place.
And this hill he call *Teyh ts'eeg*.
That's mean long hill.
Connect with Swan Lake .
Connect with Swan Lake he call *Teyh Ts'eeg*.
That's long hill.
And that's what mean *Teyh Ts'eeg*.
It's not small, but big hill.
And then five mile hill and the lake he call *Xelt'aaddh* .
Xelt'aaddh Menh
That's another place have moose.
Good place for moose.
But I can't, don't know how he call that big branch leaf on the lake.
Has some little yellow leaf , yellow flower in there.

I real...I don't know how he call English, but us, we call *Xelt'aaddh Menh* for that thing
growing in the lake.
And that's Indian name, *Xelt'aaddh Menh*.
That's five mile hill.
Now, I got talk about Healy Lake, Healy River,
Ts'aadley Ndiig.
That's stand for the fish.
Big fish come out in the creek.
They call big fish *Ts'aadley*.
And he call That's why he call *Ts'aadley Ndiig* .
It connect with *K'aay kee'*
Once again, I don't know what stand that *K'aay kee'* for English.
Maybe some kind of animal,
I really don't know.
And all I know, he call *K'aay kee'*.
And, but it's hard to explain English,
but that's our chief's home.
Our chief trapline, our chief's house.
From there come down and close to us to lake one big hill.

The creek, once again that *Ts'aadley Ndiig*.
Right down there to big hill he call to *Tuu Eeyaat'ee*.
Tuu Eeyaat'ee stand for the open place .
You climb that big hill.
You go down in the valley .
You see whole, all over you gonna see.
That's what mean *Tuu Eeyaat'ee*.
And from there come a close to Healy River, the one flat one valley.
He got cache there.
That *Dahtsaa Di'ee'aa*
That's Native word, you say, "*Dahtsaa Di'ee'aa*"

That's means in English you say, "high cache" cache there.
It mean that that's our chief's cache.
Our chief's camp.
We call that one "high cache".
From there I come close to lake,
one special lake you call *Ts'elbeet Menh*.
That's means fish ducks in there all time.
Make funny noise in that lake in that fish lake.
Got fish ducks all in there all time.
They have little one in there so we call *Ts'elbeet Menh*.

And that other creek connect with *Ts'elbeet Menh*,
we call beaver, *Tsa' Tu' Cheeg*.
That's mean Beaver Creek, English.
That Beaver Creek connect with *Ts'elbeet Menh* and Fish Duck Lake.
And from there to lake and *Mendees Cheeg Menh*.
And from there right over there where we come out with boat *Taacheeg Ndiig* that's go
down to connect with Tanana.
And down little ways under that hill we used to have fish camp,
all native fish camp.
In fall time we move down.
We dry our fish for wintertime.
And of *Xts'iith Kenin'aay*.
That's mean fish trap go through to creek.

And that's fish trap.
We made it by hand and that's our camp there.
We work for our fish.
And from there, from there and once again go back to lake.
And out there in the valley he call *Taak'etth Ndiig*.
That's clear water.
We used to go in a boat to get that clear water.
From village we used to get drink that clear water.
And he call that one *Taak'etth Ndiig*.
And then for we go up little far on a hill.
Hill go across to and we call that hill, he call that hill, all way down to Trading Post,
he call um, Cook Hill.
Cook Hill, that all that one hill.
And that's where we used to go and that name down there, that little creek, he call
"*Seejel Ndiig*".
That's graylin'.
We got lot o graylin' down there.
The reason he call where Cook Hill,
Fall time we all camp out there for that creek.
Get our moose and we get our caribou, and we all camp out, all way down to that hill.
And we all get together with cook and campfire.
Caribou, all Caribou Lake we cook long side o' camp.
From there, and my grandpa used to cook caribou liver.
He just, he clean it and he put campfire.
You just push those dirt.
Me, I stand watch, not goin' eat.
And my grandpa, he throw that liver in the fire.
Nothing in there.
He covered with dirt, he don't care.
Guess what, when after we come back ,

we pack meat all day, we come back,
my grandpa break those marrow and he take the caribou liver and he clean it with out
there on a branch,
clean special branch and he clean it and he slice it and he eat.
Me, I say, "I not goin' eat here."
I gets in there.
Boy, delicious, good eat.
That's what I say, "you gotta learn how to cook campfire."

And he call Cook Hill, *Ch'ech'el Ndiig*.
And from there, little far down, 'nother creek, *Taak'etth Ndiig*.
That's another clear water.
That's where my mother, my aunt left house for me.
My aunt gave me that house,
she gave it to me and I never went back ever since my kids grown up.
And she have big creek down there called , *Taak'etth*.
Taak'etth, it go for nice and ice cold water.
And we used to drink nice water.
And from there all way down to fish,
we call Fish Lake, now we call *Tehts'á'a*.
Tehts'á'a Lake and that lake a towards to springtime, only time you gotta work for, hunt
rats. You have big bug in there.
Enough they scare you.
That springtime, that bug fly all over.
Very huge.
And I don't know why that lake all full up of rats, very big rats, just like little beaver.
That's where me and my sister, we used to trap for rats.
Camp out in the tent.
They call *Tehts'á'a*.
That's name for that bug and I don't know how he call that thing in English, maybe
"beetle". Um, I don't know.
Lady's bug?
No, I don't think so.
Not lady's bug.
It's... I think it's this big and black and uh I can't.
I really don't know how he call English .
I don't (pay) 'tention to.
I know but um someday to go down.
Go other side this hill
Jiiz Ndiig.
That's Good Pastors, English.
Jiiz Ndiig that's "Camprobbber".

From there to you go back to village again and you go back to Cook Hill again.
And from there you come back a close to lake to little ways from village and you have
to climb that big hill for caribou.
And go in top, you, in top that hill nothing to build fire with.

You, you gotta pack you wood.
You gotta pack you water.
They call *Daditthogh Ddhe_*.
Daditthogh Ddhe_ stand for the one you tan moose skin with.
Rock, Indian stuck rock.
And that Healy he have lots those, you can find, walk around out there you can find.
Indian *Daditthogh*.
That's the one you gotta fix it and you gonna turn you moose skin with and beaver
skin. Anything you gonna turn with it.
That's Indian.
That's long ways you call that *Daditthogh Ddhe_*.
That's long ways and that climb, the one mother gotta pack baby.
And knock you out a breathe before you get in top.
But that's where people travel 'round for food.

And one little thing, I forgot it.
And my grandchild he asks me.
He wants how to fix moose marrow, dry meat.
We camp.
We camp and we dry lot of back sinew.
We call *tth'eex tthiin'*.
And we make dry meat special way.
We take sinew out and English we goin' say, "back sinew".
And we take it out, that one, whole you got take our sinew out for you for sewing and
then we cut that dry meat real thin.
Just huge dry meat.
We have caribou meat and moose dry meat together.
And moose stomach, if you take care.
You take it out without 'n whole.
This one I said, "Pat want it there."
I hope someday he goin' listen.
Pat wants whole story.

That moose stomach, one moose stomach, just think four different kind in there,
and I can't not talk.
On one we call sausage,
and one we call a *ch'etthii' niikónn', ch'enadhuht'een, ch'etél*.
With we call moose stomach and "*ch'emet*".
Connect with moose stomach.

You take it out real good, without 'n tore.

It looks like little liver.

You know how to cook it.

You goin' cut open,
you goin' stuff with moose fat.

With all full moose fat and you goin' build fire and you goin' cook it with campfire 'till real burn, and you goin' take it down and you slice it.

You eat. "Umm" so delicious and a good.

Also *ch'enedhuht'een*.

I don't know how he call English.

But I on I goin' use my native word for that, *ch'eshaan shú'*.

You got moose, moose stomach you open the outside that hat 'n look like net you goin' take it out real clean and you wash that *ch'enedhuht'een*.

You goin' turn around and you put you stuff in with that whole *ch'eshaan shú'*, and you leave out for while and goin' be clean.

And this sausage you gotta take it out all those inside and you goin' wash it without 'n whole. You goin' make it dry, little bit.

And I goin' talk about this *ch'emet at-tthayh*.

And then the last one connect with moose stomach,
ch'etthii' niikónn'.

That's Indian bucket.

This is real serious one I talk about.

Someone gotta 'ember that. *ch'etthii' niikónn'*, you goin' take it out, you goin' wash it. Dry little bit.

And then you empty moose stomach inside.

If you have that 'long side a river, you gotta rinse it out.

For this dry meat, you gotta rinse it out real good.

You goin' wash it.

No *ch'eshaaagh'* in there.

You gots wash real good and you let water drain out, on a stick real clean.

And then you dig the ground out there where swamp place, big.

You put in tub moose steak.

You put stick in there where you gonna put grease in there and then whoever make a dry meat goin' build fire out there.

He goin' cook that moose marrow all day.

We call *ch'eshaaagh'* and he pack around big bucket.

He goin' cook big bucket and he goin' fill that big bucket with moose grease.

He goin' put out there on canvas.

He goin' put big rock middle.
And you goin' pound this moose dry meat.
You pound.
Soft one you gotta pound it real good and you goin' do like that with your hand,
make sure tender.

Then you put it to moose stomach.
It's already got moose stomach inside the ground.
You put that moose stomach in there and you cool off you grease.
You fill that moose stomach with dry meat.
You don't have to put salt and pepper, no.
The very very special word I talk about.
And he put that moose stomach .
My daddy do that one time.

I watch.
When he's ready for that moose stomach, he told me,
"You better go inside.
Don't watch me," *injii*."
He say, "superstitious".
And he all put that grease in there.
He have a stick, he stir, make sure all grease gets in that dry meat.
And he all fix it real good and he sing.
He have special song.
He stir inside the ground that moose stomach.
He stir'till real that grease gets in.
That Indian name *ch'etsis wutaay*.
And, and again I can't talk English.
I don't know how, what people don't know, that this is real special food.
I don't think he have a word for dry meat,
but not... Maybe he call dry meat "jerky",
and I goin' say, "*shi' gqyh*".
And he make with "*shi' gqyh*".
He make with *shi' gqyh* and then I cut tent open 'n I watch my dad even though he
don't want I listen.
I cut little place.
Brand new tent I open and watch my daddy an' I never get catch.
I run 'way.
And my daddy, he's blind and old so he don't see me. And he finish it and then he tie
together and he take it out.

He leave out there on top some kind canvas, he put it there.
Huge, this big.
Whole goin' pack to village and when the time,
he cut it real thin.
You lucky you eat this big.
That's little bite.
Oh, we want eat some more, but he don't let us eat that special food.
And then he take moose heart out.
Outside fat.
We goin' wash it inside,

dry little bit too.
And fat and all you goin' fry and you goin' fill with dry berries,
low bush cranberries, mix with, again, moose grease.
You goin' fill it up.
And that sausage, when you're ready,
if you have to be along side the creek,
the end you open this much with stick
and you just put it in the creek and all soakin' wet
and then you go down creek and you already you grease.
Right there you just pour grease,
and one person goin' put berries in there.
Long sausage just hang there and the reason you do,
if you do,
if you do out there,
goin' fill it up and you goin' waste you grease.
So when you put
filled up the sausage,
all full with grease when you take it out and make special food.
If you want to,
you can put little bit of sugar.
Dry berries and cranberries mixed.
He mixed and , *ch'etdziid*.
All special food.
That one moose stomach connect with lot good stuff.

If right now he cut meat any old way.
It's not like old days.
My days he skin moose just real perfect.

And we know which one hard meat.
We know which one tough meat.
We know which one boil meat.
We know which one fry meat.
Back days, me, right now, I still know which one fry meat.
I know which one tough meat.
I know which one I goin' boil.
And one more that we call *ch'ethij' niiko'nn'*.
I can't say in English, but it connect with moose stomach.
And you gotta big cold,
if you was up there someplace.
I tell this one I think yesterday I record it,
so that's other half right there.
And this one, lot of people wants learn.
Lot of people ask me for this one,

but I don't share my life with other people.
This is first time I ever in a put it on recorder.
Gets mad when people tell me wants record a me.
And my ideal, I think it's good to do that for this village and my family.
Maybe this sometime my family goin' listen.
Wants to be learn something how survive out there.

And he kill ducks with arrow.
Make sure you shoot the head with arrow.
Anything you shoot, you gotta shoot the neck.
You don't shoot moose or guts.
You gotta shoot in certain place or you gonna ruined you meat.

And out there we don't sit in tent.
Yes, if Fall time it's real cold, we gonna sit in tent,
but before too cold we pack to our meat in village.
I don't know how many trip.
One meat, we don't know.
It's dry meat.

Also you skin the caribou, he goin' give you canvas right there.
You don't have to have a plastic bag or nothing.
And if walk on you caribou skin inside, real good you take all inside little thing and you
dry and you put special food for it.
All special food you goin' tie with one whole caribou.

You goin' pack it up hill.
Sometime you put some extra and you don't feel like you pack one moose 'cause it 's
already dry.
And he don't throw it away even little piece of bone.
I still real believe it:
Caribou feet, caribou, moose, my mother even climb the tree with it.
Tie to tree good.
My mother say, "*ts'edoghanih*".
Ts'edoghanih mean you prepare.
You goin' go someplace, you got stuck, you goin' 'member that.
You hungry, you goin' 'member where you put that caribou feet.
My mother have a can, old fashioned lard can.
He puts a little bit o' sugar, little bit o' tea and little bit o' dry meat, little bit o' fat.
He put it inside that moose.
Lots of caribou head inside between and he goin' tie with wire.
My daddy do that, but men always that strong.
My mother's can't do that much.

And last couple years ago, I come back.
I don't know. I think five, six years ago.

Maybe eight years ago I come back this village.
I start a walk my mother n's trail.
Where my mother and I used to pick berries.
Where I have stick in my daddy's hand.
Green wood.
An' where I used to take, go around with my grandpa.
But to be learn.
Ever since I growin' up, I real have serious mind. I want to learn.
I never think, "No, I'm young, I don't need to learn."
No, I never think like that.
I use it today.
Nice to be learn something.

And I run in to this something hang in that tree, broke.
I go over there.
Bunch o' caribou feet and my mother's lard can.
I open that lard can: little sugar, little tea and that dry meat just white, just like paper.
That many, many, many, many years ago hang.
I just sit there and cry.
Very sad for me and I just cry out and I feel good.

And I keep walk my mother n's trail.

All over I walk.

That make me feel good.

I don't pack gun. I don't scare.

I don't know how to be scare.

Out there bear, don't talk about bear too much.

It's all I hear people talk about, bear.

We calls *sts. 'y tl. 'g.*

We goin' say in the morning,

"*Shch'aa' kek' éčneghul'aa de'ndeg tihaaf de' sŷ'ŷ shdaacheegh sŷ'ŷ natuudaag shk'a' kǎ ha'.*"

That's mean, "Please, Grandpa⁴⁵, don't go in my way.

I don't have a weapon in a my hand.

Don't try to scare me.

I not goin' bother you."

That thing, animal understand you.

Last summer and bear come right in to my porch.

You think I'm shook up?

No. Why should I shook up?

He looked through at me window, and I sew beads.

Something move, but I don't 'tention. I sew.

Pretty soon I look at window. There's old Grandpa watch me.

Hum. I keep sewing.

"You better not touch my window."

I sewing. He look at me.

Finally I go out. I open door. I talk with my native words, I say,

stsey ch'iide ntl'ádhekchuut há

"*Xunâan taghinhaaf shk'a' kǎ ha'.*"

"I don't bother you, you don't bother me.

You walk down that way, look for food. I got nothing to give you."

And he stand up and turn around look at me.

"Hum, I understand you." He walk real easy.

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"Grandpa" is the Upper Tanana Athabaskan way of referring to the male bear. To talk about him and to say his name is considered to be disrespectful. This is also true when someone dies. It is *injii* to speak their name until the mourning period has ended.

He go in brush and turn around look at me. *xunâan taghinhaa*...
And you know, that thing never come back.

You have to... That's why I real likes to have a culture.
We've gotta keep it up, a culture.
You got stuck out there, something, animal attack you, you know.
How you goin' stop it?

Talk to.

And wolf, you gotta cut long branch.

You goin' do.

(Ellen whistles a long whistle.) That's a bad.

Wolf sure don't like that thing. When he hear that one, he gotta run.

That's you protect right there if you don't have gun.

And lots way you gotta protect without 'n gun, without 'n axe.

You gotta carry 'round little rock in you pocket.

You know what doing.

You gotta use expert for that rock.

I used to do that.

I got gun.

My mother bought me a 25/20 and automatic.

I growin' up with.

And but I don't pack gun.

Always I think it's too much trouble to pack gun.

My mother always tell me, "*Gee, ts'edoghanih*".

It mean: From Tok we left bad weather. Maybe I don't smart enough. I just have this a one. Maybe I just have little thin pants. Maybe I don't have socks. Maybe I don't have food.

That's what it means, *ts'edoghanih*.

When you go, before night, you gotta prepare.

Just don't getup, run out and jump in the car without nothing.

That 's *ts'edoghanih*.

I always tell my grandkids, "Don't go out empty stomach."

You gotta feed the man food.

Man can always work hard. Also woman work hard.

I did. Work hard. Man job,

both way I work on all these many many years ago.

I never think, "I want sleep some more."

I don't like go people's house.

People sleep too much. I want be alone and do.

Sometimes, four o'clock in the morning I get up.

I sew.

You want make potlatch, don't sleep on.

You hardly don't come.

I say this. Someone goin' listen.

Ghalii', you slow, *ghalii'*.

That's your money, the one you goin' make potlatch.

If you sleep too much, you never think about it, that money.

Very slowly you can't get ready.

Right now I can't get ready for my party, 'cause maybe I'm lazy.

I don't know. I not try hard.

But to me, I can't see good anymore. One side I have paralyze.

I can't do that much. I try best I can.

Sometime I get up four-thirty. I sewing.

Try to make little thing for my party.

Potlatch give you lot of pressure, but *injii*.

You gotta be strong for that potlatch.

Injii: superstitious.

You don't think you don't got nothing. You don't think you got not enough.

I don't copy other people, no, I don't believe a that.

I learn.

This is from my a culture, my own a culture from my own village.

I feel free to talk about it.

And other village, sometime a culture little bit different from ours.

Every village, they have different their own a culture.

I feel for my a culture in this village.

And I want keep it up like that.

Maybe someday I not around.

Even though one of them live, he goin' use that a culture.

Keep it up.

We just can't give up on our a culture.

And this is, that's why I talk about a little of food deal.

And the fish, he take care special way.

They have sour fish.

You dig the ground.

Our chief used to like that sour fish.

Back days we never say, "Um, smells too strong."

No, we never say that.

And you cook something.

You eat moose bone.
You eat with knife and you fill.
After you finish and this bone nothing in there, you grab a and you go out.
You don't throw out moose bone.
That's superstitious.
You take this moose bone, go out. You goin' hold and if you see tree, you put it under
tree real good so some animal goin' chewing and you don't throw it away.
Whatever you eat, throw...
They have special history word for that.
One day starvation!
Right now we go back to backwards now.
It's there, out there, but yet our children don't know.
People say, "Oh, early Fall."
Other people know.
One day that starvation come.
What our children?
Our children eat right now chip, ice cream, pop, candy and rotten teeth and...
I growin' up they told me, "Don't eat blueberries," when I began woman. Cranberries,
anything...
That's why I have my teeth this long, not short time.
I got gum disease. He pull all my teeth out.
That lotta *injii*. You gotta really believe a that.
Pass on to young people. Pass on to young boys and young girls. And the clan, the
clan's name: *Naltsiin*. You gonna say, "American people." *Dik'aagyuh* that's other clan.
Ch'aadz, that's other clan. *Tsesyuh*, that's other clan.

Interview with Ellen Demit
Healy Lake, Alaska
August 16, 2000
Interviewers: Don Callaway and Connie Friend

I goin' talk about my daddy.

He's blind man.
He's the one, he make trail all over with shovel⁴⁶.
Our trail just like road.
Many people make picture on the road where he make it look like road.
Cuttin' tree, make good trail...
Summer trail, winter trail
Good trail.

And my daddy, he's complete blind.
He was born,
blind.
He got cane.
He got his own sleigh.

He go out wood yard.
Sometime I go with him.
I go ahead of him with stick
in his hand.
Sometime I don't.

And, you know, he go in wood yard.
He hit his stick
He hit the wood.
He hit stick,
he go there.
He cut little piece,
he gonna smell.
Green wood,
he knows green wood.
Dry wood,
he goin' mix green wood and dry wood.
He don't believe on hitch 'em up dogs.
With his neck,
he goin' bring back a load of wood

⁴⁶Parts of the extensive trail still exist along the edge of Healy Lake. People who come to the village often take pictures of this trail because it was such a remarkable feat for a blind man to accomplish.

to village.⁴⁷
When he started cut, saw wood,
he split wood.
I used to close my eye.
I don't want see.
Seems to me he's goin' cut his whole hand off.
I used to watch to make sure he's blind,
way he walk.
And I watch all time, but
later on I begin find out he's really blind.

And rest of the part:
He tan moose skin.
His clothes tore,
he gotta sewn his own clothes.
He don't tell his wife
"Do this, do this."
He make dry meat.
He cut fish.
Today I'm old
I just wonder how he did.
I start to realize
he's blind.
Back days
to me I just thought maybe he even look.
And one time I asked him a question,
"Why you blind?
Why you don't see?"
He tell me
*Neet'dod'ht'êy*⁴⁸ send me this world the way I am.
That's mean, "Good Lord send me in this world
to be blind."
Right now, today, I get old.
I understand what he mean.

In Springtime, May

⁴⁷Rather than hitching up a dog team to haul wood, Ellen's father would pull a sled using a tumpline "with his neck."

⁴⁸This is the Healy Lake Athabascan word for God.

we used to work for our "gardney".
And we don't gets paid to do that

He put twine' round in "gardney",
all way around.
He crawl around
and he just pull that twine
around the "gardney".
We dig the ground.
He walk right along with us
He dig the ground.
He tell us,
"That 'gardney' gotta be real clean."
We clean "gardney" real good
before we dig.
But he tell us back days
no fertilize like he have right now.
Our fertilize we boil fish head and fish guts
and we spill on a "gardney".
That's our fertilize.
All "gardney"
and he told, "Do over again.
Make sure real neat and soft."
So we do that.

And sometimes
he go in the cache
he give us beautiful blanket
all of us.
Old time blanket
all of us, he give it to us.
We work hard.
He tell us
"You sleep on this one."
Boy, we like it.
We don't think about
we gets pay.
I try the best I can
after I'm realize he's blind.

The seed,

he tell us, "Cabbage,
one seed each."
Little bit hard from that cabbage to the
little bit hard for each other.
He tell us that cabbage leaf goin live,
touch to each other
and your cabbage not goin' growing.
If carrots, you gotta plant
two carrot seed.
He don't let us touch little seeds.
He wants do himself 'cause
us, we crazy 'round.
Maybe not even half a line.
We use it
so he don't let us.
And he leave peas
dry peas overnight.
He plant peas, string beans.
He plant.
whatever he plant, all growing.
Potatoes.
When "gardney" started growing
he gave us
up there.
"You take care,"
he told me.
He taught me how to do.
I gotta do it exactly
he tell me.
Without make a (mi)stake.
And he...
And right now
I don't know how he plant seed, but
he plant cabbage, rutabaga, carrots, turnip, potatoes.
We don't use our potatoes out.
Potatoes, we save it
for our seed.
And what's left over
we replant it again
and we got our vegetable right there.
We eat vegetable all winter.

Inside his house he dig the ground⁴⁹.
And uh have all vegetable
and cabbage and everything
inside our house,
inside the ground.
Each village he have a
deep freeze.
Indian deep freeze.

Our chief he dig
make big hole on the bank.
Big hole.
You go inside,
you don't have a light, either.
You go inside to that ground
if you want your meat fresh.
You gotta hang a whole moose
inside the ground.
Just hang there.
Not goin' be spoil,
not goin' be even smell.
By the time winter time's up
we got our fresh meat
right there.
And my daddy have a
same too.
Everyone of them have
where he have whole place.
Wild rhubarb,

and he's the one he make trail
all over
with by hand, with shovel.
Close to tradin' post
he make just like road.

He's blind man.
He done so many things.

⁴⁹This seems to have been a "root cellar".

And he's special man today
to me
when I talk about it.
Maybe he try to pass on
to his life to me.
At time I 'm very
don't 'tention that much.
I'm respect.
I'm young, I'm respect, but
sometime I want play out there
just like rest of the kids.,
But he don't let me play out there.
He don't let me go to village.
He don't let me go somebody's house.
He used to tell me,
"If you go next door,
maybe person goin' cook her last food,
and you come in he goin' pass this last food to you
and the person not goin' eat."

I real believe a that.
Whatever my mother and daddy told me
I just real believe it.
I still use it right now
And I got my own house.
I real believe it.

I used to go out to cut meat.
I stand next to.
I watch.
To be learn.
One whole moose arm⁵⁰
he goin' cut it.
One pull
he put that meat,
he cut it.
One whole moose arm

⁵⁰Front quarter of the moose

he goin' cook one piece dry meat.
Just real
I don't know how he do, but...

And a fish,
He cook dry fish.
And take him out pickin' berries.
He pickin' berries just like rest of it.
I stay out of his life when he cut wood.
Scare me to death.
Anything what he do
I stay out.
If he do something I like it,
I gonna watch all way through
and I learn from him.
He do lotta anything
good stuff, lotta way he do.
So today he's special man.
And he pass on to his grandkids
and pass on all the way down
still today.
He did lotta good way
to make us understand
to be learned something
from him.

He taught us
how to make vegetable.
He taught us
not to make spoil.
He's blind man.
We used to like his biscuit.
He make biscuit
in top stove.
Blind man cook for you.
Blind man make biscuit in oven for you.
Not to be hungry.
He goin' cook cranberries
with moose grease.
And we eat biscuit and cranberries.
Boy, back days everything taste good.

Take me quite a while
to be understand
to be learn.
Right now I gettin' old,
gave me lot of strength.
Some (days) in the morning I don't get up,
"Oh, my mother do this,
I have to do."
And I help myself,
"Oh yeah, I can do."
Why it's hard for me?
Get up do.
Look forward for
to be do.
I really wants try best I can
'till the end.
I want pass on my culture
to my grandkids, to my relative
to my friend.

This is I talk about myself.
Pass on what I got.
I have many white people friend.
I have many Christian people friend.
I have many people don't believe.
They have own, their own life.
But I take after my mother and daddy.
I'm not 'shamed of the pray.
My mother used to pray all time.
The Native pray(ers).
Lord's pray(er).
I use it at home all time.
Go someplace, Someone goin' protect us.
We left Tok bad weather.
Before night I pray for our trip.
I asked God he goin' take us to Healy Lake?
Bring us home, safely.
We have to have good life
to protect we don't get in,
run into something.
Gonna hurt us.

Boat, car.
We have to have a
good life for our friend
safe trip.
You go behind wheel,

you know what you're doing.
Sometime we run into something.
I pray for my friend, Don.
Go back to Anchorage,
have a safe trip.
I not shame of pray.
I always bless my food.
I go to bed I always pray.
I go out, go do something for my life,
I always pray.
"God protect us".

No matter what we are,
we are God's children.
We're not different from each other.
We're not different than white people and white woman.
We're all the same God's people.

Got believe it like that.
That's what keep us going
every day, 'nother day.
'Nother day, sunny day

Nee'et saadin' aa.

Thats mean, "We have good shiny day today."

We have to respect for each other.
I have to respect for other people.
I have to respect for young children.
Respect for father and mother.
We can't let ignore each other, no.
We have to care for each other.

And this village,
I sure love to talk about this village.
Jo Ann is chief's granddaughter.
Lot of respect for her.
Pat is chief's grandchild.
Ray, Michael, Ben, Cory, Jenny,
Rest of a loved one,

that's all chief's grandkids in this village.
And we respect for them.
They all try real hard for their lives.
Little bit o' job,
prepare the food,
fish, ducks.

Right now I came to
*Xtsiik Saa*⁵¹
Can't understand what's mean *Xtsiik Saa*.

Xtsiik Saa , right now we're on the *Xtsiik Saa*.
That's mean we're on the August. .
Xtsiik Saa stand for "Leaf fall down, everything turn to yellow".
That's what it mean, *Xtsiik saa*.
And close to Springtime, *£uu*⁵²*saa*.
That's mean , "Everything freeze a.
Springtime, close to Springtime, that's *£uu saa*.
That's April.
Saa chox, that's Christmas month.
My Native word I gonna say, *Saa chox*.
That's Christmas month.
Ch'eshaan saa, that's February, February month.
You have all kind name, Indian way.
All I know, every bit I know, but
all kind ducks have a Native name,
different way.
'N us Native, we all understand,
but some young people don't
(Indiscernible) understand.
But some Native wants be
*Nondlêde*⁵³.
Some go college.
"Oh, you think so?
Great. Yes.

⁵¹Literally "yellow month"

⁵²Literally "ice month"

⁵³White man

College, it's great."
White man educated,
it's good.
For me, we have to hold on
my Native educated.,
white man educated,
both way.
Both way, I real strong feel
I always tell my grandkids

And right now, everybody goin work
for meat.
Ten days season open.
How fast do you go out,
you get your meat?
Ten days.
How 'bout these ten days
like today the boys workin' out there,
weekend.
How fast the boy and girl gets a moose?
You know why? A Fish and Wildlife.
Fish and Wildlife watch every each village⁵⁴.
I guess they have to do their job too but,
our food, that's what we grown up with it.
We gotta have our fish, our ducks, our meat and caribou
rabbits, grouse.
Whatever on the land, we real(ly) goin' eat.
I don't know. Sometimes I confused 'bout Fish and Wildlife.
Sometime I can't understand.
Pick people, sometimes people loose their boat and their gun.
Some people don't have an income.
Like this village, people hard to get by.
It's not like other villages.
People don't have easy money in this village.
They all work hard for the live.
That's way we believe it in this village.
And myself, I don't have much income.

⁵⁴Ellen is referring to the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. Healy Lake is surrounded by state land and there have been conflicts over state "management" policies.

Whatever I work for, I got little bit o' check.
I'm just like rest of it. I had to pay my bill,
I had to pay bank.
I had to pay my 'lectricity
and I so thankful I don't pay my rent.
I got my own house.
I have to pay for my wood, oil, propane.
By time every little bit I got,
it's gone.
Everything costs too much.
So, to me, we have to put it away our food.
Anything whatever we grown up with
we gotta put it away for wintertime.
Long winter
we have to face.
We gotta be ready for that.
Lots way we goin' do.

All cemeter(y) needs to be cleaned up
someday in the future.
The renew,
all those things,
lotta things to talk about it.
Every each day
something to talk about.
We gotta learn.
Seem like we still growin' up to be learn.
But mostly I want young children learn.
Us, we know already.
I know already,
but yet I still learn.
I still learn.
Lot way I still learn.
But the word,
my mother's word come out on me before
Na saa tee' qq.
Sun's goin' down.
The word come out.

I'm pretty sure
I got lot o' white people, friend.

(indiscernible)teenage girls,
Some mother die, say
"Oh, my mother used to tell me like that.
Oh, I learned from my mother.
Oh, I learned from my daddy."
That's what I try to pass on.
Our children gotta be learn.
The father still be
needs to be grown up to be learn.

And the land,
Fall time we wait for our
our ducks.
On October, real cold
and we go out get our ducks.
We clean it.
We leave guts in there.
We have wash tub all full water.
We put all our ducks there.
Freeze it.
We leave it there all winter.
And the fish, you gotta cut it.
You dry really good.
Don't let fly gets in.
You put it in the cache.
You dry meat gotta go in cache.
Don't eat it one time,
even though it taste good.
You gotta take care your food,
your berries.
One time you goin' eat real good,
and will take care o' you half a day.

And young people I want start real(ly) learn.
Real background.
Whoever feel sorry for,
give you little story.
Just stop, listen,
you learn something.
That's what I learn from my mother and daddy,
my relatives, my aunt, my relatives.

I learn from them.
They pass me on to the life
to me.
It's in a my mind all time.
Get up early.
Do your thing.
Me, I can't get up early any more.
I done my part already.
I walk all over.
Fifty mile, twenty mile
I pack my meat.
For woman like me from village
to Cook Hill,
and a big huge valley.
Somebody got moose.
Back days you don't throw it away
moose skin.
You gotta use for mukluk
and moose jacket and mitts, moccasin.
The person kill moose,
he's sick person.
He can't pack moose skin.
He give up on that moose skin.
And my mother talk about that moose skin
all time.
"Gee, it goin' be waste."
"Gee, it goin be...."
I gettin' tired to listen.
I never tell nobody where I goin' go.
I just grab my pack and little biscuit
'n I takin' off.
I go close with that big, huge flats.
Swamp.
You don't have hip boots or nothing.
Use moccasin.
You don't worry 'bout you goin' get sick.
You don't worry 'bout your feet wet.
But you gotta carry 'round extra sock
extra moccasin,
in case.
Extra dry clothes you goin' pack.

That Fall time skin,
huge bull moose, moose skin.
I pack. I put it in my pack.
Boy, I just made it to that end of flat,
big valley.
I just go middle
swamp.
One place I fell down,
I just laugh for myself.
Nobody 'round out there,
I just laugh. I thought it's fun.
And I fell down and (indiscernible),
my feet stickin' out and my pack.
And I can't get up.
I had to takin' out n' my pack.
I pack that moose skin all the way to village.
Drag over there in village to my mother.
My mother don't know where I'm at.
I never tell nobody where I'm going,
I just takin' off.
And my mother go out.
"Hey! What you doing?"
I never say nothing.
"Oh, you talk about that skin too much,
I thought I better bring it for you," I say.
And grab me and hug me.
She say, "Shouldn't do that."
I say, "It's okay, I'm young."
I bring that moose skin.
My mother work on right away.
Take her four days to clean that moose skin.
Big huge bull moose skin.

Another place, winter time.
Way other side big, huge hill
somebody got moose.
In the village we hungry.
And with some reason too cold
we can't go our tradin' post.
So cold we can't do nothing

and even though
somebody go out hunt.
Got moose.
Real fat.
He all bring back 'nough meat,
good part, but he left some.
Too hard.
Too hard to go back
for it.
Say, "That moose gotta be waste."
But somebody say, "Maybe wolf goin' eat it,
not goin' be waste⁵⁵⁵."

What I did, five o'clock in the morn,
I get up.
I hitch 'em up my dog.
I takin' off.
I climb that hill.
I run into bad trouble.
I never tell my mother I goin' go.
Nobody know where I went⁵⁶.
I went to other side the big hill.
I loaded that meat left over.
And that big hill overflow.
And you 'sposed to tie spruce,
lotta spruce,
tie to your sleigh.
I never did.
I go down middle to
'n all over my sleigh slide.
My sleigh broke and my dogs
all there and there,

⁵⁵ "The animals sharing the land with the Upper Tanana Indians were considered almost like partners of Indian daily life. As the source of food and as living beings they had to be treated with respect." (Guedon, Marie-Francoise, 1974 :29)

⁵⁶ The Athabaskan culture has a great appreciation for personal sovereignty. With Ellen's early training she would feel at ease in being by herself.

Almost loose my life right there.
I goin' be gone right there if I (don't) know what I'm doing.
This is special word.
You know what you're doing.
You been hurtin' out there.
I always have extra in my pocket.
My back real hurt.
I can't do nothing,
but I tie my sled together.
There and there I pick my dogs
and I fix harness
and I start to hitch 'em up.
Boy, I'm very pain.
I can't even make another step.
I tie myself, my back
and make sure I'm okay.
And I make it to village.
I lay on three month, lay on bed
for my back.
That's what it means,
ts'edoghenii.
Don't run into something you can't do.
But I'm very strong.
I work just like man. Nothing to it.
And I bring that whole moose in the village.
Everybody can't believe I did it.

I go through real hard.
I always think though,
"I can do. I can do.
Why not?"
I always do
run into something hard.
But I always win.
I always bring back.
That's what it mean,
the life.
Good life.
Every each day,
different life.
Every, each day

you gotta work different.
Other time, maybe you prepare your wood.
Other time you goin' go out pickin' berries.
Other time you goin' go out look for native medicine.
'Cause goin' be covered with snow,
you not goin' have medicine.
Gotta' pick all those medicines
for winter time.
And you gotta get tea out there.
You have to do a lot way (out)on the land.

Summertime our fresh foods are:
rhubarb, mushroom, raspberries,
salmon berries, blueberries, cranberries,
high bush berries.
We so glad to see summertime, (indiscernible)
But hard to keep blueberries wintertime.
No 'frigerator.
We have antique, big barrels
we put all full with blueberries
and we put between sugar one bucket.
And we put sugar between.
It take, have lot o' juice.

Back days,
I don't know that much.
Right now I catch blueberries juice.
I make, add up, I boil it,
I add up with water,
I gots my cranberries juice.
I make it certain way.
Not really English way
I do different way.
I make it my own juice.
But back days I don't know why I never did.
We waste lot of blueberries juice.
'N lot o' way,
sometime your food spoil on you.
But you gotta keep try,
keep learn.
'Nother day to be learn.

Ellen Demit
Healy Lake
January 19, 2001
Speech to relatives

This thing over there 1946 I left and this village hard days.
We moved down to Fish Camp.
I think I have Agnes and Ina and Daisy,
just baby, just a newborn baby.
We left down there.
We set up tent and my daddy's blind.
He's down there. My kids... This part it's hard for me to talk about it.
The tears run down to your face
when you open up something.
Down there, Fish Camp
and nobody to come back from this village.
Nobody.

Our chief tried to save Jo Ann's and em's mother.⁵⁷
Move a to Big Gerstle, Little Gerstle.
Try to save that one little lousy girl,
That baby.
It's had to be my niece.

We stay Big Gerstle.
I goin' talk about today.
But this thing...
After so many years I don't want to face Healy Lake.
I just don't want to face.
You have to be strong like me.
I'm very ,very strong for anything.
Right now I had two daughters.
All my family not well right now,
Marylou⁵⁸, Agnes and my youngest daughter⁵⁹.
But some time I think about it:
I wonder I gonna face it again.
I don't think so,
unless I break in.

I come back over there and the first thing I see over there village,

just like all, everything come out.
No smoke, lots grass.
I look big cemeter(y)
I don't see cemeter(y)
I look at my family's cemeter(y)
I can't see.
That's what it mean,
"Mendees Cheeg, Teejuh".

57

Stella Healy

58

Marylou is Ellen's granddaughter, daughter of Agnes and Paul Henry.

59

Daisy Northway

I meet that son.
Paddy Healy have a one son too,
but that one...
It's hard for me.
So...
You kids ready?
You don't have to do anything.
Just gets in your heart
Even though you *Nondlêd*(white man),
it touch from Healy Lake.
It gets in you heart.
I never think you *Nondlêd*.
You part of the family.

Mendees Cheeg, teejuh,
You hoo, you hoo
Ah eh ah hey eh eh,
Hey ha hey hey hey,
Hey hey ah ah hey hey,
Ah eh yah ah ya,

Mendees Cheeg, teejuh,
You hoo hoo you hoo,
Ah eh ah hey eh eh eh eh,
Hey hey ah ah hey hey,
Ah eh yah hey hey hey hey hey
Hey hey yah ah hey hey yah eh yaah

Mendees Cheeg, teejuh
You hoo, you hoo,
Ah eh yah hey hey hey hey hey,
Ah eh yah ha, eh hey hey eh eh
Hey hey yah ah eh eh yah hey yah,

Mendees Cheeg, teejuh,
You oo you hoo

Ah eh yah hey hey eh eh eh

Hey hey ah ah eh eh yah eh yah,

Hey hey yah eh eh hey hey
Ah yeh hey eh yah eh yah

Mendees Cheeg, teejuh
You hoo oo you hoo,
Ah eh yah hey eh eh eh hey hey yah eh yah
Ho.

Okay. That's my ceremony.
Okay, what you want I stop?
You want to talk about your deal?
(From the audience) Maybe say what that song say.
Ellen: English? *Mendees Cheeg Teejuh?*

Sorry. Feel sorry for village.
No people. Nobody⁶⁰.
That 's what it mean, "*Mendees Cheeg, Teejuh*".
Oo hoo oo hoo.
That's motor. Motor kind of like:
Oo hoo oo hoo.
What it mean:
Oo hoo , oo hoo.
And that's what it mean,
"*Mendees Cheeg, Teejuh*".
That's like, gee, over there
I feel sorry for that village.
That's what it mean.
You catch on now?

(Inaudible response by village member)

Yeah, yeah it's goin' be there. Uh huh.

Um, okay I just talk with him while ago.

60

Ellen composed this song when she returned to Healy Lake (probably sometime in the 1950's) many years after the terrible epidemic of the 1940's. Her mother, father, children and other relatives were all gone. Her song is now requested at potlatches throughout the Upper Tanana and other regions.

I don't want double up, I don't want repeat.
Connie's goin' go like that and I goin' stop talk so...

Okay, we left...

This one I never talk about it.
So I had to talk about this.
And all this and don't know yet.
I never talk about it.

We stay at Big Gerstle
and there.
And me and Alice and Margaret⁶¹,
Alec Joe, and my husband and Agnes and Daisy.
And I don't have my son by that time.

We stay way in the back
ts'ôgh tah taats'étl chox nits'in'aay shíi dzeltth'ih
I'm sorry, I talk English
after while.
He likes listen Healy Lake word.
xandúg taats'ôgh tah dzeltth'ih
ts'ôgh tah
taats'étl chox shíi dzeltth'ih
And uh, we stay there then
This one the kids don't know.
Alec Joe pass away Big Gerstle.
and then from there we don't know what to do.
Alec Joe don't belong to Tanacross,
but we send him back to Tanacross
being buried there.
And then we stayed there.
From there later on we move to
Little Gerstle.
And me and my cousin Jeanie and my niece, Dahla,

61
Alice Joe and Margaret Kirsteatter, daughters of Gus Jacob and Agnes Sam (See Lee Saylor interview: p. 150).

and our chief, Johnny Healy,
and Alice and Margaret
we stay there.
we stay at the Little Gerstle.
That's our village too.
We stay there
and for long time we stay there.
And we don't have kids to worry about.
Kids small to go school.
And we stay there
and then my husband begin started sick.
And then even though we stay there,
and then our chief go out trap to
Ch'ich'ih Ndiig
ndég ée_ eedlah debee gha é_

so the family eat.
xundég ée_ eedlah
ée_ xundég eedlah ts'f'
debee é_ ey xuh tah ts'enh da'elsh^heeek.
I, just finally he feed his family.
That's mean, *Ch'ich'ih Ndiig*,
that's the name, Indian name.
Way in the back.
I been in there.
From this village I was...
with my nine dog I went
to that way in the back sheep country⁶²
and I bring back whole sheep
over there in the village.

62

This could have been the Macomb plateau which had been the traditional sheep hunting territory of Healy Lake until it was restricted by the military. Traditionally sheep hunting was men's work. This is just one of many instances in Ellen's life when she was required to do what needed to be done, regardless of traditional gender roles. Her husband became ill not long after they left Healy Lake during the 1943 epidemic and he never recovered.

So, man job, woman job, I did both.
So right now today I don't miss nothing.
I guess somebody hold my hand, walk around
like uh, it's cute.
Way in the back
and then he went back last trip.
That's how you kids' grandpa's⁶³ gone
Last trip he went back.
Get sheep, bring back sheep to Little Gerstle so,
we goin' eat all.
And that big open place, ice.
all of sudden, dog sleigh just like that 'n,
dog sleigh swing like that 'n
our chief hit ice.
Roll down, roll down, roll down.
And he fell down in ice.
Four rib broke this side.
That's our chief.
It's the one our chief die while he's still young.
And uh, start of hemorrhage.
He take to doctor, but he can't do nothin' so
he start a hemorrhage.
And I gotta talk about this

is correct story.
You kids, you don't know this part of story so
then later on he was gone right there.
That's how our chief been buried down there.
Part of *Mendees Cheeg* people.
Little Gerstle.
My niece, our chief, Steven Healy,
and her little sister, little girl,
and one more little baby's been buried,
part of you, part of this village 's been buried.

This is Patrick Saylor, Jo Ann Polston and Benjamin Saylor's grandfather, chief John Healy.

From there we stay...
I don't know I want talk about this,
but I just try to make it
good, 'cause this is other part,
but, somehow, some people came to Little Gerstle.
Have a trouble with us.
And by (that) time my husband build house for me up there
along side the road and my cousin and my niece
down there, Little Gerstle..
Finally we move up to highway and that little log hut,
lumber house,
with my kids⁶⁴.
And then she had bad trouble.
Little Gerstle come out
and with, we don't know.
Just right now if you did something
you goin' get reward.
My kids don't know this one.
And bad trouble.
What I did,
I left my three kids.
I walked half way.
Where nobody goin' see
I put them.
And uh, really bad trouble over there in our house.
Three people come in.
They all get rid of to each other
And uh, I was scared.
Woman like me
I take my life any way for my niece and my cousin.
That Little Gerstle, water just like that.

Water this much for me..
I told my husband,
"Watch kids. I goin' walk down".

64

Cf. Lee Saylor's interview p. 212. The people moved to the road in hopes of getting a school.

I walk down to Little Gerstle.
That waters look pretty rough.
I just jump.
I'm small. I almost float down.
Water this much for me.
I went to other side
to tell my niece,
"Come on let's go.
Bad trouble out there".
And, you understand,
Nodlêd iin ê_ xee't'aan up there
"Come on let's go".
All of them
they all don't want go in that waters.
"If I did it, you girls goin' make it".
And we all hand each other.
We go to that water and make it to other side.
Soakin' wet I don't have time to think anything.
So we walk back to the road..
I put all my family in in special (indiscernible)
I put my kids and my husband together.
and nobody have axe.
Me and Margaret we have to walk back to my house.
That automatic, my mother...
Before my mother goin' die she bought me automatic.
I worry about my gun.

Sure hate, but I don't have that gun today.
I went back to our house.
That gun was missin' already.
And Carl Innistrom, he's old time next to us.
He's real old time..
Nondlêd.
He's real old time. He's real nice person.
He's next door to us. It's the one he tell us he want to live next door to us.
He likes Daisy. This Daisy's a little baby so cute.
He never see kids like that
so he just make us move to next door.
Every in the morning the old man bring maybe some little food in;
just enough for my little daughter.
.He do that. That's why he wants we move a to.

And then, he all...Somebody all get rid of them,
all of them.

The person's name's Leon Jones.
And sure enough, he went to Little Gerstle.
He break up cache, house, those dog.
And uh, I so thankful I save all my a relatives.

From there we went to half way.
Live on the top. Can't just open place we live.

And from there I started go court.
It's real hard one. Especial come out from little village.
Can't just open place we live.

And from there, I started go court.
That real hard one went through,
especially you come out from little village.
But you know what you doing.
You don't have to freed what you goin' do.
You can't say, "No, I can't do."
If you Indian 'nough, you gotta look forward for.
You gotta go, no matter what.
Don't you think, "Oh, I can't make it". No.
Indian never think...Indian have real strong feel, very strong feel.
And Indian don't listen to people there, there, there. No.
Naltsiin walk right straight. Keep walkin'.
Keep walkin'. You push everything.
Bad stuff, put it behind.
Somebody come along and tell you off,
Woo you goin' get so mad you don't know what to do.
But it don't work. That's why I talk to you last Fall.
Exactly I open up to you.
Time we get mad it don't work.
We cannot say anything in front of our little children
out of respect.
We goin' say something to our little children
LEARN.
Goin' remember.
And we cannot talk about other person in front of our kids.
That's what I raise up my kids.

I never talk.
When I have company, I tell my kids,
"Go upstairs visit. I have company".
Free to tell stories.
Naltsiin 'n very strong.
Strong feel.

Us Indian, we don't want nobody push us around.
We don't want nobody tell us what to do.
Don't want nobody to say, "Do this. Do this". No.
Don't tell me what to do. I'm really mean for that.
I want do something, I gotta do.
Like after all I go through, some my brother come out, say,
"I don't want my sister dance anymore".
I think to, I laugh, tell his wife, "What kind of Indian he is"?
I not goin' die.
That's my Indian life, my native dance, my native food.
That's our native life through to background.

From there, we call that Five Mile Hill over there.
We climb that hill.
Little Gerstle after our chief's gone, no food.
We don't know what to do.
That's inside Fish & Wildlife.⁶⁵
We don't know what to do.
And my husband worry about his cousin.
Chief's wife, he say, "I don't want my cousin hungry".
Little Gerstle after we come from,
after all funeral and all done,
we don't have no potlatch, no nothing.
We couldn't help it.

After we put him away real good,
our chief dress good.
His wife dress him up good,
fancy stuff.

I'll never forget,

⁶⁵state land

his grandma told me,
I sewing just like Popeye
and perfect too, not any old way.
Nach'enihtl'ú'u.
That's mean I not have to sewing any old way.
He gave me (indiscernible).
Gee, you think I goin' finish that (indiscernible) in two or three hours?
"Yeah", (indiscernible).
She save her little pocket knife out, put on. and
"Oh, gee". I grab. I never say nothing. I just grab 'n.
Gee I was eatin' all full with beads I finish.
Here.
K'od daan k'exdaht'ee_.
You goin' be a woman some day.

You word from you grandma and you grandma, you grandma.

We come back. No food.
No job.
We climb that Five Mile hill like that with our three kids.
We down to that lake with our fish camp.
Not fish camp, camp. We make *ts'ôgh shax*⁶⁶.
We don't make tent.
Ts'ôg shax tah.
Just for you I talk my Native tongue.
And we make *ts'ôgh shax*.
Lots *tsôgh*⁶⁷ we cut.
Inside we had tough canvas and campfire.
We sit there and whatever we got we never eat.
We give it to our kids instead of. Me and my husband we go without eat.
Whatever we got and that night big bull moose at the end of lake.
We got huge bull moose. Lots *ch'ek'ax*.
And we cook campfire.
We eat good.

⁶⁶log house

⁶⁷

spruce wood

Fast eh, we cut that meat.
We work fast. People hungry,
so we make dry meat fast.
Try best we can and we smoke it little bit.
Then we left that meat there and we came to village
and we started hunt for rats (muskrats).
And rats and you just work around the clock and you just do thing and you dry
everything
and we load the dog pack and we go back to Little Gerstle
That time real nothing and we come back with dry meat and dry rats.
Lots little goody and everybody has smile face and we happy.

And some day we run into bad trouble.
And uh, from there, we go there to village.
We started off with Dot Lake.
We don't get along.

I just goin' say good part.
Other part I don't want to talk about.
We don't get along but I got stuck with my kids go school.
And after my kids graduate, oh boy.
I move a to Tok
look around for job.
I find job and I work.

This one, I skip it out.
But from Little Gerstle,
She don't accept my dog in the bus.
And my kids and my husband sick.
Put it in bus.
This time I started walk road.
My gun, my pack and my dog.
From Little Gerstle I walk all way up to Sam Lake
you know where I talk about Sam Lake trail?
I made it from Little Gerstle.
This, I don't know, I can't make it.
I set up tent.
Go sleep. I spent the night next day
I walk to Dot Lake with my dog.

This one, I almost forgot it.
So I did quite a bit.
And we walked this hill
you guys see, we been all over.
this whole, this one right there.
Always we walk. We don't ride.
No easy life. You jump in four wheel and boat and
if you go in boat you gotta have paddle.
You hungry? You go in that boat. You go 'round.
You get moose. No makes difference.
We got our moose with paddle.
If you don't .. *k'ii ts'eyh shii tatint'ox.*
You shoot you ducks there.
That's you food..
That's Indian life.

This part I never talk about it.

I'm glad this morning it's come out.
I'd better talk about it so these three kids know.
What's the back life? How painful we go through.
Today real like all my grandkids 'n treat me like...
Spoil me . I'm spoiled rotten. I put my finger there.
Something down, "Yah"
Something I don't want to work on, "Nah".
Don't need to work.

I got one after me right there.
This Fall I goin' make you work.
I joke.

And uh, we went back.
From there we happy.
All my cousin 'n have food.
We go to George Lake with paddle to river.
And we stay with Frank Luke.
For fish, we dry fish.
And we do little thing.
On the end we tan moose skin, beaver skin,
The end her grandma make moccasin

and we have no time to do anything now.
I start a make moccasin.
I start a do anything.
And we go Fairbanks, we bring back truck load.
Just us woman like us for this one, give us money.
This one.

Today I don't want sewing anymore.
I go through so much.
When that time I sewing for potlatch.
My mother used to tell me:
Tedhihts'eyh dé', ch'axon ké' ts'i' su'u tighuhts'eyh.
So you know what it mean?
If you want "make tea",
gotta be sewing stuff.
Yeah. That's what it mean.
She make fun with women and they laugh for each other.
All women gotta work together all time.

And then
last time we all go 'round.
All round to corner to corner to corner
with my husband and last trip.
every each corner we make,
that's my husband last trip.
Then we move a to Dot Lake for school.
That's where my husband die.

Woman like me I go through a lotta hard life.
If I talk about it, lotta tear on my eye.
You, you young. That thing gotta get in
Gets in.
One day the one talk with you,
that person is gone.
nasaa'aa'aa_ ts'i'.

Tear gonna run down to you cheek.
ey ch'e right now *mexnek_ee.*
All of you.
Sun's goin' down, that word's goin' hit you.
That's what I'm doing, my mother.

I never nag to my mother. Never.
I do anything for my mother.
Hand, knees, I not 'shame.
Brown soap, who ever use,
have a Tide anything.
Hand soap, brown soap, I used to
wash, scrub my mother's.
And the blanket, I take it out during the day.
Make sure it's clean. Fresh air.
I bring it back, make the bed..
I never say, "I work too much."
Sometime I haul wood.
Sleigh rope close to me.
Sometime I bring.

I'm very very strong woman when I'm a young like you.
I put my sleigh way over there.
I bring one cord o' wood with my neck
just so my mother 'n my daddy's warm
in Auntie's house down there.

Linda,⁶⁸ she done so many things for me
when I was up there.
She bring food, cook.
And all this time bother me
why she's not up there.
I'm glad you gave me good moose.
Hope she's well. I hope she come back.
You start it all over again.
Change his life...
I look forward to be change his life.

That drink,
that drink, what you life goin' do?
I goin' tell story that you remember.
Not only me, even Connie's goin' use
for her grandkids.

⁶⁸Linda Erickson, Margaret and Paul Kirsteatter's daughter had been in an accident and was in a full body cast at this time.

Even her, she's goin' say.
Say, "I in Healy Lake,
Old Grandma tell story.
It's nice."

They goin' tell his kids, "Don't do this. Don't do this. Don't do this."
It's hard.

But I did listen every word. Every word I listen.
That's why I use that right now.

Yes, I'm complete educated my Indian word,
but it's not that.

Lot of people say, "Oh, I know anything. I goin' speech,"
but not me. I not goin' say that, no.

You gotta really, really, really patient
for word.

Whatever you have to say,
Teejuh in your heart for other people.

Maybe you share food, little bit o' bite with you other friend,
that's what it mean, "*Teejuh*".

Like last Fall, "What he got he just givin' me? Fat?"
Pat. I still have it in my 'fridgeator.

I still have little bit from potlatch.

He know I gotta have something to eat.

That's what we did.

That's how it begin, started.

Up to 1946.

And '50/'51. '51 from this village
non-educated woman.

I don't go school. No kids over there.

I don't go school, nothing. Complete nothing.

'51 Dot Lake I got job.

One day, it's all my boss taught me.

Just like that I get. Use you brain.

And uh, gee I want, I goin' make.

No, I could do. What kind I am?

And I gotta job. I work. I stick with it, my job.

All those job, I never get fire one day and

not either one job.

Never.

I walk two mile to my job.

Sometimes three mile.
Sometimes seven days week job.
Sometimes ten hour job.
Sometimes fourteen hour job.
All day and night shift if this other person don't shown up, I got do their job.
I never nag at them.
I never say, "Oh, I'm too tired, I don't want do it."
No, I never say that.
You want job?
Stand on you feet, work.

That's me.
That's my life.
This is, I want share with you kids,
and I got lotta thing that plan on already,
that talk about it.
And some reason this one, I feel so good to come back my little village.
Even one night do me any good.
And I'm glad you kids come. Talk with you to listen.

My back days, my mother and my daddy tell me story.
We just sit there. We never move around, no.
He had little willow. It was this big.
We started attention,
we don't 'tention, he goin' hit you
How you goin' make it live when you grown up?
You woman.
You just sit there all way through. Sometime one, two hour story
we listen.
It's hard. Right now if we hit our kid, "Heh, Heh."
He's goin' cry a lot.
But that's our days.
Our days, we don't sleep all day.
"Oh, I want sleep some more. Ah."
You know what my dad used to tell me?
Not only one person I talk.
All of you guys. Pass on to your kids.
No makes difference.
Nondléd goin' listen.
He goin' pass on to their kids.
We not different.

Like I say, I don't want nobody come to my village
besides them and them.
I'm pretty fussy. I always tell Pat,
"Don't bring nobody over here." I make a state(ment).
But this time I accept.
If he wants somebody bring,
go ahead, but...I don't know.
Gotta be all Native.
This is native village.
Dendeey shuh keey .. neech'ah wutsey .
Not goin' step in.
I'm glad all people other side,
it still belong to this village.
Other side I see all fancy house.. We used to be never have a...

I don't know who bring them? I wonder sometime.
It don't belong to them.
This village is *Naltsiin* village.
Over there, old village history story I hear
from way, way, way before anything.
He have village over there.
All the way through to *Naltsiin*.
We have few *Diik'aagyu* in our village
and sometimes something bother me, but it's okay.
Maybe it's good for you guys to make company.
You hear motor, you see something,
but, I really don't care that much.
I got just as much right to say, "This is my village."
And I'm old too. I'm just right to talk about it.

And from there, okay, I talk about all this what we done with you grandfather.
I never talk about this.
From there after everybody die, we all...
My niece move a wrong direction,
got married.
My niece and I we used to be like that.
We share our one dollars with each other.
We watch each other.
Make sure one don't hungry,
Make sure other one dress good.

We share. We share. We share.
We walk together, 40-Mile together.
It's right there we split.
She say, "My aunt, I fall in love. I goin' get married."
Whooh!
Okay.
That's where my niece left me. 40-Mile.

Got married.
That's where...
turn out.
I never talk about this
with you kids...
Naxuh ddel ts'ey wudzih nts' e' me' atdeyh?
He knows.
Ddhel tsey miisi'' nts' e' me' atdeyh?
You know what's Indian name?
That over there,
Xaagos Menh, Swan Lake.
That long hill, *Ts'eeg*.

Xelt'aaddh Menh.
Ch'uxeel Ddhel.
That where moose always,
Ch'endaag, moose like eat dirt.,
That's my native word I'm gonna say,
Ch'endaag. Moose like that thing he eats.
He eats the dirt.
That's what *Ch'endaag*, that hill over there
just like basketball field.
It's one he call *Ch'uxeel*.
Way in the back.
Way long time ago,
in top that hill, person's name, his kind like...
Maybe that's why over there he call very strong village.
And man live over there in top.
He don't want nobody disturb.
So he set in top.
His name is *Ch'uxeel*.
He make Indian basketball with *chox*, porcupine quill.
And basketball he play.

I hear other side just used to be beautiful
and when young kids go over there he play with that Indian basketball,
Ch'uxeel. *Ch'uxeel*, that's basketball, been made with porcupine decoration with...
feather and he just say...

That's why he call *Ch'uxeel Ddhel*..

All the way to that Healy River,

Tsaadley Ndiig.

Tsa' Tu' Cheeg.

Way over there, big hill,

Tuu'eyat'een

and this,

Dahtsaa Di'ee'aa Nde'

Uh, *Ch'endaag*,

Little creek. Little creek

I wonder it's still there.

Little Creek, *Taak'etth*. *Taak'etth Ndiig*

he call just like Volkmar.

Taak'etth Ndiig he call.

Dahtsaa Di'ee'aa.

What *Nondléd way call it?*

Cache. High Cache.

Indian way, *Dahtsaa Di'ee'aa*.

And *k'aay k'ee*.

And *Tsaadleey Ndiig* connect with *K'aay K'ee*.

Tsaadleey those big huge fish, Fall time.

There's lots in that creek.

That's why you take all you supply.

And that's what it mean, *Tsaadleey Ndiig*.

You connect with *K'aay K'ee*.

K'aay out there someplace, this big animal.

Used to be lot over there in village.

During the night time just stand up.

He make hole so much with where's cemeter(y).

And I don't know what happen. I never see *K'aay* anymore.

You see?

Whew!

Used to...Oh, used to be lot during the night.

(From the audience: "Groundhog?")

I guess. (Probably marmot)
That's what it mean, *K'aay K'ee*.
He name of that little animal, *K'aay K'ee*.
That's Chief Healy.

After you pass *K'aay K'ee*, there's some huge *ddhe*_
those pink stuff *tseyh*.
That's Indian paint.
That's real....
This one I want you guys remember.
Maybe someday, even though different, but
maybe Pat go round see that little hill.
I don't know how...
No young people go there. No.
Not woman. Chief, himself, he goin' climb that hill.
He have a
little skin bag
and he just pick.
He pick all full bag..
He call *tseyh*.
Indian paint.
He paint you face if you
if you, you're mad.
If you're really mad and you're strong one,
he put that *tseyh* on you.
Somebody come close to you
and stand out there,
"Oo, he looks mean".

And that's one *tseyh*.
That's where that *tseyh* from.
You gotta get it.
That's real real paint,
real nice paint.

And uh, they call it *tseyh*.
That's where that Indian paint come out.
You touch something with it.
stay there. Never faded out.

All you kids don't understand

that's why English and I mix...

It's hard for me to be English and my Native tongue.

mix,

and also I loose out my Native word from Healy Lake
little bit.

Don't touch. And uh,

xundég eeteen.

aadaa'a ddhe_ denh tah naghin'aay

connect with *Sah Tuu Cheeg.*

From there, way up there someplace,

big lake, called Fish Lake.

Luug Menh.

And I don't know how you guys call.

I don't know it's still there or not, but

so changed. So changed.

xuh ch'e ts'edoghanih.

You know what *ts'edoghanih* mean?

Jo Ann and Pat know..

Ts'edoghanih mean you real real gotta prepare.

If you want go, you miss out all those Grandma's stories.

Wudzih



Caribou

***Patrick Saylor
Born in 1966
in Fairbanks, Alaska***

Pat Saylor is the older of two sons born to Stella Healy Saylor and Lee Saylor. He has one daughter named Swan. Although he greatly prefers to be engaged in subsistence activities full time, he has been politically active since he was seventeen years old. Pat's genealogical links run deep in both the Healy Lake/Joseph and the Mansfield/Ketchumstuk bands as well as the Upper Ahtna. Reluctantly he has held the position of First Chief of Healy Lake more than once. He was one of the founders of the Arctic Athabascan Council which serves indigenous people internationally. Pat has fought and won many battles for his people in his young life and though he would prefer the quiet of the woods, he carries the mantle of his grandfather and great-grandfather, the chiefs of Healy Lake.



Patrick Saylor front and center.

Benjamin and Patrick Saylor at Healy Lake Pottlach 2001

Interview with Patrick Saylor

Healy Lake

August 16

Interviewers: Don Callaway & Connie Friend

It's Wednesday and we're in Healy village, Healy Lake and today we're gonna have Pat Saylor talk. Present also are Connie and Agnes. It's all yours, Pat.

Pat: Can I talk?

Don: Talk. Say anything you want.

Pat: And then you're gonna back track it?

Don: Right.

Pat: Oh, okay. Well I'll just talk about the bear thing. We used to have to watch all the, watch all the food when there's, the hunters were out. And like cookin' the bear ribs of fire or messin' around n' cookin' ducks n' oil and duck eggs or doin' somethin' always. Have you busy there all the time and couldn't go noplac. Couldn't keep up when you're only seven or eight years old. Your stuck in one place watchin' the camp, keepin' things ready for when they came back. Hot tea 'n (rest of sentence inaudible).

Well, I'd like to just start out with some things my grandma told me about where she was from, where she was born 'n grew up 'till she was the age of twelve. At that time she said she was born in the Middle Fork of the Forty-Mile River right, right below where Joseph, below Joseph Creek down in that area there with the caribou. Forty-Mile caribou herd has their, has their, um, has their babies, 'n calving grounds. And she had two older sisters and anoth' one, younger one, she, Lucy Luke, her next, next right under her. When they were twelve they moved, they went up the Middle Fork River in a fork to the, to the right and then crossed over the mountains and dropped down into the head of Sam Lake, Sam Creek country and then went down to Sam Lake where her father, Grandpa Sam and Belle Sam and her mother. That's where they had her other two sisters, Eva and Lena in Sam Creek. That's where they lived for quite a, quite a few years and then from there they moved up here to Healy Lake where they joined in with John Healy and Paddy Healy and the rest of the band this way.

That's when she wound up, her two older sisters, one of the older ones, that's Margaret, Margaret Kirsteatter, her family stayed here, pretty much in one spot for all these years. Her and Alice was her, was the two kids from, from that'. And they, they stayed, from those two sisters, the older ones that passed away, Margaret, Margaret and Alice, their mother and their older sister there passed away here and that's when Grandma and them moved up this way and I guess from that point Margaret was moved, was moved up to Tanacross where she was married to a Jimmy Walter for a time.

Was mistreated and John Healy went up the river, grabbed her and took her back and brought her back home. From that point they had a quite a few good years where the caribou were high

¹Margaret (Kirsteatter) and Alice (Joe) were the daughters of Gus Jacob and Belle Sam.

cycle n' a lot came through. She said sometimes four days in a whole row there'd be nothin' but caribou.

She'd tell me a story about her and her son. She only had nine shells and she walked through the village, her first born and he was like nine years old, eight, nine, barely keepin' up. He had a .22. She shot nine caribou with nine bullets. She was gonna get the .22 to finish off a couple of them and he had been goofin' around, tryin' to shoot their antlers off this whole time. She wasn't payin' attention to what he was doin'. She said she got really mad at him. Went back and had to go get some more .22 shells. She said they used to have a real good time, especially around that time when there were so many caribou comin' in.

Our grandma taught us a lot of things that we didn't understand when we were small. She ended up in North Pole where my mom married to my dad, Lee Saylor.

A lot of times we slept with most of our clothes on. We didn't have p.j's n' stuff mostly like most kids n' we're always ready to move all the time. Shoes close together by the door. It was an old habit from back when she...She came from when it was even, last one skin tent.

My mom was educated to the third or fourth grade so that would make me and my brother and sister the first educated in our whole family.

She talks about when she first seen some miners there in the Forty-Mile country and they had hair all over their face and long beards and they didn't...

The first time they ever seen a donkey (laughs) and horses. They didn't know what those were.

And there was a lot of things. It must have been some kind of a horrible shock, I was thinking. Now that I think back on it. It's like, for an example, if you took a knight in shining armor five hundred years ago in England and slapped him in a Mazurati and told him, "Here, drive." That's probably how, how she felt a lot of the time. Then, it makes sense to me, but I understand her training.

We were ran around in the snow early in the morning. I think Agnes remembers us gettin' tossed out the door when we were little. Not wakin' up. (laughing).

Agnes: Yeah (also laughing).

Pat: (speaking to Agnes) I remember you used to warm our feet up when we came back. Yeah, we'd get tossed out the door and we'd have to run around the house. They taught us to wake up early and for times of war they said when they were attacked or something, they said you'd have to run without your shoes if you didn't have time to jump in your shoes. We made our little pack sacks and stashed 'em out in the woods with crackers and dry meat and one pair of clothes, n' little knife and stuff. N' we thought it was a game when we were small. I understand what it was now. She was makin' us ready in case the house burned down or somethin' happened you had to get out of the house like right away. It was part of her training, but she was taught in case somethin' bad happened.

And everybody had their own caches so it was not like, if somebody got caught they could tell on you. The only person who knew where the cache was, was you. And that served as survival.

I understand it now. At the time I didn't.

And we were told...We didn't have a t. v. until we were the age of twelve. And we didn't have regular friends, except for family, 'till the age of twelve, 'cause we were to be in train...We didn't need distractions. And she was training us. We didn't realize it. We thought all other kids were the same, probably. But now the older I get, the more I see it's not that, not the same,

but I'm glad we were trained the way we were trained so that we could make sense of what's happening.

We spoke our language 'till the second grade. We were told that we could learn our language on the weekends, or, which is not true. You can't learn English language just on the weekends. How are you supposed to learn all the Native stuff, Native language in the weekends which was false.

I 'member first day of school we went in and we couldn't understand what the principal was telling us. We'd understand some of it and then we wouldn't. And he was hollerin' at us. And we were... We ran away from him and he tried to chase us on top of the drift snow. We had moccasins and we could out run him and we learned how to run on top of the snow. Just like lynx or, you spread your feet 'n move. You'd move across stuff he couldn't, 'n he couldn't keep up with us. So we went back and grandma came down really pissed. She went into the school and she came, told us to wait outside, 'n wait one place. She used to put us in one place on our knees. This was part of our trainin' too and if we ran around, she even tied our, tied our legs so we'd be kneeling all the time so we'd listen to her stories and we'd sit in silence all day sometimes. And it was to teach us patience... for hunting especially, or waiting for whatever it is, your opportunity. That was part of it. And it was disciplining us, disciplining our mind.

Also, the steam bath. When we first went into that, we wanted to get out of there in a god awful way. Strugglin' (laugh), but they wouldn't let you out. They told you to be still. Be quiet. And then they would whip you with willows a lot of times. It loosens up your muscles and it, the more the heat gets, it takes, it learns to take pain, a lot of pain.

It disciplines your mind so that if you have rough times, that you can close off the pain. You can shut it off like a switch. You're not gonna need a shot, pain killer. You wouldn't scream, 'cause you were taught not to make noise in case, maybe if you were hurt or some'in' bad happened, our grandmas taught at war, you screamed out, you might give everybody away. So those parts o' hurt, we were taught to suppress. And even crying was part of it. You never...It wasn't good to cry in front of people. They told you, "No." If you lost somebody, you went...The men, the warriors would find their time to go alone somewhere out in the woods where they would get...They would release that pain, 'cause that...You had to watch because others would take advantage of your weakness. That was part of it.

Now back to the...Grandma went down to the school and we had to wait outside. Back to the, the first day of school part. But we sat there waitin'. All the lights in the school went out and she was in the back room with the principal. I don't know what she did back there, but the entire room inside that room with the principal turned blue light, and she was talkin' in our language, but I think it was the old, really really old language 'cause there's different... There's regular conversation language that you have if you're talking regular like, "*Ndeel nde*", "Give me some tea." or "*Aa haal*." "I'm gonna go walkin'." But this was, this was some'n different. Somethin' almost between animal and human in our language and the whole place turned blue in there and when she was done, you just heard him muttering and whatever and (ha) not makin' much sense. The lights came back on. She came back out of the office and he came out shakin' and pale white. He never did bother us again, but we got to school on time, 'cause we knew what to do then. But he never did bother us again. I don't know what she did. I never asked. There's just some parts better left unsaid, I guess but I'm sure whatever it was changed his mind.

About parts of our trainin'...about not havin' a television: that television, it strays your mind. Our television was story tellin'. We could hear the same story over. We'd hear some of the same stories twice a day and we'd sit there and listen. They'd tell us stories. I like that one about *Ch'inchedl Tcteyy'*. That's Gran.... Grandma's mom's, Belle Sam, great uncle. That's about a hundred and fifty years ago. That's where he comes from. That's where my Grandma's sisters are born and that's Sam Lake. Remember that *Ch'inchedl Tcteyy'*, they named a hill after him. He was a war chief of the whole Upper Tanana. I guess back Tetlin got wiped out. They were attacked by the Canadians from Kluane Lake, came over the pass and over the hills 'n attacked and raided and so they went to see *Ch'inchedl Tcteyy'* to gather all the best warriors.

He gathered all the warriors of the Upper Tanana. He climbed this tree, this leaning tree over the, over all of them. They were all underneath it. And he caught a squirrel. It was running around. Anyway at the top of the hill he said whatever warrior can grab this squirrel, is comin' with me. And he dropped a squirrel and those who grabbed it when it was bouncin' around between all these, ha, all these warriors down there...They had to be quick enough, quick enough to grab arrows or dodge arrows. And this is his uh...to find the best ones. And that one 'n really wanted to go no matter what, he wouldn't take "No." for an answer. He was the only one that was killed in the battle, once they went to Canada..

But from Sam Lake to Kluane Lake, they made it in five days². That means they were crankin' seventy-five miles, hundred miles a day. Steady movin' and back too, 'cause they didn't...It was just a pace. I understand that pace. When me and Ben were young, we moved through the country. Way deep, deep movin' just to explore new places. Way up the Healy, upper George Lake and upper Sam Lake. We put some way above country. We went seventy-five miles in one day and forty-five the next day.

I don't see any young kids doin' that now days 'cause what they have to understand and why I'm explaining this is if they want to get through life or want to get, have things done, they cannot do it by thinking that the easy way is the best way. You can't learn nothing so much from the easy way 'cause you, "easy come, easy go". If you earned it hard, if you had to walk seventy-five miles or a hundred miles, to get somethin' nine times out of ten you're gonna remember that, 'cause it was hard. And you have to go through so much to get it so it's worth something. If you're goin' fifty to a hundred miles an hour on a highway, you're not gonna remember it. It's gonna be worthless because you think you can get it all the time. There'll be a hard time again. That's just the way life is. And if those who appreciate n' work really hard and earn it instead of trying to get it for nothing, or steal it. See, if you have to do that it gives you self worth. It makes pride in yourself and pride in who you are. But that is important because that may get you through when you think that, "Oh, it can't get no worse." or, "I can't make it." How do you know you can't make it? Have you tried? With everything you've got? Have you tried every avenue? Sometimes we can't see the most simple things: the key to a door. I've run around with a pen in my hand, lookin' for a pen. You can't tell me that ain't happened to everyone of you in this world, 'cause it has. That's the same kind of thing.

Ah, that's the kind of discipline, the kind o' the kind o' people we come from and the reasons being it's like that story of *Ch'inchedl Tcteyy'*. He trained his men on that hill. They used to

²This was a distance of about 270 miles.

run up at him and he would be shooting at them. I mean shooting to hit them and they had either to bust the arrow in mid air or catch it, and that's comin' straight up the mountain and bein' shot at straight down. And it teaches, this kind of teaching makes you appreciate your life because you appreciate living 'cause you earned the right to be there and that's, that's what I want the young people to remember, even after I'm gone after, because when the hard time returns again, a depression, crash in the stock market or somethin' if you have that kind knowledge, at least to know that it's in you, that you can always go back to it and discipline yourselves and be able to persevere, go through.

Another thing that people do not understand is cross-cousin marriages in the Upper Tanana. From what I gather from my grandmother the uplands were the training like *Ch'inchedl Tcteyy'* of warriors. In the old days, mercenaries to the lower villages who had an easier life because of the salmon runs. Salmon were huge in abundance and the food was lots so their villages had a, a huge amount of population compared to ours. Ours was a harder life and harder in the mountains, in the highlands. And what could we give them that they didn't already have? Well, what we could give them was our, our knowledge in hunting and war, "weaponry", our best weapon was our mind. And the discipline...We were bred for almost a thousand years from what I gather. They bred them down like you would a good dog team or you would a good strain of running horses. With the medicine people who could foresee the future, to the best and strongest warriors with the strongest legs, strongest arms, good best eyes, were inter-bred with those who could see the future. They bred them to the fourth cousin 'cause you couldn't get them any closer. 'Cause I'm sure they'd see what happened when you bred too close. They were unbalanced. Four was always a balance. Three would not do it. It would be too close and the kids would be all messed up. The fourth cousin was as, as close as they'd tolerate, and this was a strict code. They bred them like this so the offspring would not only be of strongest blood and genes, of sight and strength, but he could also foresee the future when he slept. So it made him even quicker, more advanced, so to speak, almost genetic engineering. They come out with a perfect warrior: One that could endure anything that nature or human had to offer. These were what they (indiscernible) where all rest of the tribes came to gather.

This is what the Upper Tanana had always brought to the table. When there was fights against Eskimos or the lower villages, when there was somebody making trouble, disrupting the peace or messing something up, this is where you came to find or, find either assassins or war, war chiefs, and the payment would be made big, with many blankets, many tanned skins, wives, whatever they wanted.

Copper: copper was very treasured and some of the blacksmiths, one of the last ones was, was my Grandpa, Grandpa Sam's brother, Nothol where, at the point where I'm down at, he had a tent frame and stuff down there where he would hammer up in the valley there between the old village and my house. He had a old rock, a rock just like a smith would have for hammering iron. And he would get, trade for the copper. Trade 'em paint. We had famous paint, red paint that came from this area and other things we traded with the Copper (Copper River/Ahtna Indians) to get their metal which we'd pound and folded until we had a triangular like dagger that... It went from the very tip to the very base it was a triangle and with cur-. They pointed the curls on the end. Curls on both sides of that spear and a tat-. They used to tattoo on both cheeks of the warriors a spiral. Everybody wants to know what them spirals are. They used to

put spirals on the knife handles or the spear point. The spiral represents the caribou fences. The caribou fence had an opening with two corrals on both sides, which once the caribou went to the main opening, he'd spiral to both sides. They'd shut one gate when it's full, take what they needed then open up the other. And they'd have this continuous cycle.

Also it represented the Upper Tanana, the mother's side because that meant the mother's womb. The fence, the opening of it on both sides is the same. That's what they meant by, "we take our mother as a clan side." The father and the warriors are meant to protect the family on the mother's side. This is why they cannot get the "okay" to go to war without all the mothers getting together and consenting to it. You cannot just go out and do it. Just like in the Caucasian ways, they wouldn't think twice about it. They wouldn't be goin' home and askin' their mothers (laughs). But in this case, the tribe, the mothers and the children would suffer because of war. That is the reason why that they, it must make sense before it is done. It is not a senseless foolish act. But these are the things that I've been taught 'n I've went to look for myself many many times.

Just like our herd was a bigger population³ and I heard that it split in half and half of it went across between Circle and Eagle below the Charlie Riv...or above the Charlie River, toward Eagle and it went up and joined the Porcupine Caribou herd. 'N our old people, the old ones that were around and talked about it, Silas Solomon from Tanacross, come from Ketchumstuk country. They wanted to know what happened to the leaders 'n what, how come the caribou got all mixed up. Well, when they had the Taylor highway and they started shootin' off all the leaders⁴... You can't shoot off all the leaders because they got their own leaders. Their scent is different from the rest in the whole herd. It's on the bottom of their feet, located between both toes. It's a scent gland. And maybe one out of a couple o' hundred will be born with that and all the rest of them follow him or her. Now if you shoot those off, the rest of the caribou get confused. And they start milling around and they get confused; they don't know where to go or what to do. So once they shot off the herd, they shot off the herd leaders coming across the Taylor, you had all this milling about, confusion, because once the leader died, that's where they was. Stuck. Panicking. So, one of the leaders that were still around, must of, (They've got sense too. They ain't all stupid...) They changed their route and went across and went up and joined the re- other caribou in the Porcupine region. Well, our people wanted to know 'n Healy Lake bein' small is also scouts for the rest of the Upper Tanana to find out things for them 'bout other tribes.

Silas Solomon was one of those that could understand the Gwi'chin language, and the Upper Tanana language and the Copper language(Upper Ahtna) and the Canadian lang-.(Southern Tutchone) We sent people like that, like me to find out things, to convey the other tribes' concern or to make alliances in times of trouble.

So I went North and there was people in Circle who remembered my grandfather, Chief Healy and Silas Solomon and them comin' all the way to Circle to get tea and sugar, from the

³Pat is referring to the Fortymile caribou herd which migrates through Eastern Interior Alaska each Spring and Fall.

⁴In the 1970s the Fortymile caribou herd crossed the Taylor Highway en masse and were slaughtered primarily by young military men from the Lower '48 states.

steamboats and meet with Chief Roberts , the chief of the Gwi'chins around Fort Yukon and Venetie and Arctic's chiefs comin' down and meetin' because the caribou crossed, crossed the river below Circle and and then between Circle and Eagle and made a rotating spiral through their country. And our people helped hunt our herd just as well as we hunted the other part of it.

But the cycle was being disrupted and the army and the management at that time (laughs) didn't have too much of a clue or really didn't, have the, didn't have the people to police the area.. Part of it's "naiveness". I can forgive some of that, but some of it should be common sense that I would think...

That should be taught in school right off the bat, more than anything: how to treat others like they want to be treated. That, that should be something I think that should be... I don't know how you could teach that, this kind of training and concept. Maybe it's more Eastern. I think it's more Eastern, kind of mental training. I don't know. Be sure. But I think it needs to be taught when you're young. It'll keep ... It'll help to keep things from disrupting.

Just like how we were taught about fire arms. Our guns are weapons. Keep them out of the way. Keep them... We don't let women step over our guns and things. They were, we respect their things. We don't bother women's stuff. We respect their things. They respect our hunting things. We respect the other person for... You don't point a gun toward another person. You keep the gun pointed up, even when we're walking, 'cause you could trip and the gun could go off. You could shoot somebody accidentally. You don't step in the way of guns. A gun is a tool like a hammer and nails. It's not a toy. It's not like what you see on t.v. now where they got people pointing guns right off the bat. There isn't even an explanation. They shoot people for no reason and kids think that's right. This is not right. This is not... This is the kind of discipline needs to be taught off the bat. If you don't teach it, you'll have chaos. They don't know what their doin'. It's not so much their fault. It's like a game they see on t.v. Oh it's not real until it happens. Then what are you gonna do? You gonna put the bullet back in the gun? Once you squeeze the trigger, you've already made the decision. They, they, that realism , I don't think that they have a... They don't know what it is until it happens. And the, then the pure horror that they've taken another person's life set in, but then it's too late. Just like in the cartoons when we finally did get t.v. me and my brother, Bugs Bunny, that was the kind of humor, and the baddest guy in the whole thing might be Wiley Coyote or Bugs Bunny sometimes and then Elmer Fudd. And he was a, he was a hunter, even him. He was out tryin' to get somethin' to eat or whatever, but he sure didn't get much to eat in them cartoons. This was the kind of... Even then the kind of respect and discipline I think they need to slowly integrate back in, because the tail end of all this is those kids you see runnin' around in the street doin' all those things and what they're showing on t.v. and our village kids seeing that straight up, straight off the bat. They're getting trained in their mind, not for the woods, not for respecting others. They're getting trained for the city.

They go to the city and everybody else is on the same wave length. They're thinking that kind of way even, maybe even in their subconscious. This is what I see as a lot of the reason of breakdown of discipline. They don't respect, 'cause they don't know any better. Somebody's making money off of what's more exciting on television, you know. This is , this should , somebody should take this and use that, this knowledge that I've seen and maybe help change some of that. Because they're not being oriented for the woods, they're being oriented for the city and that's why there's so many younger kids going into the city instead of staying in the

bush.

Because it takes time to train a hunter, to train a warrior, to train women to know what berries to eat, to know when to take an animal, how you'll respect him when you kill him.. Your first kill you drink some of the blood or eat a piece of the heart. This is part of our training, part of our respect to the land. You throw a piece of the fat in the fire for people that have went before us. Part of our hunting practice: to respect the animal and our weapons and our life. We respect our life. And if these kids don't respect another's life, if they just seen it was taken and thrown away, they don't value it and that's what I see. It makes me very sad. What, it's what makes me keep going to keep trying to pound this through in my own way. Also so the young people can have a chance, to have hope, because if you don't have a choice...

That's why I'm such disagreement with the state of Alaska on many issues. When you don't have a choice anymore, you're a slave. This is not right. This is not what I see America as supposed to be in the first place. The natives are not gonna saw the branch we are standing on off if we have the time to train our kids : how to take game, how much to take, when to take it. We cannot teach them all this discipline and this knowledge on the weekend. If it can be integrated in the schools and perhaps help the non-natives also understand what we're doing, they wouldn't look at it as a threat because it's different. It's basic. It's common sense. It's survival, and that's what it is, plain and simple.

All the other stuff is just window dressing or frosting. You need a rock to stand on, build on, and that's what the natives are, but it's deteriorating at a rapid pace. And this could be detrimental even to the non-native population today. Everything is a circle and it's gonna swing around to the environment because they're not respecting their environment. And it would be not because...It's because they don't know. It's the reason a lot of them are...and money. Money truly is the "root of all evil". It makes a person do something that they normally would not do. There's other ways to make money, cleaner ways. The right way, to work the hard way for it, so when they do spend it, it won't be on some bologna.

This is part of what I'm working towards as a whole. That discipline that I was taught, by my grandmother and grandparents and Grandma Ellen and Chief Walter Northway, Stephen Northway, Andrew Isaac, his brother, Oscar Isaac; also Silas Solomon, Julius Paul, all kinds of different elders that would, would teach me things and, they, they choose certain people to carry certain knowledges because you have to be trusted with the knowledge. That has... You can't just use it like a stick. If you, that's... They have to have that discipline and respect for it. If you give it to the wrong person, they could be hurting a bunch of innocent people with it. Not understanding the sheer power of it. I was called to the bedside of many old people about to pass away. They'll call for you hundreds of miles and they got something to tell you before they die. I've been called to over ten people and the next day they would pass on. This is the kind of knowledge that I carry and when I give it to certain people, certain pieces of it, I see that certain situation in a person, a certain, the one that would take care of it, that would not use it recklessly.

Dleg



Squirrel

Agnes Henry born Healy Lake

Agnes Henry was born in Healy Lake, the middle child of Ellen and Frank Felix. Growing up at the Lake she enjoyed playing with other children, sliding on the lake, playing house and all the things that children do the world over. She also checked snares, hauled wood with a dog sled and helped care for her younger siblings. Agnes's favorite foods include: moose, ducks, duck eggs, fish, fish eggs, fish guts, and all of her traditional foods. She currently lives in her own home which she shares with her daughter and grandchildren in Tok, Alaska. Her dream is to one day have a cabin of her own in Healy Lake where she grew up.

(No photo available)

Interview with Agnes Henry

Healy Lake

August 17, 2000

Interviewers: Don Callaway & Connie Friend

Don Callaway, it's Thursday, August 17th in Healy Lake and today Agnes Henry is going to talk about her life history.

I just like to tell a little story for myself. I don't know really that much, but little things I know from my life as I growing up.

I growing up real hard way and my mother work real hard for us to feed us and get some food for us. All, how many years down here in Healy Lake and we didn't have lots of things that we want. People have today. People have easy life today, but in those days it's real hard. And it's real hard to live in the woods. And we live off the land. We live on moose meat, fish, all different things. We make dry meat, dry fish. Raw fish you gotta cook it in bucket (pan). And cranberries, blueberries, that's our dessert. And anything my mother put her hand on, that's our food.

My mother raise us up real hard way and we didn't have decent clothes, just like today. And I always help mom, when she cut wood, I always bring wood for her with my dog because I was just a little girl and I didn't have no pain on my body. I did all that for her right behind my mom's back. As I grow up, I always think where I take a walk, I think to myself, "Maybe someday I goin' be growing up and I goin' be a woman and I gonna do same thing what my mother do".

This is real hard. I always see my dad work on the boat. And try to bring somethin' to eat for his people, his relation people. His aunt, his grandpa, my dad took care of all lots of people with Indian food.. He never get stingy¹. He never put it in his freezer. And he never say, "I didn't have anything". My dad teach me lots of things. My dad told me I should shoot 30/30 when I was a little girl and I said, "No". I scare gun. And he let me shoot .22 and that's my first shot. How many years, years, years ago, long time ago.

I can't walk out there in the woods all by myself because I wanted somebody else to walk with me. And while we walk, people tell me story.

And I went through lots. I went through lots. But those days I never think about what kind of shirt I goin' wear and what kind clothes, because we didn't have clothes. My mom have to scratch around for us, to make us little things what we can wear like at Christmas time. I don't know where material come from, but she make our dress and make... We wear moccasin for Christmas. Summertime she make us moccasin that you can tie. We went through so much that... We went through so much.

And when my dad go out on the trap line, him and mom. We all have to sit inside sled. Sled, they cover us up with canvas so we can stay warm because they don't.... Nobody goin watch

¹sharing

over, watch us because they don't know babysitter² at that time.

All these years as I growing up, I always think that I should do like my grandma and grandpa . I growing up, twelve years old, thirteen years old when my mother took us out of here, Healy Lake, move us to Dot Lake because she didn't want us to die³. So that save our life and we's live in Dot Lake for I don't know how many years. Dot Lake and that first is Little Gerstle and from Little Gerstle to Dot Lake. Both place, both place we stay. My aunt Jeannie Healy there and her daughter. Her husband, chief,(John Healy) work. And my cousin n' them, they took care of them there and us. Only us, them and us. Only us we live there, nobody else beside us. And from there after so many years later we went to Tanacross and stay in Tanacross for how many years.

And I think about it every day. Every day I think about it. And what I gonna be, as growing up. I want to be a good person. I want to do, I want to do what people do. Go out pick berries with mom. Go out look for mushroom. Go out, all what's ever on this land, we go out and pick it so we can have something to eat.

Lots of things, little things I remember. That's what I goin' talk about. Today. It's better to live out here in the woods where you don't have to wish do this and that. I always wish for have something right now. I always wish to somethin' when I didn't have money. But right here in the woods you don't go hungry. You might not goin' have clothes and you might not goin' have lots of things, but you never get hungry, sit in the woods.

My mom raise us up real hard way. Not one time we never have a easy life. In the morning time we eat boil fish for breakfast. And lunch time, I guess. We don't have no clock. We don't know, we don't know about lunch time and supper time. We go by sun. Which way sun hit, they said that's twelve o'clock. So that's the way they know. Nobody never had anything what we got today. My mom feed us again. She fry fish for us.⁴ I don't know where the frying pan came from, but she cook, she fry fish for us. Grandma and Grandpa, all of us, my sister, my sister Mary, my oldest sister and she didn't have my youngest sister and brother at that time.

My three, two sister and one brother buried over there at Healy Lake, old cemetery. All these little things I really learned. What I went through and what my mom went through for us.

²Traditionally nuclear families frequently hunted alone.

³The 1940's flu epidemic that swept through the entire Upper Tanana region was particularly devastating to Healy Lake which had no medical assistance.. Ellen lost three of her children and both her parents in a matter of a few weeks. She ministered to the sick and dying and finally in a desperate effort to save the few living, those remaining walked away from the village carrying nothing but the clothes on their backs for fear of contamination. cf: Lee Saylor :p.144.

⁴Whitefish was and continues to be a subsistence food among the tribes of the Upper Tanana. As in the past, Native people sometimes trade or visit relatives in the Copper River Ahtna region or along the Yukon River to obtain salmon. King salmon is especially prized for its oil.

Sometime, where my mom say somethin' it always hurt me because it's... This is very hard. I hope some day when I'm not here, I hope my grandkids listen to this tape.

I didn't have a nice shirt and pants on. I didn't have this kind of shoes. I didn't have anything. I don't know about clothes. Also my mother, all, everybody who ever lived there, they do same thing what my mom did. My mom set trap so we could have food in our tummy⁵.

From Little Gerstle, how many years in Little Gerstle, from there we moved there from Dot Lake. I don't know why we moved to Dot Lake. We didn't have a house. My dad is ready to die. We moved to Dot Lake. I was twelve, thirteen, twelve years old when my dad gone. My dad die right there in Dot Lake. They took his body to Tanacross. where all his relative are. That's way my dad was buried. And from there I went on with my life.

I always think to myself, may people, teenager want to have fun today, I don't know about fun. I don't know about nothin'

I don't even know about boyfriend, nothin'. When I was Dot Lake, I got, I got my first daughter. I don't know how that happened, but I got my first daughter and that's Mary Lou. After years later, I get my son, Lee and that's my first kids. I went through so much with them. I didn't have no money to take care of them, but with Christian people help me I went, I raised them up myself. I raised them up myself and after when they got a little bigger, mom took them up and raised them until they're real big, know how to take care of themselves..

All these little things we can put it together. We're out there in the woods. If we know how to cook and we're hungry, we can build fire with almost anything. If you don't have no matches, you can find somethin' out there. Those things, you goin' take it out from a tree and rock, that's your matches. We can cook out there. We don't have to go hungry. Spruce house, is, that's our house. We didn't have a fancy house. Half the time it's inside tent. Lots of time I get cold and sleep behind my mom's back. I'll always want to be close to her. From her, I want to be warm. As I growing up, I never have a easy life, I never have a easy time.

I went to school in Dot Lake. And I finish my first and second grade. That's all I finish. And, I don't know, I couldn't get along with my teacher so I told my teacher one day that I goin' quit because it don't do me any good. I got mad at my own teacher so he didn't say anything to me and he told me, "That's alright if I want to, I don't have to". But he told me I can go, so I went. He didn't chase me out of school house in Dot Lake. He told me if I want to I can go.

From there after years later, I went to Tok. My mother went to Tok. She rent little place right across from the Assembly of God. Even so my mother has a place, I didn't go in there and move in there with her because I was old enough to go on my own. So instead of go in with her, I asked for job.

In Parker House⁶, that's my first job. So many different place I work. And I see people get nice clothes so I didn't buy myself clothes. My kids come first. I buy them clothes.

I get mistreated from Dot Lake so I move. I move. I didn't want to be in there for another day.

⁵Traditionally women often had traplines for small game such as rabbit and marten. The men hunted and trapped larger animals such as lynx, moose and caribou.

⁶The Parker House was an old landmark restaurant and hotel in Tok. It was torn down in the late 1980's or early 90's.

When we moved to Tok, from Tok, moved down to Tanacross and stayed Tanacross for how long? Long, long time. Because my daughter was there, that's the only reason why I did that. And from there, we go back to Tok again and I get certain job there and there. Lots of things that I didn't have. I didn't eat cereal. I didn't eat eggs. What we eat out there, what we get, that's what we eat. All my family, they didn't have cereal and eggs, not like right now. It's very hard. It's very hard.

My grandpa was blind. I remember that early in the morning, I put stick in his hand. He said he was gonna pack us some snow and help. I don't know where that five gallon can come from, but I put snow in there and I push it down so if it's meltin' we'll have enough water. My grandpa, Blind Jimmy, I put stick in his hand and he hold stick. One side, he carry that five gallon can with snow. I bring him back to inside and I put him on his bed, lumber bed. I don't know we had, where that blankets came from, but they got a blanket, one pair blankets each that's what they got. They didn't have two or three of them and packed caribou skin for their mattress. That's their mattress is caribou skin.

My oldest sister, my grandma and grandpa make caribou parka for my older sister, Mary and that's her coat for winter. And she had moccasin, same thing as us. We all wear same, same thing, but I didn't have what she got. They raise her up half way for mom, so just like they make her "zoog"(spoiled). That's why she got those nice things they fix up for her. I remember that.

When my brother is gone, my little brother is gone, I remember that. My little sister gone, I remember that. My mom didn't have lots of kids because she's havin' problem havin' baby. And all these years, I always think of my mom didn't have another child again because even so I was little girl, I don't know, I don't know about pregnant then.

My mother, she go out, she go out, out, out, out every day she go out. Not one day she stay inside. My mother told me I gotta stay home and watch the kids, little brother and sister. And I babysit for them while she go check her muskrat. The next day she said she gotta go check her fox snare, lynx, lynx. She set snare. Both way, my mother did all that. My mother get long story and I just went behind my mom.

Little things that I know, that's what I talk about this morning. And I hope someday, I hope my grandkids just listen to this, listen to this.

And maybe move to highway is not really important. Live down here, it's better⁷. Even if you didn't have a house, there's a log out there. There's a log out there. Spruce house, in between spruce house and tent, that's what we used to live on. Sometime, like I say, I got so cold. We sleep in one blanket and canvas and big fire in front. I always think my moccasin goin' burn, 'cause I stingy for my moose skin moccasin. But my moccasin didn't burn. We don't take our clothes out and sleep. We sleep in our clothes. Lots o' time I sleep in my moccasin. My mom always tell me, "At least take you moccasin out", so that's what we did.

And all these years I live in Tok, Tanacross, Dot Lake, Little Gerstle. I learn lots o' things. I learn lots o' things for what people do. They go out there, they're hungry, they go out there and get it. If you goin' sit inside all day, you can't get anything. You hungry, you goin' stay hungry until you use you two arms and two leg to go get it. My mother did lots of things for us. It's not

⁷There is no road access to Healy Lake except in late winter when an ice bridge is built across the Tanana River.

easy. It's not easy.

Young kids right now, they grow up and they got nice clothes, they play tape deck and they go dance. Dance and have a good time. We didn't do that. It's real hard. We don't know about tape deck. We don't know about radio. We don't know about nothin'.

I always hear people say, "I eat cereal". Nobody ever eat cereal because nobody did. This is real hard. Real hard. I thought. I thought I not gonna live today if my mom didn't take us away. Maybe me and my sister in Tok gonna be gone today too and my mom's not goin' have no kids. She probably even not goin' have grandkids.

Little things I know, that's what I wanna, I talk about right now. I hope someday when I'm gone, I hope my grandkids listen to this tape. It's real good that we can live off of the land. Berries is our dessert. Lots of things we can do out there in the woods. Go take a walk Go do somethin'. Pick berries. Moose skin coat, people had. They don't go to store and buy jacket. Moose skin. If they got blankets, nice wool blankets, they cut it up and they make underwear. That's what they wear for long johns. My mom used to make me rabbits scarf, rabbit skin scarf for winter and some way she make us jacket and that's not real easy to make jacket. She have to scratch around to make a jacket for us. And I had my rabbit skin scarf and hat. I wear hat when I go check my rabbit snare. She told me to dress warm. Whatever I got, that's what I put it on my body to keep warm until I make it back to house. Check my rabbit snare early in the morning. I was so happy growing up. Little girl. I wanted to be my dad's baby. My dad, I always tell him to pack me. I keep my other sister and brother on the side and I want to be "zoog" so I give my dad bad time. After my dad die, I don't do that. Lots of things that it's not worth it. I not goin' talk about it. I just talk about my kids.

I raise up my son, my youngest son and youngest daughter myself. With my first kids my mom help me. She took over and raised them up half way. While she work, she buy them things. She buy their clothes. Give them place to stay. That's the way my family raised up here in, between Tok and Tanacross and Dot Lake and Little Gerstle. It's real hard. It's not easy life.

I hope all these young kids out here, I hope they learn how to go out there. We're hungry, we get frying pan. Maybe we got one cup of rice, we can cook it out there. And biscuits, no butter, no jam, no nothin'. People don't know how to make jam those kind o' days. It's real hard. It's real hard.

I wanted to share this, this morning. People always treat me good, right today. Make a friends, because I want to treat people right. I got lots of friends there and there. And I wanted to treat them right. If I got house, I'll share my house with the people. My dad talked to me lots of time before she, he die. He told me, "Don't laugh for people. You help people. You got last cup of tea, go give it to them. Don't hold it back," my dad used to tell me. My dad is Frank Felix. I miss my dad. Many years I miss my dad. I finally forget. Little by little I forget about my dad because that's long long time. Long time ago he die in Dot Lake.

All our relative, we didn't ask for help. We didn't go to people's house and try to eat up what they got because even those days it's real hard. You don't have a tissue, you gotta use what you put your hand on those days.

All these little things I remember. I learned all this from my mother and as I growing up to be a teenager.

Seventeen years old when I had my first daughter. I didn't want to. I don't know how I make

mistake. I was just a teenager. I real didn't have to have my daughter and I hope it never happen. But, I'm glad. My oldest daughter today is married.

And I'm glad I can share all these little things this morning so Don and Connie can listen to these just like I just share with them. And nice that people treat us good today for what we are. We might goin' have different plans from the other people. All people have different plans. They got different name and that name, maybe it's not important to me.

But all these years, and in Tok I went this far with liquor. And I don't think it's really important. Almost loose my life with liquor. And I try to destroy myself with medication how many time? And it didn't work. That didn't work for me so I quit. How many years now I was sober. I was sober. I did it on my own. In Tok I did. If we stay down here in the woods: never will be happen. I thought it's good to drink and have a good time and sit in the bar all night long. Which that I did. When I changed my life around, I started go to church and I pray for people. I go to real church. I started praying for people and pray for myself. I didn't see "AA". I don't see nobody because "AA" people don't go around to village and try to help people so I did it on my own. I pray and I ask that "Man upstairs" to help me. That's way I got myself away from liquor. Today yet, I never drink yet. I don't smoke. I don't chew. I just want to be happy today for who I am and where I come from.

I can say on my mother's side, I can say, "I come from where she come from". I can say on my dad's side, "I come from where my dad came from". So this is really, really true that what we learn from this land and what we learn and what kind of things we goin' wear.

Go down the lake. Wash you hair. There's no shampoo. There's no hand soap. I don't know where this brown soap come from⁸. That's the one we take a wash ourself. Wash our arm. Wash our leg and feet in the lake. Sometime there's an old pan. My mother heat up the water for us and she told us to wash yourself. So that's what we did. And I learned all these little things so that's what I talk about this morning and I'm so glad that I went through hard way and I didn't raise up easy way. I didn't have lots of things that I wish for today.

Now right here we move into road and I always look at things and when I don't have money, I wish I have that one. I wish somebody buy me that one. I wonder how much money they got. I wonder what kind check book they got. I always wish for things. That's not right. I shouldn't be wishin' like that. I shouldn't tell people to buy me things. I should just be just the way I am. And I want to be this way until someday that "Man upstairs" take me back.

I love all my grandkids very much, all my kids and my grandkids. I went through so much with them. Lots of time I scratch around for to get diaper because I didn't have the money. So all these things, all these things is real hard.

When I went to school I meet lots of school kids, Dot Lake. Not too many of us in school. But even that when I go back home, I help mom. She need water, I go down and pack water for her because she get job in children home and work in children home. Her paycheck wasn't real big, but she always took care of us and buy things for us after my dad die. After my dad die, people out there get somethin' they have to share their food with us because my mom did that much for us. And I don't know why today we go through so much. We should just live in the woods down here in Healy Lake. We goin' be alright, but my mother took us away because she

⁸This was probably the "Fels Naptha" soap introduced by missionaries or traders.

didn't want loose us. That's why I guess I still alive today and I got lots of friends. I got lots of good friends, just like Connie.

I always think about Connie and Gary John because when I need help, they always there for me and give me something to eat. I'm sorry if I cry in this tape, but that's what happened when my dad die. And I got a good friends today. I gotta good friends today that I can call them up in telephone and talk to them. Nobody never stingy to me. Gary and Connie how many time in Tok, they bring some things to me: fish, salmon, little piece of meat, little grouse and ducks, little berries. I know all that. I got it in my heart for them. And some day when they need the help, I goin' be there for them. I gonna turn around and I gonna help them. What I got in my freezer I gonna share with them.

Just about my story is over.

And when I get married, my marriage didn't work and I didn't like it. I didn't like it a bit. I don't know about gettin' married. People make me get married and I didn't like it. I didn't like it, I really didn't like it. I was hurt. Hurt, hurt, hurt, hurt all the time. But I not goin' talk about it in tape because I don't think it's worth it. I just tell a story for my life how I want, I raised up. I'm glad I'm still alive today.

And I look around and see things what people do. I still learn lots of things from people what they do. My mother teach me how to sew beads. I sew. I sit up all night I sew beads. Make mukluk (inaudible) for her. I got good eye. I don't need no glass. I sit up all night while my mom sleep. Make mukluk (inaudible). One night I fill it up all with beads and I sew beads. I sew slipper top. Whatever she sew, I did. I help her. In the morning time I show it to her what she did, what I did. My mom always so happy. How you did it in one night? She always tell me. I always tell mom, "I want to so I finish". That's why I sit up all night. I didn't want to sleep I told her. I didn't want to sleep. I got my little bed right front of mom and I didn't, I didn't feel too happy to sleep. If I go sleep I thought, "I gonna keep my mom up". So that's only reason why I sit up with my beadwork.

Lots of things that I didn't learn today that I want to learn. I didn't learn how to turn beaver skin and moose skin. I didn't learn that. I don't know how to do it. Still yet, right now I don't know how to do those things. I can cut little meat. Little things I can do it. Pick berries, put it away for winter. Cranberries, dry berries, high bush berries, all these little things, I can do it. I don't know...Someday, sometime I look what I goin' do tomorrow morning and there's lots of things I can do.

For my sickness, sometimes my sickness get on top of me where I can't do anything for myself. But still yet, I'm still alive and I'm glad that I got kids and glad that I got grandkids, that I love them. That's our family.

My dad get relation in Tanacross. His relation people used to fry us meat in the morning when my dad took us to Tanacross. The people that he related to they cook us meat and rice and biscuits. They feed us good breakfast. Last us all day. It's real hard right now kids all growing up real good way. I'm glad they did... I'm glad our kids got good clothes, lots of blankets and they got house. They got wood stove. They got freezer going, refrigerator. There's coffee pot plug in. I didn't have nothin' to plug in that day because I don't know about coffee pot.

I don't even know about hand soap. I don't even know about under clothes. Whatever my mom make us, that's what she make under clothes for us. It's not fancy. She sew by hand. It's

not fancy. What she sew for us, we put it on. Sometimes she get her hand on some kind old clothes, like a old sweater and shirt. She cut it out and make our socks with that one. That's what our socks used to be for Christmas.

And lots of things that I never learned, I hope I learn. I hope I learn more while I'm still livin' today. I hope I learn a little bit more so I can turn around and teach my grandkids what to do. I told my kids they have to learn the hard way.

They should get up. They should build fire out there and cook out there. Don't cook on cook stove. Go out. They should learn hard way.

I not goin' be here on this earth all rest of it my life. Everyone of us, we goin' go someday. I don't know where else we gonna go, but we gonna go. When I changed my life around, go to church, I want to be a good person so I go to church for good way beside what I learn in woods.

I learned. I learned this much from little things what I see: how people cut their meat, how they make dry fish. When we do our meat we gotta sit out there and watch it so we can have a good meat for winter and good fish. So fly don't get into our meat and get sour and rotten. When you food get rotten, you got lazy, you can't take care your food, your food's goin' get rotten and sour. And fly goin' get into you stuff what you goin' eat. That's why you gotta sit out there and take care. Don't just make smoke one day and go someplace else and forget about your food.⁹ That's your food you goin' live on so you keep it clean and you make smoke and all you food right there what you goin' eat. No cake. No cake and pie for dessert. Berries is your dessert. That's our dessert.

My mom used to go out there and pick berries for us in wintertime. Few high bush berries, there and there. She put little flour in there and that's our dessert. I enjoy what my mother did for us.

Teejuh, my mother,

Nts'é my mother, neexah t'indɕ'ɕ.

I hope,

I hope all ts'j' t'êey..wutsinkêey xundeyh dé

all t'êey nts'é neexah t'inɕ'ɕ xiyetatdeyh

My poor mother,

all that she did for us,

I hope her children will remember,

they will know all that she did for us.¹⁰

All my mother, all what she did for us with all, every one of us. I hope. I hope other family live

⁹Traditionally meat was smoked and dried for preservation and ease in transportation. Diligence in tending the meat during processing was of utmost importance.

¹⁰Translated by Gary Holton, Alaska Native Language Center, University of Alaska, Fairbanks, Ak.

today so that they can look at their old mother today¹¹.

My mother, after my dad gone, my mother didn't get married. Didn't get married because we didn't want her to get married. Better off. My mother work hard. That little small paycheck she work her butt off for that paycheck to feed us and buy us little things.

That's way I grow up. It's not easy way to grow up. It's real hard. We don't know about shoes. We don't know about nothin'. We don't know about comb. We don't know about bobby pin. No put up hair, no nothin'. Ribbon. Sometime once a year Grandpa, he bring us ribbon and we tie it up on our hair. That's what we did. And I'm glad I share this one this morning and I'm glad we come down to Healy Lake again and share our love for two days. And I'm glad we came down with Connie and Don. I'm glad. I appreciate Don he bring us down with his car and he came across with us.

Grandma and Grandpa say always, "It doesn't matter where people came from". They used to tell us. They used to tell us, me and my sister Mary, "You gotta care for those people".

And I wanna keep on going on with my life.

When I meet my kids' dad in Tok, when I left from Dot Lake, for a while we didn't have no money either. I gotta get job. Have to go in the bar and go clean up all people's dirty mess. But I did that for, to get another dollar. That's what I did. And nobody...just like when you need help, you don't want to ask people for help because you didn't want to. People always when we need help, I think it's not hard to ask for help. It's "no" or "yes". That's alright.

Still yet today I want to learn some more things. I don't want to go on with my life. I'm glad we had this 'nother good day today. Many years ago, we still have a sunshine.

So I think that's all my story, little things I know this morning so I gonna stop this morning. So I'm gonna pray this morning. And if Connie and Don doesn't mind, I wanna put this little prayer in there this morning: No matter what we do, what we are, there's a Man that's our answer this morning. We can go out and sleep hard way out there.

Our heavenly Father, this morning I come before you in the name of Jesus. When I had change my life, I want my life to be more strong and do things right, whatever I'm supposed to do. And I pray for all the village, all different village and all the loved ones and all the Christian people, all the minister, all our relative, all, every one of them. I pray that God if You are there, You the only one that's gonna take care of us today now, whatever we went through. We went through a hard way but You there for us. I'm so glad. I hope I just live in the woods today yet, then I could be hundred per cents better. And I want to thank You, Lord, this morning. I want to thank You Lord, this morning we get place to sleep and share food with each other and have a good coffee and a good cup of tea.

This afternoon when we ready to go home, You watch over us and protect us. You help us for another day to be strong with you. This morning, someday you goin' be ready for us to take us home. We got good place to go home to. This world is not our home. We just live around here. Up there in another place is our real home. I want people to understand what we went through and how we learned. We didn't have a easy life, but you always there for us. This is goin' be the

¹¹Agnes is expressing her wish that her deceased siblings could be here today to see their mother and know that she survived into old age.

**end of my story, this morning so this is my prayer for this morning and I ask You in Jesus' name.
Amen.**

[The following text is extremely faint and largely illegible. It appears to be a collection of prayers or reflections, possibly including the following phrases:]

... I am a sinner, and I need Your grace...
... Help me to love You with all my heart, mind, and strength...
... Give me the strength to resist temptation...
... I pray for my family and all who love You...
... Amen.

Shos



Bear

Paul Kirsteatter

Paul Kirsteatter was born in the lower forty-eight states and became acquainted with Alaska during his World War II service in the armed forces. After his discharge, Paul returned to Alaska where he met his wife, Margaret. After their marriage, they settled in Healy Lake shortly after the epidemic. Four current households in Healy Lake are related to Paul Kirsteatter and his deceased wife, Margaret (Jacob) Kirsteatter. Margaret Jacob was born in Mansfield, Alaska in

1916. Margaret's parents were Gus Jacob of the Mansfield/Ketchumstuk band and Agnes Sam from Healy Lake. Gus Jacob was first cousin to Walter Isaac, chief of Mansfield. Agnes Sam's mother, (Margaret's grandmother) was Belle Hatchet Sam. When Chief Sam died, Agnes married Paddy Healy who was son of Chief Healy. Chief Healy was also the great grandfather of Patrick and Benjamin Saylor and Jo Ann Polston.



Interview with Paul Kirsteatter

Healy Lake

August 16, 2000

Interviewers: Don Callaway & Connie Friend

Hi, my name's Don Callaway. This is Wednesday, August 16th. We're in Healy Lake. We're in the house of Fred Kirsteatter and his Dad, Paul, is going to talk about his life history.

Paul: I was born and raised Outside, born in 1922, and, and I entered the Service up here in Alaska, well, I entered the Service, I came here in World War II. I came up here. I was stationed at Everest Headquarters, a headquarters in the Aleutian Islands. During the time I spent in the Service here in Alaska, I spent most of the time in the Interior flying around with a special crew and I became acquainted with a number of native people during that time. We had a Tenth rescue made up of Eskimo and Indians and prospectors. And uh, they did a lot of rescue work: downed air craft and people in trouble all the way up, the Aleutian chain all the way to the Interior. So that and during that time I became acquainted with a number of Native people and I had a lot of respect for them and they had the, you know, they were adapted to the country. They wore their own clothing, you know, their mukluks and their fur clothing or whatever they wanted to wear, although they were in the Service and they did a lot of amazing feats in rescue work. Some of them parachuted out of airplanes, dog teams, and uh, and then when an airplane, a plane would go down, it would be located, and they would, usually if they couldn't snowshoe in or go in by dog team, they'd just jump out of an airplane and they'd see if any survivors. They'd paint a red, a white cross on the airplane craft so it wouldn't be reported again.

And I was discharged in 1945. I went Outside and I was discharged in Fort Sam Houston, Texas and I turned around and came right back to Alaska in twenty...the Spring of 'Forty-six and met my wife at that time and what later became my wife and we lived here in Healy Lake. At that time in 1946 there was about five families living down here in the old village and they had an epidemic here back in the, the mid forties that almost wiped out all the families here. At one time John Hajdukovitch¹, the trader out at Delta told me that there was seventy-five children here,

school age at one time. That uh when this, this was during World War II, it was hard to get doctors in in here. The trader, Stanley Young was the trader down there at that time. He told me he tried and tried to get doctors in here and there was entire families was dyin' and layin' in their cabins. This was uh, my wife was here at that time. She was one of the survivors. Entire families lyin' dead in their cabins and there was no way to bury 'em and uh new white traders and others was, was living down here by the trading post, John Knight, Stanley Young and others was helpin' bury the people and they finally got a doctor in by the next Spring. He came up, an army doctor came out of what is now Ft. Greeley. He came in. Burt Hansen brought him up.. He was a resident. Burt Hansen was a resident of Big Delta. He



Healy River circa 1940
John Knight in front.

¹See "Walking Among Tall Trees" by A.F. Gavin : 186-188.

brought him up by a dog team, up here, the doctor and the doctor, by that time the epidemic was almost over. No tests were ever made, but by the, by the symptoms and all he thought it might be diphtheria and measles together. The Native people had very little resistance to white's diseases . They had never been exposed to it like our race and they, it, you know common measles would decimate an entire village sometimes. And then when they had these diseases, the elders were great for it, and they felt a sickness, they would always get in the steam bath and uh they would have someone make a steam bath and then all the men would get in the steam bath at one time. Well if a sick person in there like...They also had TB was around for, was around for, was rampant too, also. But that wasn't mainly what the epidemic, whatever it was was water born ... Back in the 1930's they also had an epidemic here that uh, decimated a lot of people and they believe it was from the water here around Healy Lake. But most people were uh, I understand, were moving around. They're nomads. They... They uh, in winter time they spent , the Healy Lake people spent most of their winter up at Joseph and the Middle Fork² area over in that other drainage. They had the caribou drift fences up there. They had the caribou drift fences up Healy River. And also they spent most of their winters up there. The Spring they come back. It was a cycle. They come back here for the moose and the beaver and the fish. They weren't dependent too much on fish, but, although they did have fish that mostly, there's no salmon coming up this, this part of the Tanana , very few, so they depended mostly on whitefish. But they had traps down here on the Healy River, traps up the Healy River for whitefish. And then in the Fall they'd gather berries and all. They went up in the Alaska range³ over here for sheep and the marmot. And the women and all would all go along too and they pick berries and the women would pack the, snare the marmot and the men would be hunting sheep. Then they would come back here and prepare to go back up in to their caribou fences, up in the upper Eighty and the Middle Fork as far down the Middle Fork as Joseph Village. That was Healy Lake people's area up there.

The , the Army, Billy Mitchell, he was stationed at Fort Egbert his journal , he came up. I believe in 1901, up from Eagle through Joseph village in the winter to find a way through for the telegraph line going to, to Fairbanks and he ran into the Healy Lake band at Joseph. Chief Healy and, and his band were up there at that time. He made an agreement with them to lead him through the following winter to Delta, to the Delta area to find a route to put the telegraph line which would extend it off the Eagle line. It ran from Valdez to, to Dawson and Eagle that way and the following winter he came up with his sergeant, and made contact with what we call Chief Joseph. But Chief Joseph was really from the Salchachet. He was from here, but he'd married down at Salchachet and came back up here. But he wasn't really the chief. Chief Healy was really the chief, but he was the only one who could speak English so Mitchell assumed that he was the chief. But uh, they contracted with him, to lead him up...(This was when it was fifty below according to Mitchell's journal.) lead him up the Joseph Creek, from Joseph Village over the head of the Goodpaster and down to the village down at the mouth of the, toward the mouth of the, close to the mouth of the Tanana, the Goodpaster River and uh those people, they uh, those

²The Middle Fork of the Fortymile River.

³The Alaska Range and particularly the Macomb plateau was the traditional hunting area for Dall sheep and marmot for the Healy Lake people. In more recent times much of this land has been acquired by the military and used for a variety of weapons testing. Because of deformities found in the wildlife the Native people have abandoned this area for hunting thus eliminating Dall sheep(an important resource) from their diet entirely.

people, there was pictures taken of the band up there, Chief Healy and his band. And there was... It's been well recorded and documented by Billy Mitchell. He thought a lot of the people up there. They had their caribou wickiups with their skin houses according to photographs they'd taken. And they told him they were Tanana Indians, they came from over here. That was the place where they wintered up there. Sometimes they, I understand they went over to, joined up with the Ketchumstuk people over there. They were related to the Ketchumstuk people too, I understand too.

I'll get back to my wife and the Healy Lake people here at the lake. When I, I moved back here in uh, in here in 1947 and stayed. During the summer time my wife and I, we moved in, and there was several other families here, but they just spent a little while and then they'd go, move back out to the highway and when the Alaska Highway was constructed, Chief Healy was the chief of their, John Healy was chief of the band here and he had moved the people, the survivors of that epidemic, he'd moved them up to the Little Gerstle on the Alaska Highway. So people more or less, his people moved up there with him, the survivors of that epidemic they had but they would still return here all the time and mostly in the summer, you know for fish and the moose, the beaver and all. And anyway, my family, we lived in that old village. And Fred was born down there in that, that old village.

And, but we carried, we hauled all our water there. The water was bad there, you know, the lake water was bad and we hauled our water from the creeks, the fresh water from the creeks and different places, because we was always afraid of that water. Through the past, you know, rec...records of the epidemics there.

Then in about '50, about 1950 we moved over here to this location. Built our cabin. Drug the logs up, cut 'em by hand, drug 'em up with the dog team. Built our cabin and we raised our family here. We had a garden. We had a... We got our moose, we got our fish, we trapped for furs and I did a lot of predator trapping and hunting for the bounties and occasionally I'd go out and work in the summer with the Alaska Road Commission out of Tok. And uh, pretty much, our family grew up here. We didn't, we weren't dependent on no, no outside money, BIA⁴ or anything. We lived mostly strictly on subsistence off the land.

The family, we had nets out here in the lake and my family dried fish year round, or you know, not year round, but all during the summer. We fished under the ice in the early Fall. We had two big dog teams that we used for travel and for trapping and bringing supplies in. We usually brought supplies in once a year by boat. But we lived right here off the country. We didn't get no, any outside income other than sometimes when I'd go out and work maybe for a month in the summertime.

Anyway, finally most of the people moved out of here for good, you know. They weren't even coming back any more. So for a number of years, clear up until the '70's most people were livin' out on the highway. Some of the band moved to Tanacross, Dot Lake, other places. Some to Fairbanks and since then there was a lot of descendants, you know, of the people who were originally from here, there was quite a few. But very few of them that are still alive today, the original people that was here in 1946.

And Chief Healy died, I believe in 1946 up to the Little Gerstle and his people became pretty well scattered around. They went to what, the survivors they went on up to, like I explained up to Dot Lake and Tanacross and Tok, other places, other villages.

⁴Bureau of Indian Affairs

But through the years here, we, we uh, we made a good livin' here, you know. It was pretty much subsistence. We didn't have much money to spend, but we lived right off the country mostly, you know. My, my family dried meat, moose meat and caribou. And when we could find caribou up the Healy River that was part of the 40-Mile herd. They still are with the Canadian caribou coming through up there.

They had traps up Healy River. They always had traps up Healy River. I'd like to point out...I had the highest respect for the elder natives, for their knowledge of game and their and their respect for wildlife. I never saw them waste game and when they butchered an animal they took everything that was edible and what we'd once considered not edible and even the moose when they was in velvet, they even ate, chewed the horn. They'd cook it over the fire and chew that. Nearly all the organs of the animal they ate. The liver, the brains, mostly the brains we used, of the caribou and moose were used for skin tanning. But nearly all the organs they ate: the stomach and the kidneys, all, everything. They seemed to be healthy and they had good teeth all the elders did when I came here. And they were very, you know, they were rustlers. They were always out, even the elders, the old ladies, they went out setting the rabbit snares, you know and draggin' in their own wood. And surprising some of the elders was way up there in age, they would cut, saw their own wood. And maybe the youngsters would help out. They would bring wood for 'em, you know, the ones that was too old, but a lot of 'em would be sawing their own wood, carrying it into their cabin.

They had a village here, down here on the point, that one time they had one across the lake and they had one up Healy River at old Chief Healy's camp up the upper river. They had a village up there also. That was more for caribou and fish than the Upper Tanana. They had upper Healy River fish. Upper Healy River they had by the old chief's cabin up there, they had, well there was a number of cabins there. and they had camps and there's also pits up there where they had, they had covered you know, with skins and bark and, and all along the river there's still cache pits in evidence where they had their fish there, their whitefish, they put in those pits, you know and they put, lined them with bark, put a layer of grass there, fish, layer of grass, then later they would cover them with logs 'n soil 'n moss, 'n later dig them up. Then they dried 'em, quite a bit of fish.

They also put up caribou and dried, frozen and dried caribou also and moose.. Everybody had, seems like nobody went hungry. There wasn't...No one went hungry that I know of. They didn't need any hand outs or anything like that either. I had the highest respect and I still do for the elders and I learned a lot about wildlife from the elders and uh, and I still admire them how industrious they were and how they could get along without nothin', and their survival here in a real harsh climate and on the trail I've hunted with many of 'em and many of their huntin' trips and hunted wolf dens with them and wolves and uh, they, they could call, you know most wildlife perfectly, and, you know, call moose, caribou, bear, muskrats, birds. This was the elders, you know. They were real good at it. And that's how, how they contributed to their, a lot to their you know, their knowledge of game and wildlife, contributed a lot to their survival up here, because they talked about... the elders talked a lot, they'd talk a lot about famines. And, they always put away, I understand they put away food for those kind of events. They had hidden caches out. A man and his partner would usually have a hidden cache way out somewhere. You find 'em all over the country uh, up on top of ridges where they would fork. They made pits and they put their...They put dry meat, clothing weapons, berries. A lot of times they would put berries up in trees. They'd make 'em...a lot of times they'd pick berries while they were on a look out

watching for game. They'd take a birch tree and knock the rotten, and knock the inside out and put sticks to the bottom and some moss and fill it up with berries while they were watching for wild game. And they'd climb way up in a spruce tree and stash it up there. And uh, they was always talked about these caches, very important. Way out, there'd be no one just the, the two partners here. Sometimes they'd marry two sisters. Anyway they had their own caches. In the event that they got driven out by people coming through. They always talked about people coming through up here from down, down below, the other side of the Alaska range, comin' in here raidin' their villages and if they got driven out of their villages, their encampments in the winter, they always had clothing and weapons and food stashed someplace. This was the reason, I understand that they had made those caches, for survival. And and they talk about the Upper Tanana where they... Those people came over from Kluane Lake that tribe and shot a hole in 'em down there and a lot of people that escaped, were, you know that got away and did survive by some of the caches way out and later they went back and retaliated, I understand.

⁵ But it was those caches that when you're driven out in severe weather, driven out of your encampment, driven out, not fully dressed, you know and with no weapon, you're you're... It's almost a death sentence unless you have something to fall back on the way they explained, the old people, and which is understandable. But I don't know it's what more I can say about the people here.

They had a trader, the early trader here, I believe was Newton. He came in here about 1917 roughly there and first he was up in the Upper Tanana..., went up the what was it? Mansfield at that time and traded some up there for one season. Then he came back here to Healy River and made a trading post down here. And he was here 'till about 1930, I believe. And his trading post burned down and his, his family moved to Fairbanks for school. There was no school here. And uh, they started a school here one time. I understand my wife told me, but it was only one year, some uh, minister, man by the name of "McIntosh"⁶. He came in here and started a school one Spring. But that's the only school they had here. Hajdukovitch was a trader that went up, with his boats all the way to Tetlin. Later Herman Kessler, he ran his boats clear up to up and around Tetlin and like that area up there. Then there was uh, there was other traders too. They were uh, uh... Off hand I can't think of all of 'em, but, uh, anyway I 've heard so much about 'em through my wife, you know. They had those steam boats and went all the way up to Northway I guess. Tetlin. And uh, sometimes in the Fall they didn't make it all the way up there, they would bring it in. Then the traders would have to unload all the material. It'd be floated in on the Tanana someplace and they'd have to unload everything and cache it. And later after freeze up, they'd hire the Natives of the Upper Tanana would come down with their dog teams and haul the trade goods up, up river to their trading posts. Hajdukovitch had trading posts at Tetlin and I think Northway, one at Tanacross. He also had caches along the river here at George Creek, Sam Creek, there were little settlements there of Healy Lake people. And uh, he had the trading post. He had a little trading post here. But uh, Newton was the main trader here for a number of years.

⁵The Upper Tanana retaliated in what has been called "the epic nineteenth century massacre of the Southern Tutchone". (Cf. McClellan, Catherine, 1975 : 25-26). Also in: McKennan, Robert A. 1959:171-172.

⁶This was the Rev. E.A. McIntosh who was the priest-in-charge of St. Timothy's Episcopal mission at Tanacross (about 100 miles East of Healy Lake). Cf. Simeone, William E. 1995: 40.

And then he turned it over to a man named Emil Hammer. And Hammer ran the trading post for a number of years, then he died on the trail, froze going down to Delta one winter. Then a man, Tedlow. Tedlow one time too ran boats up here, run, hauled freight up here for Hajdukovitch. I believe for himself too and traded. Tedlow took over the trading post here in Healy Lake and Ted had the trading post, owned it during World War II and Stanley Young was running it at that time, during World War II. Stanley Young was the trader here at that time when they had the epidemic during World War II. And he was the one that told me about him trying to get doctors in here at that time to take care of people. But it seems, and I heard this not only from Stanley Young, but others and my wife. It seems that they, some of the elders...Before this epidemic some of the elders, some of the people would get sick and they'd send them down to the traders' boats and they'd end up in Fairbanks or wherever and then when, if that person died down there, and then when they sent the body back, well then, 'course they did an autopsy, well then, the elders would look at the body 'cause they dressed 'em. And here there's been an autopsy performed on the body and they didn't understand. They thought they'd, the doctors killed him because of you know, the way the condition was. But it wasn't explained to 'em. So it was real hard to get any of the elders when they got sick to send anybody to Fairbanks. And their tradition was that they always bring a body back to where they were born, where they were from. And they talk about if a man was born here, from Healy Lake and had married somebody down river or Upper Tanana, he died up there, they always brought the body back even in the winter time if they couldn't pack it, a few would go up there and bring it back with a sled or whatever. But they believe that's the spirit that will be coming back to the locality where it was raised. And I think they still, you know, especially the elders, you know, follow that real closely and I understand that there were a lot of hard feelings between the BIA and the elders when a lot of the people would go to Tanana for medical help and died down there. Then they went to sanitariums for TB and the bodies would never come back and so there was a lot of hard feelings between the elders and the Bureau of Indian Affairs and doctors in general because they really thought they were killing their people too. But it was understandable because they had no education, you know.

The Upper Tanana people were the last ones to be exposed to any amount of education, I believe. John Hajdukovitch and Jack Singleton, I believe was the first teacher at a school up at Tetlin. It was arranged by John Hajdukovitch.

John Hajdukovitch was instrumental in getting the Tetlin Reserve. He, John had about thirty horses. He was a U.S. commissioner for the Upper Tanana. He was a big game guide. He was on the Alaska game board, the territorial game board. And he, during his time of guiding he, he became acquainted with a lot of influential people like the Mellonkoffs and others, Endicott and number of those people. Along the Alaska range here he would take those hunting parties all the way up to the Upper Tanana. Maybe spend two and three months at a time on the hunting parties. He, at that time would hire mostly Healy River people here, men to help guide. You know, because they were good, good...They were also good river men too, you know and John had run gas boats up for his trading boats up the Healy River, he usually got John Healy or some of the Healy River Indians here to run the boats for him. And he hired a lot of 'em for, most of 'em for his guiding party. And through the people that John had become acquainted with through these hunts like Endicott and Mellonkoffs, people had a good deal of political influence. John made a number of trips back to Washington, D.C. testifying about the Natives in the Upper Tanana that the caribou were...

Back in the mid-thirties was the last time that any amount of caribou made the big migrations, I

understand through these Upper Tanana. And John made the...testified several times before Congress. It'd be a matter of record back there I'm sure. That the Upper Tanana people needed, you know, more game up here.

So that's one reason the buffalo were sent up here from Montana. But as it turned out the Native people never, were never allowed to use the buffalo, but they didn't seem to be much concerned about buffalo meat any way. They were more concerned about their caribou and their moose. But never-the-less that was the reason the buffalo were sent up here. They were brought up, I understand, by the Tanana Valley Sportsmen group. They put the money up for transport 'em up here. I believe the Park Service in Montana released though that many for breeding purpose to send up here, so that's one reason why the buffalo were sent up here in this area.

And the Upper Tanana people's area was from the delta, down here, back to the Alaska range, all the way, all the way up and part of the Goodpaster, the Volkmar and on the divide goin' up to the Mt. Harper and the drainage of the Upper Middle Fork was their territory and back down along the drainage between the Mosquito Fork and across to the head of Minnie Creek and across to the Robertson River. That was the area that the Healy River band here claimed as their subsistence places⁷.

But any.. gettin' back to the testimony that John made in Washington, D.C., he told me that he, he got the reserve up there in the Tetlin Reserve that was made by, I believe he told me the Executive Order, was never passed by Congress although Congress approved it. It was supposed to be, that reserve was supposed to be for all the Natives from Delta on up to the border. Well, my wife tells me and other elders that at times they used to leave here. It would be during the Spring. They used to hunt muskrats and there'd be a lot of people that would leave here and they'd go up to the Tetlin area and the Northway area to hunt muskrats. But when there was no rats here. You know rats ran in cycles and this area this year could be hardly any muskrats, but up river a ways in different areas, they could be plentiful so they went up there, would go up there and hunt muskrats in the Spring of the year.

And they were, I understand, pretty much interrelated and marriages between here and Upper Tanana. And there's a number of families in Tanacross right now at one time was at Healy Lake. The Isaacs and the Joseph families, they were from, originally from here, but moved up there later. Usually during those epidemics, you know, people would move out. And anyway that...Is there anything else that you wanna know that I know about?

One of the reasons you know, that I was successful as a trapper ... You know I came up from the Lower 48 and of course I'd been a hunter down there and an out-doors-man in my younger days too. It was a lot different here in Alaska. That's for sure.

One of the reasons for my success was through my wife, Margaret. She was born at Mansfield. Her mother was a Sam from here at Healy Lake and her father was an Isaac. Her father died when she was two years old and her mother brought her and her sister back to Healy Lake. Her mother married Paddy Healy and shortly after that, a year or two, Paddy Healy died. And then her grandparents raised, took her up to Sam Lake, up up above George Lake and raised her. And her grandparents never spoke English. They were a generation behind and they retained their old ways. They weren't influenced very little by, by whites. And Margaret, my wife, she always talks about at night her grandparents, her grandfather in particular would be telling her about the old ways. Her grandmother 'd tell her about the old ways. Everything from childbirth to things

⁷Paul is defining Healy Lake's traditional hunting grounds.

that were taboo in their culture and about wildlife how the, the rituals they went through when they hunted wildlife and consumed it and potlatches and everything like that. And so her, being as her grandparents didn't speak English, Margaret never spoke English 'till she was in her teens back here at Healy Lake. But she never went to school, but she picked up the English language pretty quick. And 'course when I met her, well she spoke mostly Native, but through the radio and conversing with me she learned English and got real good at it. And uh...but she was an unusual woman. She was real proud of her race, real proud of her people.

And when everyone left here Chief Isaac appointed her chief here. She was chief here for about twenty-five years up until about 1970 and in fact she was the one that fought for the land claims here. The land, Healy Lake was one of the unlisted villages and we fought for three years. We had to, you know, gather up all of the records and everything else and present to the Department of the Interior to convince them that this was a village and was entitled to the settlements. And Margaret's name is on the claims and my family was the only one that lived here year around at that time and had lived here for quite a few years. We were the only ones here. But others would come in. They had their allotments here. They'd come in for their fish, meat and quite often they were, they stayed...Most of them spent their time out on the highway where there was schools.

I self taught my children for three years and then they went out to BIA school when it was too much for me. Beings that my wife couldn't read, well she couldn't teach correspondence, but I did for three years and then I had to make a living trapping so the children went out to Chemawa and Edgcomb⁸ and places like that.

So Fred ended up with, he ended up going back East. He's a graduate of the University of Vermont and, but that was one drawback here that we missed, was schools. But I think the schooling that they got by being raised here and raised here in a subsistence life, you know, style was an education that others weren't fortunate enough to ever get. They understand how, what there, we went, what we did here to make a livin' here and what their mother taught 'em.

And my success as a trapper and all, I learned mostly from my wife, Margaret, but from the elders. And that's, that's one reason I respect the elders so much because after all they survived here all this, this time with their knowledge of wildlife and how to survive here. And I've been fortunate, you know, to learn so much about their ways and I have respect for all their ways: their potlatches, system, their whole culture.

Now getting back to the Healy Lake people and the Native people from the Upper Tanana, there was...I've heard over and over from the elders and also from the early prospectors in the Chicken area, the Forty Mile. At one time there were a lot of prospectors in the Forty Mile and it was a year that the steamboats got frozen in with supplies coming up the Yukon, and so they were short of supplies, the miners and prospectors (in) the Chicken area and so the Ketchumstuk people had tended fences for caribou over there and they practically saved, you know, many of the miners over there by meat. You know the meat they were getting from the caribou and they hunted for the.. moose and all. One of the prospectors told me that they would try to pay them with gold and they had no use for gold. They would throw it over their shoulders, you know, they had no way for payment; but they did it out of compassion for the prospectors that was in that area. And most of the early prospectors had a high respect for the Native people.

And the injured and sick and those accounts of different prospectors and miners in the Forty

⁸These were boarding schools which are still in existence. Mt. Edgcomb is located in Sitka, Alaska and Chemawa is in Oregon state.

Mile area that would become sick in the wintertime, severe weather and the Ketchumstuk people would put them on their sleds and their dog teams and with their dog teams would take them to Mansfield, which is in the Tanana drainage. And then from Mansfield, the people there would put 'em on a sled and bring them down as far as Healy River and then Healy River people would take them to Fairbanks. And they saved a lot of prospectors that way. And a lot of the prospectors really appreciated the Native people, you know, and their ways.

They were poor. They didn't have much, but whenever people would enter their village, their intent was sharing what they had. Most of 'em were honorable, their word was good.. John Hajdukovitch told me that he used to leave caches of food all along the river up here for trappers. He would outfit 'em and uh, and even though the Natives didn't speak English. Well, he had access to the caches, he would take tobacco, rice, anything that he had left in those caches and in the Spring John would come up with his boat and trade for the fur and he said he never got beat. He said they would always make a mark for whatever they took, you know. John spoke the language too which made it easier, and he said he never had anything stolen from those caches all through the years that he had up and down the Tanana.

But that's about all I can tell you about what I heard and understand about the Upper Tanana people and the Forty Mile and Ketchumstuk people. They helped them save lives, we already crossed that didn't we? Not only hunting game for them, but when they were sick and wounded, they hauled 'em down to Fairbanks and you know, relay them from one village to the other.

CF: If you'd like to speak to the Athabascan traditions or cultural traditions...

PK: Oh, there's lots of 'em. It'd take me a long time. There's things like the young girls when they're growing up, there's taboos for this, like when they're menstruating, they'd camp way out away from the village until that was over. And a man uh, a woman never step over a man's weapons. Certainly not when she was menstruating. There was certain foods that the young people didn't eat, of the moose, the caribou and the beaver and other animals. Certain...Young people was not supposed to eat them. Women weren't supposed to eat bear. That was just here, although they vary in other places. Some people up river had different customs, but here women didn't eat bear. Many things like that. Then they had certain customs about hunting.

The caribou they talk about, they always let the first of the bands go through, migrate through. They left the fences open and the corrals open. They had long drift fences. There's some up Healy River and some up in the Forty Mile. A number of the Healy River people had up there, the Upper Middle Fork, Joseph, (Inaudible) Creek. When they hear of caribou migrating through, regardless of how hungry they were for meat, they always let the leaders go through because they claimed they left a scent trail, you know for the ones that followed. Once they let the leaders go through, then they could go ahead and fell the caribou. They had a circular fence and a long drift fence, been described to me. I've seen the drift fences. I know where a number of them are, especially up here. You can still see the outlines of 'em where game through the years followed those drift fences and cut in down long trails to where there were enclosures. Enclosures were described to me as being mostly circular and the women and children would be way behind, out in the route of the caribou approaching the drift fences. And then once they got past the women and children, they'd make racket and drive the caribou down the drift fences into these encirclements. It was described to me that the caribou went round and round. Well, the men in the early days before they had white men's rifles, the fences had openings in the corral and there

were set snares made out of sinew, braided sinew. And they set snares in those openings and they could catch the caribou as they tried to escape and the men would run along and cut the tendons in the back leg and let the caribou disappear and put the snare back. They have an enclosure, you know, and then later they had, and of course they had, at that time they tell me, they had bows and arrows and all that. And they'd select the fattest caribou, and they knew which ones.

The elders were real sharp on game. They knew which animals at a certain time of the year were the fattest. That's the ones they tried to take. And like I explained, in the winter time they froze a lot of the meat up on caches, away from the dogs. In summer they dried a lot of the meat. When they traveled, they carried dried meat. Berries, they stashed berries all over where they'd come back in the middle of winter. After the Fall they picked these berries and had 'em stashed. They would come back for these berries.

There was certain taboos they had for the potlatches. Certain ways they stirred the meat, the soup.

The body might be taken out of a window, brought in and out of a window⁹. In a community hall, or what we call a community hall; in a home, they, they, uh, sometimes I understand, if it was a wickiup, there was a cremation right there sometimes.

In the places where they had a partly submerged pit. They usually two families lived in those places. They had the willows bent over in a dome shape with an opening for smoke to go out. They had the two ends open. One side they had a fire pit, a long fire pit. And they put the dried logs in 'em and burned 'em from the center. The smoke would go out from the top and the heat from the fire pit would warm the ground on both sides of the shelf and they were partly sunken and then one family lived over here and then the other. Really, this is where your partnership came in and the families stayed together, you know. The one family on this side and the other family on the other. Those are still in evidence around here, those pits. The house pits, sometime I understand a death there that they might uh...In the old days they would hire a non-family member and he would criss-cross the body with logs and it would be cremated. Then they might put the ashes in the house and burn the house down. They didn't stay in those houses after somebody had died.

⁹This practice continued until quite recently although it has now been abandoned. The purpose of this action was to avoid contamination through the doorway where young girls had walked which was considered to be *inji* or taboo.

Ch'ets'iidz



Bull Moose

Fred Kirsteatter
born April 10, 1953
Healy Lake, Alaska

Fred was the last child born in the old Healy Lake village, the son of Paul and Margaret Kirsteatter. He has two children: Paul, age twenty and Elanor, age seventeen. Fred has illustrious ties to the history of Healy Lake. It was Fred who first collected lithic artifacts and then brought them to the attention of archaeologist, Robert McKennan and others. These artifacts and later investigations documented the long antiquity of the Healy Lake community. Fred was also a past chief of Healy Lake succeeding his mother, Margaret Kirsteatter.



Interview with Fred Kirsteater
Healy Lake
August 16, 2000
Interviewers: Don Callaway & Connie Friend

It's Friday at Healy Lake. It's August 16th and we're talking with Fred Kirsteater.

Hi, my name is Fred Kirsteater. I was born and raised in Healy Lake. I was the only (telephone interrupts). Yeah, my name is Fred Kirsteater. I was born in Healy Lake. I was the last one of that was born in the old village site of Healy Lake. I was born in 1953. And pretty much I was raised out in the Healy Lake setting with just a family and a subsistence lifestyle where there would be just my parents and my immediate family, my sisters and we lived under the umbrella of basically a subsistence lifestyle and the, and the more rewarding probably more economical way of life really.

I think it was of more value of living and as far as enrichment from my mother, I think we were pretty much enriched with her traditional ways and some of the customs that she passed down to us sure have benefitted us in our discipline and our in our daily life on up to our adulthood.

I would like to say that after spending three or four years with my education with my father, I quit correspondence. I was sent to Chemawa¹. I spent two years there and we were approached by Dr. Robert McKennan who was the anthropologist for the Upper Tanana area at the time of 1966-'67, I believe and he introduced me to a program, Native Studies program called "ABC" at Dartmouth College.

The coordination became possible by my findings of artifacts and some of the heritage of my people. I was collecting arrowheads and other implements, spearheads and implements such as stone and obsidian arrowheads, but I think that the findings led itself to my educational ways that perhaps gifted me into getting a college degree from the University of Vermont after attending summer school at Dartmouth. But I kind of left the East Coast and came home in '78 after graduation.

I followed my mother's tradition by being the "Assistant Chief", you might say because I became Chief through her custom that led to a development of a village here at Healy Lake. Under the, under the Land Claims Act that passed in 1971 we implemented the progression of that with benefits of getting our land, our people and restoration of just basic socio-economic groups, but for twenty years I served in that capacity.

And up until this point I was pretty much in the political realm because I graduated with a degree in political science. I felt that it was adequate, that it would serve me in the system that we worked in and the Native people and issues that confronted everyone in the Interior and statewide.

In that regard I was pretty instrumental in securing the schooling and the basic setting of Healy Lake; and the people that reside here have part of my benefits that I worked and strived for. And I believe that with our younger people getting more and more educated to the awareness of the

¹Chemawa is a boarding school for Native students in Chemawa, Oregon. Many Alaskan Natives have attended and continue to attend this school.

traditional sense of our people and values that our ancestors were carrying as heritage, I believe that those things that, that are taught to them by the elders that are so limited now in their numbers I believe that it does carry some value on them to pursue their education whether it's social or educational in the academic field. I feel that this is really necessary that, that Native children from Healy Lake or other places that go through the acculturation or assimilation fine line, maybe that, if you will, they would learn that their basic home rule is that you pursue the best you can. It's just our way of making survival...It's a way of life, the only way we can.

Getting back to my point of, of my home. My mother had taught me some traditional ways of, of being aware not only of the respect of the animals, but of traditional uses of eating habits and the traditional use, ways of learning the hunting, hunting ways of our people². I think one of the first things that I wore were bone, were bones from beaver to make me work hard. For example, I had a necklace that had some hawk claws to make me swift and be more wifful when I, when I make delivery on what I have to kind of grasp when I was later learning in life. And another thing I remember going through initiation of having to eat porcupine heart so I won't get scared out in the woods. So that would teach me not, when I grew older that it would come back to me that fear would not be my, my way of my behavior when I got older. I think that a lot of these values and things that my mother put forth on me and I think proved rewarding.

I stepped out into the real world back East and it was hard for me because coming from a small setting like one family in rural Alaska, a trapping home and making it into the real world, you have to have more than just basic educational calibers to help you get through life. I think that it takes a lot of self determination.

I believe that family values like again I said, my dad and my mother, Paul and Margaret, I've raised my family to the utmost of, of well being and wholesome. I think it has a lot to do with going out and striving and working for...for everyone. I think it's a unity effort when you start to, start to look back on how the Healy Lake band and its people and Chief Healy had taught their people to be more communal. And to start with the family values and the things that kept the webbing in tune to the structure of life, I think families and the people should work that way. That's pretty much what taught me to survive really.

I think we're looking at a changing world today, as you've seen with the elders and they stress education as one of the things we all need. I think we're looking at a generation here where we're not turning back on necessarily, but we're looking at subsistence as something we take for granted, but it seems to...each day where we're looking at trying to grasp onto some of the traditions and some of the inherited things that are necessarily really a great deal of strength in our fiber in our culture and our survival rates. I think hunting and fishing is probably that and it's going to continue to be part of all our social gatherings and it's going to continue to be part of all our gatherings including the potlatch and beyond just setting food on the table for your family.

²Although there was less formality in puberty rights for boys than for girls in the Upper Tanana, there were certain expectations regarding observation of taboos and cultural norms. Skills were learned by observing the actions of adult males and older siblings. Mothers also provided teaching and training in the form of stories as well as talismans to protect and enhance their children's abilities. (Cf :Vanstone, James W. : 78-79.)

I don't know what to say.

Getting back to my educational experience. I find it very difficult. I would highly recommend it to other Native, Native students who want to pursue their education, but I must, I must remind you that my educational purposes were more than just educational. I think the social aspects of life kind of intertwines with your academics. I believe that meeting people and making friends and relating to them, what their interests, certainly has its weight on your accomplishments, on getting your work and your accomplishments in order. When I experienced going to school at Dartmouth which was a Native Americans program, I felt a sense of pride where there were other Natives from North America that were attending the school. It was a program called "ABC, A Better Chance". I was there with other upward bound and Native prospects that were potentially going to college and I was one of them that was fortunate enough. I was recommended by Dr. Robert McKennan because I had some qualities in pursuing my education. I believe that the challenge was sometime pretty tough. It was like bangin' my head against the wall, you might say, but I find that after a year or two of being away from home and being alone and trying to pursue my academics in the world of being in a Ivy League, it was, it was the hardest part, but I believe that if you have a healthy mind and meet other people to relate your problems and then to share their interests whether it's sports or some of the things that we find interest in and to share with others, I think that's the bottom line to surviving in the academic world if one truly is to pursue the educational needs of being Alaska Native in the rural area whether it's a village or a small place like Healy Lake.

I had, I had some fond memories and I don't think I ever had a bad memory of learning and being able to achieve what was put forth as far as my degree, what was required, my prerequisites. It was just a matter of getting down and putting some discipline into your hard work and studying, but I've found that later in life it paid off by...

I was injured, however, being in a wheel chair, but I still maintain that my mind is healthy enough to purposely go on.

I raised two children. They're now going to...One's going to boarding school and one's getting trained in this Fall in Delta for mining school. I find that coming home and accomplishing my educational needs I related that to my two children. I raised my two children alone and with a tight family and the things that I were taught were fair and stable and therefore I raised two children that were healthy in mind and body. I feel that it was rewarding when you can go out alone and find that you can better achieve, make achievements in your own way of setting your own goal by just basic hard work Hum.

After coming home, finishing school and being a parent, I feel that my accomplishments in some of the things that I have looked to and what I've, what I've contributed to my home, my family and my village, what services I have provided with others. What I gave and what I took, you know, so far as some misunderstandings sometimes, but I feel fairly well with what my accomplishments are. I try to digest that I did the best I could. I think that everyone should come to a conclusive thinking that you're not always perfect, but I feel happy with what my accomplishments are. I believe that I contributed a lot to my community and made, made uh, perhaps regional, a regional impact on my people.

I worked for the Tanana Chiefs as Director of Wildlife and Parks. I was in that capacity of service for four years. I found that the challenges were there and I found that there was not any

more that I could do to serve so I came home after that to serve my corporation. I worked on the Board as president and as chief in it's capacity for the Council. And I worked for the "E" board (Executive Board of Tanana Chiefs Conference, Inc.) and I worked on...

Also after being injured I became paralyzed but I found my capacity not limited. I was appointed by the Governor to serve on the Vocational Rehabilitation Commission. And that was from '85 to '90, I believe. And I served that to the best I could. In fact some of the things I incorporated within the state acknowledgment of vocational rehabilitation regulations were that hunting a vocational setting for people like myself to go hunting and fishing whenever we can. And so subsistence is not an issue for me. And I feel very comfortable to, to say and still display some gratitude in my accomplishments. I might be a little selfish with, selfish with it, but I'm still happy about that.

Hum.

Niiduey

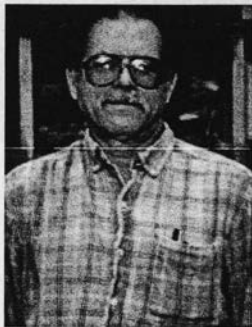


Photo Courtesy of Hank Timm

Lynx

Lee Saylor
born 1941 in New Albany, Indiana

Lee grew up in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. At eighteen he joined the army and came to Alaska. Later he married Stella Healy from Healy Lake. They had two sons, Patrick and Benjamin Saylor and he became step-father to Stella's daughter, Jo Ann. Stella Healy Saylor died in 1971. Her mother Jeanie Healy lived in Healy Lake during the summers and in North Pole with Lee and his children during the winters until her death. During those times she shared her memories, stories and traditions with Lee and her grandchildren. She left her pictures including names, stories and histories in his care and these are what he has generously shared with us all. Later Lee married Rita Paul from Tanacross who died in January, 2000. Lee continues to live in North Pole maintains close ties with his children and grandchildren and actively assists Healy Lake in whatever way he can.



Interview with Lee Saylor
North Pole, Alaska
December 8, 2000
Interviewer, Connie Friend

CF: We'll just start with the date. I thought it was the 9th, December 9th, I think.

LS: Okay., December 9th, the year 2000, about 11:30, North Pole, Alaska. I'll see if it is the 9th.

CF: And I'm Connie Friend, and this is Lee Saylor and we're doing an interview here in his home.

LS: Okay, what uh? It's the 8th, by the way. It's the 8th of December, correction. Now just exactly what information do we need here, Connie? Just go back on Healy Lake?



*George Lake
Johnny Healy, Alex Joe, Arthur Healy, Frank Luke*

CF: Yes, the history, your perspectives, what, you know, what you see as outstanding and what you see as, you know that was a little bit problematic and the challenges for the tribe and those kinds of things.

LS: Okay, the whole thing with Healy Lake ... The first time I was over at Healy Lake, it was in 1966 and that, that was with my first wife, Stella Healy and that was daughter of Johnny Healy and Jeanie Sam. And a lot of other people, they would come in seasonally, you know, fish, as we did, go fish and hunt

and stay there, but in a way it's as if Margaret and Paul were discouraging people from re-settling Healy Lake because at that time the old Healy Lake people were scattered. And uh, well, Lucy and Frank Luke were in Tanacross and Abe Luke. But in 1966 Healy Lake, you know, the village was practically, the old village on the point was abandoned then and you know, Margaret Kirsteatter and her husband, Paul they had built a cabin on the next point near where the village is right now and uh really, just them, they were staying there all year around as well as David Joe. Abraham Luke was in Dot Lake. Jennie Healy was at Little Gerstle. Now, Lena had married Moses Thomas in Tanacross and that was, you know Ruth's mom (Ruth Woods) and at that time everyone was, you know, just scattered all over the place. And my first wife, Stella, to her, that old village of Healy Lake was... You know she kind of thought of it as... I don't know how you describe it; kind of a mini- paradise that everything, she kind of referenced it back to that, you know, when her dad was alive and you know it's just the way that, a lot of what I know, that is what she'd be, she'd tell it to you so much you'd get tired of listening to her.

But, you know, her dad, Johnny Healy he worked on the river boats. He went from Delta up toward Northway and Tanacross. He worked for John Hajdukovitch¹, and I think for Herman Kessler and other people running goods up the river. But uh, well, and also in those times there was really two villages. There was one on the point in the lake, the really ancient village site there and the other they used to call it Healy River or fish camp was right at where you go in the river, right at the point the store, the trading post was on one side of the point and then there was the point and kind of a little flat spot and in there is where people, where people lived and... I think it was Paul Healy and his wife and Frank Luke and Abe Luke. Well, Abe had a cabin there. They built a cabin and there was one little settlement there at that time, and then one over at the lake and probably between the two there was maybe fifty, sixty people. Maybe more, I'm not sure. I could dig it up, but...

CF: There was a reference that there were about seventy-five children in school there at one time.

LS: No, no, no, probably about seventy-five people in the villages. Yeah, um hum. But the children, that one teacher from up Tanacross, Mr. Fleischman. He came and just taught 'bout three or four months school at one time around 1940 or so and there must have been around thirty kids that weren't getting any school and you know, like my first wife, that's all the schooling she ever had and well, you ask Ellen. She never had any schooling and Agnes, they grew up there. They never went to school. And uh, so this was, you know they were petitioning for school and actively working to get school there. And that was during World War II and again, all this is what I've, I've been told and I've seen papers and documents from Little Gerstle at that time that that was happening.

CF: Do you remember what they were?



Healy River Trading Post
circa 1920 *Annie on right*

You know that was my wife's oldest brother and the territory and also the BIA. And uh, this, you know in 1946 for a little while, everyone from Healy Lake moved over to Little Gerstle because they thought if they went to the highway, they'd get a school. And uh, you know a lot of people died.

Well, in 1943 at Healy Lake probably two-thirds of the people there died within months. And what I've noticed was the ones that died were the poorer families and the ones with really young children and all the old people. It just took the old people right off the map. There was none, none left after that went through.

CF: Do you have any idea what that might have been?

¹John Hadjukovitch who was born in Eastern Europe was a trader, entrepreneur, U.S. Commissioner and friend to the Native people of the Upper Tanana in the 1930's. (Cf. Simeone, William E. 1995 :27-29.) Chief John Healy worked on his river boat as did other Natives of the Upper Tanana including Chief Andrew Isaac.

LS: Well, I think it was, you know, some kind of flu or respiratory, but they tell me that they'd be bleeding out of the nose and mouth and sometimes even the ears and it hit Tanacross at the same time, close, you know close to the same time, but they had the army doctors there. That was the army base right across the river there and the same, like Northway. But the kids and people died then at Tanacross, but it didn't take 'em like Healy Lake and at that time, you know, Stanley Young was running the store there, the trading post and he went out and sent people out several times saying, "Everyone's sick. They're dying in Healy Lake", and no one ever came in to them. It about run its course and there's graves up in that hill that are just unmarked from that time. They could just barely dig a hole and dump people in. That, you know, Mary Healy, she, she died, her daughter and five children, all of 'em. Ellen probably told you about some of that her kids dying and Blind Jimmy and Selene going. Old Sam and Belle Sam and Annie and all those old people, Josie Healy. I've got a little notebook with uh, someplace that Arthur Healy had written in and it was May 1943 and he was saying one place, you know Belle Sam died that day and then uh, Selene died and you know just little notes in that. And uh, you know he was sick at that time with TB. So uh, this uh, that, that thing kind of has, I think it's marked all the people in Healy Lake and what's been passed down on it and there's another thing that I just kind of infer, you know that old chief Healy, you know he died in 1928 you know the year after that big potlatch they put on over there and he kind of ran that territory with an iron hand and you know he did not like any gold miners. You know he didn't, he harassed them and tried to get the prospector just out of his country. A trapper, that was okay or someone like John Hajdukovitch, you know trader and guide, some one who could hire some of these people, but he didn't like gold miners. It wasn't like...Healy Lake wasn't like Ketchumstuk where they'd go over to Chicken and work for gold miners and hang around Chicken. But sometimes I think that Old Chief Healy built up some ill will towards Healy Lake at that time by taking that attitude. So I don't know this for sure, but it's just something that I, that I get a feeling that maybe he had.

CF: Do you think that disease might be related?

LS: No, no, that disease...Maybe no one coming in might have been related, but no, no, it's just that sickness came up with the army and it spread to the...and I think it's all there is to that.

But anyway, it was there you know, during the sixties that Healy Lake started becoming a village again. Now well, uh, you know my wife had an allotment over there and we started building on it and about that time, you know, Josephine....Well, anyway, it was Margaret's daughter, Josephine was living over there now and anyway her and her husband built a house and David Joe, who was over there at that time started building a community hall. And really the present village dates from that and some of the people that had moved out, started comin' back eventually.

But uh, I think that even back in those old days that Healy Lake people kinda tended to disperse. They'd be all there and there'd be something like a disagreement and a bunch would move, move. Well, Sam and them moved up to Sam Creek for a while, there by Dot Lake. Chief Joe made himself another little village at George Creek.



Healy Lake circa 1920
Katba

Around 1930 you had Healy Lake village and a couple people over by the trading post and you had Chief Joe over at George Creek and you had Old Sam up at Sam Lake and some people with each of them. But it was only uh, oh, God, I forget the exact year, but it was 1937 or '38 that everyone from Sam Lake moved back to Healy Lake.

Well, you know, maybe I should...with Healy Lake, maybe I should go way back. These are stories that I've heard from Jeanie Healy and Abraham Luke who, you know, who learned them from Old Sam and his brother, *Katba*, Little White Man, they called him.. And you know during that time when that sickness hit, he was the oldest man in Healy Lake in 1943, and he died during that sickness. But it, really it goes back to that Old Chief Healy's father and Old Sam's father, the one that they called him *Theeg*. I think uh, it sounds like those two were the most important men way back for that area.

And another one would have been Jeanie Healy's grandma, her and Lucy Luke and Eva Luke and Lena, their grandma. She was from that Healy River area and she was, you know, a relative of Old Chief Healy's mom. But she married down to Salcha, or it might have been Salcha or Chena, but down river, and she had three kids down there, two girls and a boy and her husband died. Now like is often the case and I've heard this story from different places with different peoples. Her husbands' relatives weren't treating her good. They were mistreating her and using her as a slave, not allowing her to re-marry or anything. She took her kids and she went back to Healy River.. At that time, from what I gather, is uh, you know, Chief Healy was chief by then. His dad was gone. But anyway, these three kids she had, the boy was, you know, later known as Chief Joe. The one girl was Belle which married Old Sam, well, one of Old Sam's brothers first and later Sam and uh, that that one, Belle was mother to Margaret Kirsteater's mother, Agnes, to Jennie Healy, Lucy Luke, Eva Luke and Lena Thomas. And Chief Joe, his only descendent now is David Joe and, and his son, Alex there in Delta Junction. And the other, that other sister, she married back down to Salcha and she was the mother of John Joseph and Joe Joseph. And uh, Joe Joseph is Martha Isaac's dad so that's how everyone is related, through that.

And then, the other one then, and there again, this is, you know, a relative of Old Chief Healy and that is that Annie. And her husband's who's just named Fred and she was widowed real early and then she took up with one of those miners in Canyon Creek and her daughter, Martha later married Paul Healy and that's where Ray Fifer and Mike Fifer and Gary Healy, that's where they come from. Old Annie and Paul Healy which was Old Chief Healy's youngest son by his second wife. His second wife was Josie who was sister of Old Sam. I know that gets complicated.

But anyway, that Old Chief Healy's dad, you know in those times he was an important man and they were considered rich at that time and I've only heard him referred to as *Chit'ai Theeg* which just means kind of a tall old man and even Chief Healy was sometimes referred to that way, but you know the story is about it that, that Old Chief Healy's dad, he was really, well they called him "stingy" but he'd save things up but they said that old muzzle loader that he'd just put a little charge of powder in that ball and he'd be very careful, going right up on a moose and and he'd just shoot it and it'd be just enough to knock it down and he'd go up there and cut it's throat or shove a spear in it and then he'd dig out that, dig out that bullet and melt it and re-cast it again because in those days they had that little deal to re-caste lead bullets. And it was said that if he missed, he'd go look and look until he'd find that bullet and then in the moose where it shatters, he'd get every little piece and re-caste that. And this is the story that I heard that Old Sam and

Kataba, his brother and Old Chief Healy and probably Blind Jimmy were all young boys at that time and uh, they got a hold of his musket and shook the load out of it and put a whole bunch of powder in this old muzzle loader and had it loaded up that way. They said, by golly, here there's moose came out and they said it was brush and the old man couldn't really see so he went up a tree until he got where he could see that moose and he always took careful aim, 'cause he didn't wanna miss and he shot and the moose went down and he come flyin' out of that tree and fell down, and you know, was all sore and he was really mad and they kept their mouths shut. No one would ever say who did that.

And also, that old chief, he had two wives. And you know, one was the mother of Old Chief Healy and the other was mother of that Blind Jimmy and that was the brother or half-brother of Chief Healy and that was Ellen's step dad.

So then I heard a story about that. His second wife, some boys from Ketchumstuk was down at Healy Lake and I guess she was messing around with these Ketchumstuk, one of these Ketchumstuk boys and when they took off to go to Ketchumstuk, she went along and that Old Chief there when he saw that, he chased after 'em and he caught up and that one guy that was with them, not his wife's boyfriend said, "Hey, just take this woman back. We don't want any trouble". And instead that old chief, he took out his club and just worked the guy over bad and you know, took the woman back. And I guess he made it to Ketchumstuk, but he was beat up so bad, he died a little, a little while later. So I heard that story from there that he ruled with an iron hand there. And he was a pretty tough old man.

CF: That was Chief Healy or his father?

LS: His father, yeah, because Chief Healy and Blind Jimmy, they were brothers. And then, you know Chief Healy, I could never really figure out how his first wife was related up in Ketchumstuk because that's the area she must have come from because she was *Diik'aagiyu* clan. You know, Johnny Healy and Mary Healy and Paddy Healy, they were all *Diik'aagiyu*. And you know, Annie and Chief Healy and Belle Sam and Chief Joe, they were all *Naltsiin*. And that old, old Sam and *Katba* and Josie's dad, I'm not sure about him, but I think he, he might have been on, you know, Seagull side of things somehow, but his wife has definitely gotta be *Chaaz* because, you know Josie Healy was *Chaaz*. And Old Sam and *Kataba*. They were all "*Katnai*" say it in Tanacross way. But anyway, those were the ones that Healy Lake came from.

Then Old Sam's dad, that *Theeg* He was supposed to be a real powerful medicine man. And I don't know if you heard about that medicine man up Mansfield, *Deshen Gai* how that they brought him back from the dead. This old man tried it. He was gonna come back from the dead, but right when it was supposed to happen, a dog barked and destroyed the medicine so he stayed dead. And he was buried up at, up by Sam Creek and I heard a story about that: that his coffin was washin' out by the river so they went out to re-bury him and it's said that when they, that he looked like he was still alive and that even his beard and mustache had grown while he was in there. They re-buried him anyway.

It just uh, there's just all these stories that people have told me about and sometimes I remember more of 'em and sometimes I don't.

But another thing around the time of World War I at... You know Healy Lake petitioned to have a reservation and I guess, nothing came of it. That was just not what they were doin' in those days. But, you know Frank Luke told me about it and you know, some other peoples...

Well, you know when the land claims was coming along, Healy Lake petitioned to be put as a listed village. And this was turned down. I guess the BIA went and looked to see how many kids had been taken out for school there and well, there was David Joe and Sarah Joe and you know, Paul and Margaret's three kids and they said that's not enough population there and then you know a lot of people had allotments, you know, camps around there, and uh, you know of the original Healy Lake people and when the land claims come up, enough registered for Healy Lake. After what actually got to be a little bit of a nasty fight it was, you know certified as a village. And I shouldn't comment on that, that fight, 'cause now lookin' back on it, it was, you know it might have even gone clean... You know some of the feelings that came up might have even gone clean back to Chief Healy. And you know, Chief Healy was probably a pretty arrogant man. And he made his own way. He, he was a medicine man, successful hunter and actually he, at his time he supported a lot of other people in the village. You know he'd get their meat for 'em, share his stuff, but they paid for that. When he wanted work done, it better get done.

But there was, you know Healy Lake people staying at Dot Lake. Abraham Luke, which they all signed with Dot Lake and then with Tanacross. You know Frank Luke and his family signed with Healy Lake and they had the allotments on Healy Lake and George Lake and then later Louise (Luke) and them moved back there.

But to tell the truth, Healy Lake was, I almost figure there was some kind of old medicine power intervened to let that village get another chance. But uh, you know right around 1972, '73 there, it ... Well, I got uh, I was ready to go up and whip some people, you know up the river. Well, I can see now that... Well there was some people that thought it was a scheme by Paul Kirsteatter to control the land there, which, well if it was, it didn't work.

It just uh, well it's like I told someone that one time, 'cause this was after my first wife had died that it heated up. They wanted me to register my kids and I had to tell 'em, I said, "Look, I could go with," (you know they want me to register my kids at Tanacross or Dot Lake because, "if you register them at Healy Lake you're not gonna get anything," they'd tell me. I had to tell 'em. I said, "Look, Stella never told me she was from Dot Lake. She never told me she was from Tanacross. She said that, you know, "My dad was Healy Lake Chief". He used to run up and down the river, bring stuff back from Healy Lake. I said, "Even if it don't get to be a village, that's where the kids' name's gonna be". And after that they never bugged me about it. I told 'em, "I'm more scared of a ghost than I'm scared of you guys". But that's what went on right there and I could say more about that, but maybe it's better left unsaid, because people recognize that Healy Lake's now, it's a village. It's come back from that.

Well, from those up at Tanacross that used to go to the Old Healy Lake village sometimes, they're mostly gone now. Doris Charles and Kenny Thomas, 'cause Kenny worked the boats. I even had a picture of him over at Healy Lake there with John Joseph's widow, there in front of a house. I don't know if he had something goin' with her or not, but uh, but never-the-less, I got his picture standing there.

And then, well, I don't know, there was Chief Joe that was kind of in and out of the Healy Lake scene a lot. He had a house there. Right on the point there where you, it's, you know it's



Healy Lake circa 1940
Left to right: Logan Luke, Ada Luke, Lucy Luke,
Bently McIntosh, Frank Luke and Joe Luke.

kinda busted down now. I can remember when there was still part of a roof on it². But, you know that was Belle Sam's brother and he was also, Chief Joe that guided Billy Mitchell down the Forty-Mile down the Good Paster. And at Healy Lake, besides the village there at the mouth of the river they had what they called the old village upriver called Ground Hog or *Gaay K̄ē*. And then Joe village, Joseph Village was named for that Chief Joe. And the Joseph sometimes, Ketchumstuk people and Healy Lake people would be there for caribou. And they had caribou fences on the upper Healy River and over by Joseph Creek and Molly Creek and those places.

And old Chief Healy stayed up at Ground Hog a lot of time. That whitefish runs up the Healy River. He had fish traps there and it wasn't far to caribou. And Jeanie Healy would tell me that he'd show up from up river and stay there in the village for a while. And he wanted people to stay there in that village on the lake instead of over near the store because he thought that was bad influence having to be over near the store especially when Emil Hammer started an illegal still there. Course that was during prohibition and of course he was selling to miners and people on the river that would come for fur or something. He'd sell 'em. And then that Emil Hammer took up with Old Annie. She stayed with him at the store there. Again this was just stuff that Jeanie Healy told me and



Jeanie (Sam) Healy and Johnny Healy and daughter

Well, you know that old Chief Healy, he had those three kids that survived from his first wife and that was Johnny Healy who married Jeannie Sam and then Mary Healy and Paddy Healy. I don't know if I should go into all that relationship because that really strings out into the Mansfield area, Ketchumstuk and...

CF: If you can, do because all those genealogies, how they fit together is really good to know.

LS: Well, anyway, as you know, that was from Old Chief Healy's first wife, then he married Sam's sister, Josie. The only child they had that survived 'till adulthood was Paul Healy. Now, you know, that Josie, when she married Old Chief Healy, she had two kids, a boy and a girl and they were, you know, born out of wedlock. There was no special father to them, but after she was, you know after Old Chief Healy married her, those two kids, they were walkin' over to the store. It was from old village about a six mile walk on that trail, clean around the head of the village over there and I guess they saw some ducks or something there in the slew. It was Spring. There was still ice and when they tried to catch those ducks and they went in the water and they both drowned. So...That was a whole tragedy there.

But, anyway of those children of Old Chief Healy, now Johnny Healy, he was first married to one of Belle Sam's older daughters, Maggie and what Jeanie Healy told me is her sister was just sick, just coughin' up blood and she was with Johnny Healy and it was obvious TB and before

²In the 1950's the army held maneuvers throughout the Upper Tanana valley. The soldiers chopped the roofs off of some of the cabins in the old village for firewood. Ellen Demit's cabin was one that was destroyed.

she died, she told Johnny Healy not to go off and marry some other woman, to wait for Jeanie to get old enough and marry her. And well that's what he did.

And that Mary Healy, Old Chief Healy's girl, she married a guy named David Charlie from over by Ketchumstuk. And I suspect that he was somehow related to *Deshen Gai* or to Belle Abraham's mom. But I don't know. It's so many... When those old people died in Healy Lake in 1943, they took a lot of those exact things with them. But anyway, that's... that Mary Healy, that's who she married and had one daughter, Emma. And then after that, she married that old medicine man from Ketchumstuk, Old Saul and he was bad medicine man.

Jeanie Healy told me that he was there a little bit at Healy Lake and he got sick and he was dying and she said she was tending him when he was sick and she said he was really bitter about Healy Lake. Says they didn't treat him right or anything and she says he put a curse on the village as such. She says he sees the future where just this whole village, all the houses falling down and the grass growing through it, which it is right now.

But, anyway, after he died, you know Mary Healy, she, that's when she took up with Frank and Abe Luke's dad. That's Old Luke. And so that was her third husband right there, which you know after Old Luke died, her daughter, Emma married John Joseph. That was, you know wife of Joe Joseph, Martha Isaac's dad. You know, Joe Joseph. He was a widower at the time, his first wife was from down river, maybe Nenana, but she died over at George Creek when he was staying there over at Chief Joe's little village. Got buried over there. But anyway, you know, he married to Emma and for a while, I gather that Mary Healy just minded their business and tried to run, run things there, so...

CF: So she was married to two bad medicine men.

LS: Yeah, well before she... Well, here's a story about Silas Henry. Yeah, well, Mark Henry and Rika Paul's dad. You know when he was just young, he came up from Salcha and wanted to marry Mary Healy. He was just a little short skinny guy and they say Old Chief Healy run him off and said, "I don't want my daughter married to a little skinny runt like you". He says, "I'll decide who she can get married to". But I hear that before Mary Healy died, that Silas Henry was a widower by that time and he just moved in with her for a while, so like he got the last laugh on Old Chief Healy.

Then, you know, Paddy Healy, you know he married another one of Belle Sam's daughters,



John, Mary and Paddy Healy 1927

Agnes. And that Belle Sam, she first married one of Sam's older brothers. I don't even know what his name was, then when he died, she took up with his, you know, Sam which was another brother there, and uh...

CF: Do you know if that was traditional?

LS: Yes, very common and also vice versa and I gather sometimes it was forced almost. They told 'em, "You will". "If you want to stay here, you will". It was sometimes that...

Anyway this other daughter, Agnes, she married up to Mansfield first and uh, married Gus Jacob. And that Gus Jacob was Silas Solomon's dad's brother and also Belle Abraham's brother.

There were three brothers and one sister there. But they were Ketchumstuk.

CF: I thought that Gus Jacob was Titus Isaac and Walter Isaac's brother.

LS: Half.

CF: Oh, half?

LS: Um hum.³

CF: So on whose side? I've been so confused about him.

LS: Gus Jacob that, you know the four that were full brother and sister was uh, Belle Abraham, Solomon, David Soloman, Ketchumstuk Charlie Demit and Gus Jacob.

CF: So then, is that from their mom? Oh, the mother was Belle Abraham, right? No, she was a sister, so who was her mom?

LS: I have to think about what her name was. I have to ask Nancy(Nancy Paul) about that.

CF: So that mother was with Isaac Isaac?

LS: Yeah, see that, I think that was his second or third wife anyway. I think that Old Isaac had two wives at one time and they both died and he married another one and I'm not sure which...or where she fit in to that. Yeah, but that was a half- brother.

CF: That helps to explain that. Thank you so much, Lee, I've been going in circles over him for years. Margaret was his daughter, right? Margaret Kirsteatter.

LS: Yes, 'cause her mom was Agnes and they had two daughters, it was Alice and Margaret.

But anyway when Gus Jacob died there in Mansfield, again she was havin' a really hard time of it and Old Chief Healy brought her back to Healy Lake and I don't know if he told his son, Paddy

³Later, after checking with Nancy Paul (formerly from Tanacross), Lee told Connie Friend that Gus Jacob was a first cousin to Walter Isaac rather than half-brother.

who was single to go marry her, but anyway, it wouldn't surprise me a bit.

But anyway, I remember Margaret tellin' me that she thought when she was a little girl that Paddy Healy was her, was her really dad and it was only when she grew up a little bit, eight, nine years old that she found out that he was her step dad and, you know that she was, he always treated everyone nice and you wouldn't know the difference. But anyway there in the late '20's his wife, Agnes died and there he had those two little girls. And that's when, you know those girls were, you know, they'd stay with Belle Sam sometimes. They'd stay with Chief Joe sometimes and got kind of kicked around a little bit. And Paddy Healy, he went up, said he wanted to get Jessie Isaac, marry her, but it didn't work out and when he was comin' back down to Healy Lake he stopped down at Sam Creek and Belle Sam and Old Sam and them were stayin' there then and they had their youngest daughter, Lena, just in her teens. You know, Ruth Woods' mom. And she was always real hard of hearing. Her ears were bad even then and that Old Belle Sam says, "Well, you know I've got my younger daughter here and she not much good. She don't hear well and a lot of things she don't know, but might as well take her along". And so he did. And they had one child, Steven, and he died and Lena was probably not even twenty years old and a widow already.

And Steven died when he was in his teens. My wife told me about that. It happened at Little Gerstle. It was obvious he had TB. And he was coughing and must have been out playin' or something and he came in the cabin. He was just coughing. He said it was just like meat hanging out of his mouth and blood all over the place. And he died right in front of them.

CF: What year was that?

It must have been 1950. But he was just coughin' and came in the cabin and then just bled to death right there. He's buried there at the Little Gerstle.. And after that some others caught it right there. My first wife had to be sent to Sitka.

For a while all of the Healy Lake people were staying at the Little Gerstle. And my wife's, two of her sisters died there at the Little Gerstle and they died from bootleg booze. Bootleg booze that some guy up at Sears Lake was making.



Little Gerstle 30 mile Cabin circa 1940.

Tikaan



Photo Courtesy of Hank Timm

Wolf

Jo Ann Polston
Born February 5, 1958
at Tanana, Alaska

Jo Ann Polston is the daughter of Stella Healy. She was born at the Native hospital in Tanana, Alaska. Although she spent much of her childhood in the lower forty-eight states with her mother and step-father, she also has many memories of summers at the Lake. Her fidelity to Healy Lake and her people is evidenced in the many hardships she has endured in the process of making a home there for her children and herself. Jo Ann has been a key figure in the rebuilding of the village. Until recently she held the position of Community Health Aide, providing the only locally available medical care to the village. She is currently assuming the position of Tribal Family and Youth Services Coordinator. She continues to sit on both the Tribal Council and Tribal Court.



Interview with Jo Ann Polston
Healy Lake
August 17, 2000
Interviewer: Don Callaway

My name's Don Callaway . This is Healy Lake, August 17th, Thursday. Today JoAnn Polston's going to talk about her life.

Jo Ann: Well, I was born in 1958 and I was born in Tanana. That's where all the babies were born at that time. That's where they had the medical, Native medical hospital there. And when I came back, it wasn't too much longer, just, I was a few months old when my mom got sick and was diagnosed with TB and they sent her to Anchorage. She had to stay there for I think almost two years. I don't remember. I'm going back on stories now, obviously. But at that time I stayed with my grandma at Little Gerstle and Grandma was the only one there. It was just Grandma and I when I was a baby. And then my grandma got sick and was diagnosed with TB about the same time my mom got out and she got me and my grandma went to Anchorage for her stay. And then I was raised. We were all over. We went to the East Coast with my mom's second husband and I stayed there until I was, I think four or five years old and then we came back to Alaska and very soon after that my grandma (Jeanie Healy) came to live with us and has pretty much lived with us all her life and in fact spent her last, her last three years with me until she passed away in uh...It was in 1986 she died. My mom died in 1972.

And all my life as far as I can remember I think from the time I was eight years old...No, when I was seven and eight I went with my grandma to fish camp. She used to have a fish camp on the Chena River. And where the Chena and Tanana come together and I went there to summer camp, with her fish camp when I was real little and then after that I turned eight or nine years old, I started coming here to Healy Lake and spending the summers with my Aunt Margaret and her family. I would come right after school ended and stay until school started again. And we did all kinds of subsistence things here is where I learned to cut fish. It was part of my job to help take fish out of the net and cut it for drying and or eating and for the dogs. They had a dog team at that time. And hunting season I, generally I didn't ever get that. I was back in school then so whatever I learned from there, I learned from my grandma and my mom.

And when my daughter¹ was born in 1980 I moved back over here too when she was just a baby. She wasn't a year old yet. And my stepfather had begun a house here, a log cabin for my mom. And when she passed away, he just quit constructing on it and so there were only a few logs up. That's all it was. The foundation was down and a few logs. My husband and I at that time, we finished that house. With the help of family and friends we got that house completed. And we lived in a cache, a little tiny 10x10 cache all summer until it was finished. And then we moved into the cabin and spent a winter there. At that time Pat and Ben² came out to Healy Lake

¹Jeanie, named for her grandmother, Jeanie Healy

²Jo Ann's brothers, Patrick and Benjamin Saylor (See genealogy p iv.)

to live. They were very young teenagers at that time. I think they were only fourteen and fifteen. But, I gave that house to them and told them, you know, "go ahead", that's theirs anyway and I moved across the lake with my family. And we lived then in a wall tent until our house was finished over there. I lived in a wall tent all that summer until my house across the lake was finished. And I stayed there until my daughter was four years old. Most of the time, too I was over there by myself, just my daughter and I and when she turned four years old, I decided that the once-a-month correspondence program for school that she had been on since she was three wasn't going to be enough. She needed socialization, I thought, with other children. So we moved to Fairbanks and, and I uh, from there I went back to college. I stayed out in the states for a couple of years, three years and then finished up here in Fairbanks, moved my kids back in 1990 and I finished here. And then we moved, the kids and I...By then I had Corey too. We moved back here in 1992 and I spent the winter here, helping this village get their office, their first office up and running; with the computer, the fax machine and xerox, all the things that we never had here. There wasn't anything here. And at that time we didn't even have telephones and electricity. We had our own generator out there that ran the power just on a very minimal basis for this community hall and most everybody just had candles or kerosene lamps and there wasn't electricity in the homes. And no telephone here. We had a radio phone and that's how I communicated with Fairbanks for our everyday business, that winter, getting this office set up.

And in the Springtime events occurred that I needed to move back to Fairbanks and so we did. And a year after that, my daughter decided that she, she had enough of public school and that this is where she wanted to be so she moved back here with my brother in 1994. And she's been here ever since.

And I didn't come back here to live. I came back here in '95 and helped the formation of the Council in 1995 and I lived between here and Fairbanks, back and forth for about four months until this council was up and running. And then in '97 we moved back here and I've lived here ever since and now I'm purchasing a home and there's employment here with our development and I guess we're here to stay. I don't see myself leaving anytime soon in the near future.

We've had uh... I've seen a lot of change here. When I first started coming over here when I was a kid, the only house here was my Aunt Margaret's house. That was it. And it was a little tiny cabin. It was so small that her son didn't even live in there. He had his bedroom, it was a little cabin separate from there. And then the, her two daughters and her niece shared the one other bedroom beside their own that was in that little tiny cabin. And when I came to visit, I stayed in a... in a tent, in a big, in a big army tent that was partially used for storage too. So there, it was a tiny little cabin. And now, before she passed on, they were able to build a large, a large cabin for her and her children have homes here. Her son, Fred has a, most recently just a new HUD³ house, a four bedroom Hud house he just got in the last two years. And now there're several homes: There're six new Hud houses, and there're three new community buildings, a new school. Things have really changed from the time I was here as a child. We used to just play on this ground. There used to be nothing on it.

And at that time too, I remember the old village was still fairly intact. At least there were still roofs on the buildings. Now you'll see there's just a few logs laying down here and there.

³acronym for "Housing and Urban Development"

I was here when John Cook came over with his archaeological crew and began to dig in that village and they dug everything up. The whole village was nothing but a series of square holes. And I spent quite a bit of time over there out of general curiosity and, and uh watched them take out all kinds of things. And it helped me later on when I heard more of the stories about how that village died. I could really feel it when I was watching some of the things that they were unearthing. And at that time something that really touched me was they had found...They began digging in what was someone's dog yard and had found that the dogs had died literally on their chains tied to their posts. And that there was even a person that had been buried not too far from his home. People died so quickly and so suddenly that they weren't even able to properly bury their dead. And in fact they laid with their dead relatives in the house with them before someone well enough could come and help them remove the people that had passed away. It was a very terrible time and it was reflected in the way they left. They, the houses still had old um... You could see the dishes where someone had just had tea. Their teacups and plates were still on the table. Their tea kettles and cooking pots were still on the rusted up stoves. And it was just as if the people who'd lived there had just disappeared one day and pretty much that's what happened. And now when I go over there it's getting to be pretty much as a grass mound with some logs showing where there might have been structures here and there.

In the last years too this community has begun to function truly as a village again with all the people moving back, all our families as we're growing, growing up have come back. And we had, we had an open house when my aunt was alive to open up this community hall when it was finished and lots of people from the Upper Tanana came. About sixty people came for that.

And then in 1997 or 1998, I'm sorry. My Aunt Daisy Northway⁴ had a memorial service here for her two small twin siblings that had passed away. And that, uh, a lot of people came for that. And then, what had happened was my Grandma Ellen and her husband were so ill themselves at the time and so weak that when the twins died they weren't able to put a full six feet of earth there and over time the earth had shifted and had receded and you could actually begin to see the corners of some of the boxes and so they had to be re-buried and the fence re-erected and our culture that required basically a new funeral service. So we did that.

And then just some weeks ago we were notified that a member of our family that had passed away in 1953 was being removed from Sitka back to this community for burial. His name was Charlie Healy and he was sent away to Mt. Edgecomb to school as the last dying wish of his father. His mother had passed away here in the village and his father had taken him and his sister, Minnie, the only survivors of their family out to Little Gerstle to join the rest of what was left of this band here. That's where they first went after everyone...The survivors went to Little Gerstle and put up makeshift homes as best they could to winter out there. The fear of disease was so great that they literally took nothing with them and they ended up out there with uh... They had to re-do everything. They had to rebuild. They had to get skins. They had to start all over again. It was very hard. And so the people that had fallen ill to TB and other things due to the hardship continued to die.

And so when they got to Little Gerstle, not too long after that Charlie Healy's father, Paul, Paul Healy, knew he was dying and so he talked to my grandfather, John Healy about the future

⁴Ellen's youngest daughter

of the band and what was going to happen to the children. And they decided at that time that the best thing to do was to send them out to the boarding schools to the missionaries and that would be the safest thing and that education would give them the best possible future that they could see. And so Paul Healy died and he was the last one that was transported back to this village for burial.

After that nobody came back for many years. And so Charlie and his sister, Minnie were sent to Mt. Edgecomb. And at that... During that winter Charlie got sick with the flu and he was sent to a hospital there, a couple of different hospitals. One in Juneau where he met up with Tim Luke who is, was his cousin. Tim Luke's mother was Eva Luke which is my mother, Jennie, Jennie Healy's sister. And she was my... My grandmother, Jennie Healy was married to John Healy. Anyway, those boys got together and realized they were from the same place and that they were related somehow. And people were asking them at that time where they were from and they would... They didn't know how to tell them other... because they spoke very little English too. They told them they were from "up river" and they were shown maps and they couldn't even show them on the maps where they were from. And the next thing Tim Luke knew, they told him that they had moved Charlie to a different hospital because he was more ill than they thought and Tim never saw him again. And he heard that he had died and he had been buried in...outside of Wrangell on a hill. And nothing much was ever heard pretty much again until most recently it was discovered that Charlie Healy had been entombed with many other people that had died in that era with TB and other diseases that were just recently unearthed or I guess it's in my opinion, "found to be inconveniently placed" at a site where the Department of Transportation wanted to extend an airport and in order to extend this runway this burial, this storage site for all these coffins had to be removed and so they were all removed back to their home villages. And so we were notified of this. And Charlie came back here on the 5th of August and we put him in the cemetery as near to his parents as we could put him. And from there we've just closed that cemetery. There won't be any more people put there in the old place anymore. And lots of people came and we did things in the old way as much as we possibly could for him out of respect for the time and the events in which he died. His nearest relatives were Minnie's children. Minnie died some thirteen or fifteen years after Charlie and she left behind four children, three of whom survive today: Gary Healy, Ray Fifer and Mike Fifer.

And all of us got together, their clan, and helped them bury their uncle in as old a traditional way as we could find out with grandma's help and other people's help. And so that brings us to today.

I don't know...but I'll..

Okay, we'll talk about the upsides and the downsides of living in such a remote place. Well, in the first place it's kind of hard to explain where we are. A lot of people get us mixed up with Healy, Alaska which is down on the Parks Highway and very accessible to everything. Our mail goes there. Most recently all of our building materials that were ordered to build the last two houses went to Healy and sat there for two weeks before someone realized that they were in the wrong community altogether. And things like that get messed up all the time.

The upside of living here I'll start with is the fact that it's small. We're, we're a close knit family. This is an excellent place for raising children in what I consider a very crazy and wild world anymore. And that was the impetus behind my moving back here in 1997 when my son

was graduating up to Middle School. And we toured his middle school and I was horrified with the conditions and safety precautions that we were hearing about and some of the difficulties with bussing the children. Here we know where our kids are. We know who they're with and we know what they're doing every minute of every given day. They're not too far out of our sight and they're very um.. We're very able to be influential. Maybe in a world like ...from my own experience in Fairbanks when I was working in Fairbanks there would be many hours that my son would be out of my direct influence and under the influence of just anyone. But that doesn't happen here. I know who is influencing him. I know where he is and I have time to be with him and help him with his values and it's given me a great sense of security. It's something that my daughter recognized long before. She, she as well. She said, "No, I'm not going to school. I'm not dealing with these people". And she's been here all this time. She's twenty years old now. Getting ready to go out to college and just not as anxious about that as she was to go to public school. But the sense of community, the slow pace here, um, I believe has added years onto every body's life that's moved here. The stress levels just aren't what they would be if we lived in the city and dealt with the traffic and the eight-tp-five job and the child care issues. Here we take care of each other's children. Some people take their children to work. They've developed schedules that they can share child care. It's just much easier here. Much slower pace.

On the flip side the difficulties here are transportation... In the summer time you can go out by boat and there's only two true running boats here that people use to go out. It can be expensive because you have to help them with their expenses should they throw out a lower unit or some other thing that requires them to replace major parts. They have to be able to fix that.

Then there's the plane service which is an "iffy" thing at best because during bad weather conditions: rain, freeze up break up, cold weather, we won't have mail or flight service here; sometimes for weeks. And it makes the medic...providing emergency medical care quite crucial because a medivac can take up to four hours and has taken up to four hours to respond. The least amount of time being three hours for which you have to maintain someone until he's able to go to the hospital. Um, that's very difficult. It makes uh, for me, my job difficult⁵. I have to be able to identify, "Is this a medivac or not?" within the first couple of minutes of seeing that person in order to get timely assistance. Thankfully I've had the support of Tanana Chiefs Conference and this Council, this village council that I'm able to get the training that I need and the support that I need to make that happen as fast as possible.

The um, another downside is the fact that we're all related. That's, you know, it's a plus and it's a minus because you know, God forbid that we should argue among each other. You know? We can escalate pretty quickly and so we found early on that we have to talk about things right away. It's really helped with our interpersonal skills, I'll tell you. To sit down and talk about something and to keep it open and try not to be judgmental to one another and be supportive instead. I think we've come a long way with that. I really do.

When things are...It may look like things are rather hap -hazard around here but I'll tell you if something happens, an emergency or even a political issue that might require the Council's immediate attention, within minutes you'll find us all sitting down and ready to operate as a

⁵Jo Ann is the Health Aide for Healy Lake.

community, as a council and as a government. It really happens quite quickly. We all know where each other are pretty much at a given time. And we're all up-to-date on all the issues. We make that community-wide as much as we can. It's a must in survival in a village as small as ours that we be politically strong. And strong in one another, strong in the belief that we're going to be here for one another and take care of each other when we need it. And so we don't have any body...There's nobody in this village that takes welfare or food stamps. There's nobody in this village that's on general assistance out of BIA. Everybody that can work is working and in most instances both parties in the household are working. And even the children as much as they, they can. There's a very strong work ethic here and we encourage that in the children. It's something that we feel strongly about and are very proud of. We open our doors as much as we can to people and invite them to, you know, share our way of life and most recently we had a couple move in from Florida that are Cherokee Indian. And they're working here and purchasing a home and melding into the community quite well. We've become quite diverse I think and getting even more so. I like to see that growth happen.

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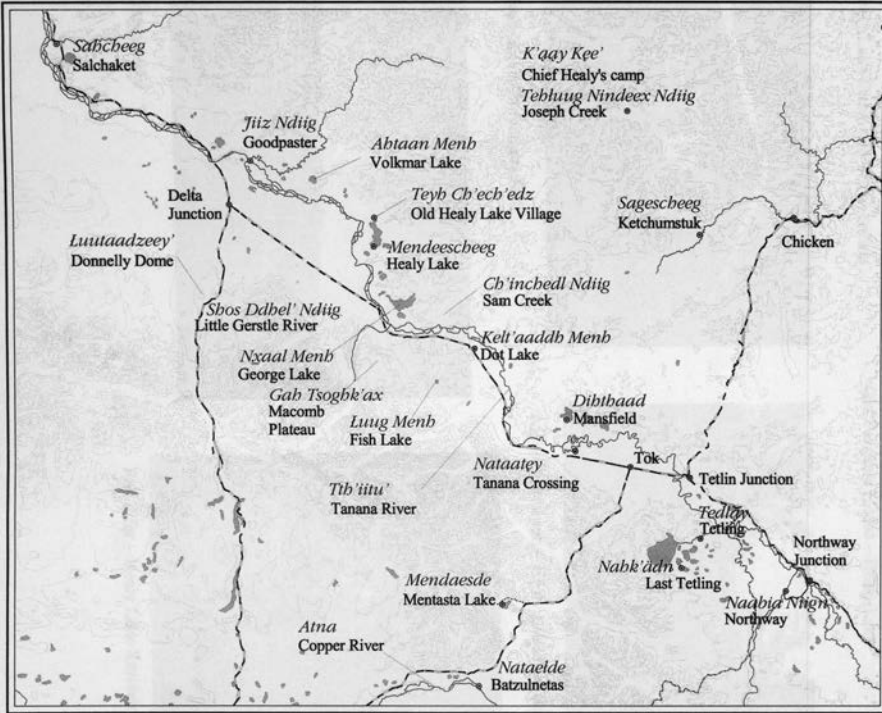
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Upper Tanana Athabascan Place Names

Traditional Use Areas

Legend

- Villages, Camps and Towns
- Tetlin NWR Boundary
- Alaska Hwy System
- Northway Road
- Mentasta Spur Road
- Taylor/Top of the World Highway
- Lakes
- Major Rivers

Map Location

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge
Cultural Resources/ H. Timm

7.5 0 7.5 15 22.5 30 Miles
1: 918,720 1 inch = 14.50 miles



Healy Lake Clinic and Tribal Office



Old Teachers House – Healy Lake



Healy Lake Community Hall



Melissa Erickson – Healy Lake Resident



Healy Lake



Ray Fifer – Healy Lake Resident

Afterword

In the Seventies when I was working for Tanana Chiefs Conference, I had a supervisor who would jokingly remind us as we walked out the door, "Remember who you are and where you're from." Years later it came to me, how profound those few words actually are. Many events have occurred at Healy Lake since we first decided to write this book. There have been births, injuries and deaths, repatriation of loved ones, potlatches and gatherings, healing ceremonies, tribal business, building a church, improving social services, adding wells and septic systems, hunting, fishing, gathering, participation in the formation of the Arctic Athabaskan Tribal Council, travel to far away places and coming home. And through it all the people of Healy Lake have been remembering who they are and where they are from. They have withstood opposition sometimes from without and sometimes from within. But like their ancestors before them, they persist in the face of all adversity and declare themselves to be *Mendees Cheeg Nalitsiin*, the people of Healy Lake, strong, enduring, grounded in their identity and ready to face the new challenges of the twenty-first century.

I would like to thank all of the people of Healy Lake who have openly shared their lives with me, shared food with me, comforted me when my mother passed away, and made me feel welcome in their homes. I hope that their stories will touch your hearts and enrich your lives as much as they have mine. I would also like to thank my son, James Jarrett Miller for his tremendous contribution toward the publication of this book. It is to him that I wish to dedicate any merits resulting from my efforts.

Connie Friend
Tok, Alaska
November 2001

