

Editor's Notes



Note 1 *The following section contains valuable kinship information for the people of Healy Lake and serves as an example of how stories are shared between contemporaries as well as providing a glimpse into the humor that is often shared during the recounting of stories from the distant past. The interview took place on March 6, 2008, in David Joe's home in Dot Lake (Dot Lake lies between Tanacross and Healy Lake on the Tanana River). David is one of the younger Healy Lake elders with a rich cultural background. Irene Arnold was present also, and the dialog between them was rich and lively.*

Following the telling of "Wolverine Man," David laughs. He asks Irene, "Did I miss anything?" Irene replies, "No."

We look at other books including Catherine Attla's *Stories We Live By*, Frederica de Laguna's *Tales from the Dena*, and Arthur Wright's *First Medicine Man: Yobaghu Talyonunh*.

David: "We go, I think as far as Chena and from there, it's the down-river people." We discussed using these other stories as a means of stimulating his memory. He said that he would read them.

[David remembered that Arthur Wright was one of the first Episcopalian preachers up this way and that his mother had told him that he was somehow related to him.]

David: "Upper Tanana stories go as far as Chena, but from there it's down-river people's stories.

David: "Where he ended. And from there, the story just kind of [*inaudible*], so, it must of. . . . This is where they picked it up at. He was like God to the Indians, *Yamaa*

telch'eeg. He did everything, made everything. . . .”

Irene Arnold: “Made everything right?”

David: “Yeah, make everything right so it'd be straight for the people that's coming, following. That is what I understood, 'cause there's so many. . . .”

“Most of them, most of the versions that I use about *Yamaa telch'eege*, Mom told me. Mom. I hear Abraham Luke talking about *Yamaa telch'eege*; it's altogether different, because it's in my language in Salcha. And so on, even up this way. I hear Maggie and Andrew¹ tell story about *Yamaa telch'eege* and it's similar, to Healy Lake, but since Mom and them were raised up here, she tells me it's a story like up here in Tanacross. That's the reason why I quote. . . .”

“Sometime I get to thinking too fast, so I have to back off and think about it. Our language is kind of . . . like the Healy Lake language is different from this one. Not very much. They all understand each other back and forth. Don't get me wrong, but you know, it's just a . . .”

Irene: “But they're still Tanacross. They understand it.”

David: “Um hum, on my mom's side.² It was my Aunt Margaret and Mom, their dad and mom's from up this way. Not their mom, just dad, but their mom's from Sam Lake. Part of Jeanie Healy, Eva, that bunch, yeah. You see? And one of my aunts married up this way, that's

¹ Andrew Isaac, who was the Traditional Chief of all interior Athabascans, and his wife, Maggie, lived in Dot Lake. Andrew was the son of Titus Isaac, who was brother to Chief Walter and Follet Isaac.

² David's mother was Alice Joe. His aunt Margaret married Paul Kirsteatter. Jeanie Healy, the second wife of John Healy, son of Old Chief Healy, was a Sam. She was one of five sisters who were daughters of Old Sam and his wife, Belle, from Sam Lake, which is northwest of Dot Lake.

how come my Aunt Margaret and Mom, they're related so much in this area to Laura and Chief Walter's family.”³

Irene said that she would hear her grandmother talk about Walter Isaac and the relationships.

David: “He was supposed to be one of the most powerful chiefs in this area, Walter Isaac. A very outgoing guy, I guess.

“Moose Creek was as far as they tracked him. Abraham Luke⁴ told me,⁵ ‘This is where *Yamaa telch'eege* came down.’ Where he ended, and from there, the story kind of . . . [inaudible]. So this is where they picked it up at. There was red mark on the side of that bluff there until a construction crew blew the face off for riprap and stuff. And from there is where they ended.”

[David said that he would have to come up to his Aunt Laura and Aunt Isabel to refresh his mind since he's been away from his people and his language for thirty-five or thirty-six years working construction. He said that when he was little, they used to come up here and they'd all get together and tell stories and the kids would listen to them and it was easy to remember them when he was

³ Gus Jacob was Margaret Kirsteatter and Alice Joe's father and first cousin to Follet Isaac, who was father to Isabel John and Laura Sanford and brother to Chief Walter Isaac.

⁴ Abraham Luke was the son of Chief Luke of Goodpaster, a powerful medicine man who adopted Ellen as a small child. Ellen was always very fond of Abraham. She cherished a cane that he had given her in their later years.

⁵ This differs from Ellen's firm belief that *Yaabaa Teeshaay* ended his journey at a famous landmark near Dot Lake called *Chinchedl*. It is said that *Chinchedl* was a training ground for warriors fighting in the great Indian war that took place in Canada in the 1800s. It is interesting that pictographs have been found on Moose Creek (de Laguna 1995:304).

young. He said he'd have to ask them, probably even Grandma Emma.]⁶

David: "Maybe I can get their story. A lot faster than you can. Like a fairy tale story and there's some dirty ones, funny ones.

"*Ja' du,*' she's right there. There are two kinds of stories. There's stories that's straightforward like teaching in school and there's the comical stories.

"Little boy born between two spruce tree. That's kind of like R, big R. Rated R. He grew up overnight. As you go into it further and further, it's really comical. Irene knows."

Irene: "David, I talk to her too. I talk to all my relations because it's been a long time since I've heard all these stories. I really have to think sometimes. She likes to tell you story about the funny ones, the X-rated ones."

Note 2

On August 12, 2008, Ellen added a bit to the story of Otter Woman.

It seems that while *Yaabaa Teeshaay* was visiting her camp, she had a pet porcupine. She offered him something to eat, but he replied that he never ate that meat. I'm not sure what it was. [I couldn't hear Ellen, and the elders don't like to repeat themselves when they are telling stories. One must listen very carefully.] He refused the meat she offered and then asked her about the porcupine. She immediately clubbed the porcupine, burned its

⁶ Grandma Emma is Emma Northway, who lives in Tok and who is in her nineties also.



Alex Joe and Arthur Healy, first two on the left; the others are unidentified.

Photo courtesy of Lee Saylor

quills off and cooked it for him.

Ellen also told a short story about a beautiful goose who married a human man. He loved her so much that he didn't want her to fly south with her people. During the winter she began starving because none of her food was available. Her husband cleared the snow off of lakes and pulled up grasses for her to eat and by doing this, he was barely able to keep her alive. In the springtime when the geese returned she told him that she had to go to be with her own people. She left with them in the fall.

Ellen said that she had never heard any beaver stories, as told by the *Tutchone* or anyone else.⁷

⁷ The Inupiaq people farther north have stories similar to this one. Ellen may have heard it from a traveler from that region.