Three Yukon First Nations Elders Share Their Knowledge

by Josephine Holloway

Le Projet de documentation des aïné(e)s, établi par le Programme de développement du Conseil des Indiens du Yukon, documente l'histoire orale des aïné(e)s de certaines communautés du Yukon qui représentent les aspects culturels importants de la vie des autochtones. Cet article contient des passages tirés d'entrevues avec trois de ces aïné(e)s.

My grandmother taught me awful lot because I lived with her quite a bit. I used to watch both her and mom used to stay pretty close and they used to work together. And I used to watch whatever they did.

The Elders' Documentation Project documents the oral histories of Elders in Yukon communities representing all the First Nations cultural areas. The project was conceived by Council for Yukon Indians Curriculum Development Program and was funded by Health and Welfare Canada's Senior Independence Project. Three Yukon First Nations researchers travelled to various communities recording the personal histories of Elders living in those communities.

Working as a researcher and interviewing the Elders for the past year has been a learning experience for me. My job has been interesting and most enjoyable. I am appreciative of the Elders' willingness to share their wisdom and knowledge about their traditional lifestyles.

The following are excerpts from interviews taped in February and March 1994.

Gladys Johnston was born in 1926 on the Nisutlin River.

Did people have their own medicines years ago?

We make our medicine from the bush, then, the store used to have some too. Like aspirins, like what we couldn't get from the bush.

Can you tell me about some of the traditional medicine that you used to use?

Yeah. There's spruce bog tea and that stuff that grows on the ground, they call it Hudson's Bay tea. We used that, we use it, mix it with tea, even now a days my brother and I use that, mix it with tea hey. Good. That how we used to use it.

Was Hudson Bay tea good for anything that ails you?

Cold. You catch cold, you drink that, you get balsam barks. And then if you have a burn or a sore, we used to make powder out of this, you know them balsam bark some of them have thick barks on it. We dry that out and make it into powder. Good for sores. And then there's something that grows on the ground in the summer time, and so the stuff comes out of there sorta looks like, sage or poultry seasoning. But it's powder, when they grow, they look like mushrooms. But later on in the summer they open up at the top. You pick up one, open up just like it's full of powder. That's good for sores.

What was caribou leaves used for?

Everything. My grandpa used to say that, well my grandparents used to tell us, that's good for a person with a heart condition. One cup a day.

What did you use for diarrhea, diarrhea or if you had a upset stomach?

Willow bark.

And you would just boil the bark?

If you get much diarrhea you can't stop, you get the willow bark and chew on them.

Do you boil the bark too?

You can boil them for cold medicines.

What did you use for toothache, if you were struck out in the bush or an earache?

Tie a thing around your tooth and pull it out. That's use to be my grandpa dentist.

Were there any ways to stop a woman from getting pregnant years ago?

I don't think as a woman ever dreamt of that them days.

Did you know of any Indian doctors, maybe your grandma...?

Some. My grandpa used to know lots.

What did he do as an Indian doctor?

That part I won't tell. It's our secret. The medicine we picked from the bush, there is way that any government or anyone would make us sell them, that's ours. There not for sell.

When there was epidemics of T.B. going around, small pox, influenza, whooping cough, how did the people handle it? Did they go into town to the doctors or?

Well back in my days, like from way back when I was just a little kid, there was hardly any of that. The only time we used to get a cold was when the people come back from here. When they been to town after all winter, they come to town, they come back, everybody get a cold.

Okay, we'll talk about childbirth now. Was there a certain custom a pregnant woman had to follow years ago, was there certain things she could do or can't do while she was pregnant?

Well like heavy lifting is one of the things, but she's got to walk. Don't matter where, but she can't pack heavy

or she can't ride a rough trail on the toboggan.

So you believed in a lot of walking?

Umhuh.

Is there any other?

Snowshoeing. My mom did that, snowshoeing. But don't go climbing the steep hills, go level places, not too steep and don't slip down. Don't step in the snow without your snowshoes on or your knee come up and hit you.

What kinds of food did she have to eat?

Anything. The way they used to tell us, my grandpa and my grandma, all my aunties, you can not eat fish head, when you're pregnant, fish head or gopher head or ground hog, porcupine, you can't eat the head or you baby will always have stuffy nose when it's born.

And if you are in the bush, you had a family around or a number of families around you and if she went into labour?

I start learning about that then I was twelve years old. I helped with my aunt, my grandma was the midwife for all her grandchildren and her great grandchildren. She delivered my baby and all her daughter's babies, she delivered them. When I was twelve years old I got to be there to see what goes on. See what goes with the older ladies that are having babies, to learn from it.

But if, if she was in the bush, would they taken her to another area away from the family while she was in labour?

No. No. If she was in the house here, them days they used to be fussy about things like that, having babies in the same building where you live. No way, they never used to do it. They build another special place for her. A good camp, home, tent. Make it nice and warm. That's where the babies are born.

Who usually help to deliver the baby?

My grandmother. Other areas, I don't know, everybody, anybody that knows how I guess.

Was the husband allow to be there for the birth?

If they want to. If she doesn't want him around, she does not have to.

How was the baby's cord cut?

Scissors. Boiled scissors. Tie them up with some kind of soft material.

Gladys Johnston

Was the baby cleaned right away and washed off and cleansed?

Umhuh. Cleaned, with damp cloth.

When a baby was born out in the bush and you didn't come into to town for, say five, six months, what kind of food would you have given her (baby)?

Breast feeding was the best for everybody. Breast feeding.

And what did you use for diapers?

That's my secret that one too. Some kind of moss. And later on when the stores was here we used to get material from the store for the baby. The new baby. And milk, bottles.

Grace Dewhurst was born in Teslin in 1932.

When you were growing up, who taught you as a small child, like to do bead work?

Both my grandmother and my mom did. My grandmother taught me a lot, awful lot because I lived with her quite a bit. I stayed with her quite a bit. And I used to watch, well both of her, and mom used to stay pretty close together and they used to work together. And I used to watch in whatever they did. Well I picked it up. I didn't have to do it but I picked it up from there. And I can tan all my own moose hides and clean them and do anything with them. A matter of fact I think I am spoiled now because that's all I'll work with, is my own moose. My own tanning. Same way with hunting, I love hunting and I love fishing. I got my own rifles and fish nets and everything. And I teach my kids, grandchildren. I hope my grandchildren will pick it up now. Wherever, wherever I leave off. They're doing pretty good so they always come down to fish camp with me and they clean fish and they learn how to cook around the camp fire. Matter of fact I think that's their holiday when we down there.

Your husband was non-Native, how did you meet him?

Well he came over, he come over from the Nahani. He walked, him and Tom Connelly walked to the Nahani. They went by canoes from Prince Albert. They went into the Nahani Valley and they lived there for a long time. They came down the, they lived all over in the Northwest Territories. And then when they came they came down I guess, you could call it the North Canal or that's the way they came anyway. And they came into the Yukon. I don't how many years he was here before I meet him.

So what year did you get married then or did you get together?

Well we got married when I was only about fifteen years old. And we

lived together for thirty-nine years until he passed away.

So your marriage wasn't arranged like, like some were? You know how, when you, some of women were growing up or when they were very young they'd say well this is your husband and this is going to be your wife.

No. No it wasn't arranged like that at all.

So what did your grandie tell you about arranged marriages when you were young?

Well she always used to say that, the mother, like if I had a son, well I gather all these girls, I would get them all to sew and make different things and take them out picking berries. And which ever girl was the best and the cleanest that's the one I would Pick for my son. And that's what Grandie used to say.

Were you able to understand the Tlingit language since you were a little girl or it just something you ...?

Yeah. Yeah, I understood ever since I was a little girl because that's the only way grandie and mom used to talk to us all the time. But we just never took it to heart and learnt right from the time we were kids. Like my whole family was like that and you know we never took to heart to learn all these things. Matter of fact I don't think half my brothers know what some of the words are. Like I was pretty lucky when grandie and mom used to talk to me about, talk to me like that and Indian all the time. And I picked it up.

Grace Dewhurst

When you were younger did you do a lot of trapping with your parents?

No we didn't. Well my dad and all them trapped a lot. But we used to go out, just like a big camp and we just camped over there. We used to go across the lake but all we did was just hunt squirrels. We never used to use traps or nothing, just shoot them. Never used any kind of bait. My dad was the one that used to trap.

How old you would have been then?

I would have been maybe twelve, thirteen years old then.

Did you help your father prepare the furs like put them.....?

No he did it all. Yeah. He did all those kinds of things. Actually I never really trapped, went out, really like trapped like the way they did. I used to just go, just the different times I used to go out and never used to go out like I was going make a million out of it or anything. Just went out for the camp out I guess.

So you're done some hunting in your life time then Grace?

Oh yeah. Just started about eight or nine years ago I guess. And I just love it. And I love going out and I love camping. Like I have my own rifles and stuff like that. I know how to run a boat and motor and a skidoo. I've shoot I don't know how many moose myself. I know how to skin them. I know how to go about skinning them. Fishing is the same way too. I know how to dry fish and can it and everything.

So hunting moose, you've dried some?

Oh yeah.

And stored a lot for the winter?

We stored lots for winter time.

What kind of fish do you eat?

Well we eat all kinds of fish that's in the lake. We have lake trout, white fish, and salmon.

Do you just catch them out on the lake in a boat or do you use a net?

We use a net. I use a net. I set a net all the time to catch them. But sometimes I go trolling and I catch trout and trolling fish for trout. It's really easy to get fish around here.

So do you dry fish too?

Yeah. Yeah. I dry fish.

What wood did you use to dry?

Alder. I use alder to smoke it with. And we always try to keep our camp always clean so the bears and stuff don't come around.

The remains of fish and moose or whatever game you catch, what did you do with it? Did you bury it or...? How did you destroy it so it doesn't attack...?

Well with the fish guts and stuff like that. Like I fish down about, about four or five miles down, just down pass the tourist camp there I fish. And I have those five gallons pails and I got a trough built. The boys built me troughs, and I just set the big five gallon pails underneath it so it catches all the blood and guts and everything. And when they get full we just take them it over to the island. There's an island over there, we just take it over there and the seagulls eat them all. We don't throw nothing in the water. Like it doesn't go to waste or anything when we do that. It keeps the camp clean and keeps the flies away and stuff.

Raising your family did you have a garden?

Yeah. Yeah. We always had a garden. We get potatoes and carrots and cabbages. We just grew the things that we needed, even onions we grew. And I still plant a garden. And the potatoes would last us all winter long. We wouldn't have to buy potatoes 'til sometime maybe May or June.

Was there any special roles for women? Like was it their role just to be around home with the kids and the men was the providers? Is that how it was years ago?

Yeah, that's the way it was. But the women used to go out and help too. They used to do all kinds of things, they were with their husbands. If they wanted to be, but they didn't want to they'd stay home too. Like they used to go out hunting beaver in the spring time I know and they used to leave all the women at home. And the women

used to stay home and tan skins and do all kinds of things like that, what they used to use for the winter. They used to do that all in the spring and have it all done.

When a woman becomes, or a young girl becomes a woman, can you tell me any stories on that? I've heard that they put a hood over your head.

Yeah, that's what they used to do. You see I never went through it myself, but I heard of them doing that. I've heard of them doing that, put a hood over your head so you wouldn't see, see or something like that. But what they did I don't know.

Do you remember how long any of them stayed out the woods by themselves?

They used to put them out for a month, I used to know and all they did was sew and sew and sew.

Who was allowed to go to them and to bring them food or whatever and make sure they are alright and stuff?

Just the women folk.

Men weren't allow to go near them?

No. No.

Ann Geddes was born at Lake Labarge in 1918.

When you were growing up who taught you to sew and cook and?

Well my mother and grandmother. My grandmother mostly.

So did she start you very young or?

Well she didn't necessarily start me on anything. She just, I just watched her a lot of times like she stayed in tents and that. If you got nothing else to watch but her sew you learnt, you soon pick it up, you remember, I remember it. And then pretty soon I started practising myself. And, over the years I sewed a lot and every time I just learnt a little more all the time and now I can, I can do anything that, I can sew anything that they can sew. The only thing I didn't pick up is my mother try to teach me how to knit and I didn't like it so I just, I just didn't go on with it. But my mother could crochet and do embroidery work and everything. She used do all that when she was with my dad, but I didn't go in for that ,I

A mother told her daughter beforehand that the first time she started to menstruate she should stay just wherever she was. To be ready for this, girls of twelve or thirteen used to wear old clothes, and in winter tried always to wear a warm parka or robe when she went outside, for she knew that if her flow began unexpectedly, she might have to wait until somebody realized she was missing. Sometimes she passed many hours in the bitter cold before her mother or aunts came looking for her.

When the girl was found, her father or some other close male relative from her father's clan or moiety made a brush house for her. It was usually 300 meters or more away form the main camp—far enough away so that the girl could not hear what other people were doing. Here she lived alone for several weeks or, if her family were of high status and could maintain her there, for as long as a year or two. Only her mother and other women or young children visited her. They brought her food and supervised her throughout her seclusion. Her paternal aunts—women of the opposite moiety—usually helped her with her rituals. They taught her what she must expect in the future, what would bring good luck and what was taboo. At this period of her life the girl was believed to be in a particularly dangerous state. It was thought that the power in her menstrual blood could harm the girl herself and also other humans, as well as the spirits of game animals. So she had to learn about this new power and how to handle it. She was told that the welfare of the entire camp depended on her proper behaviour.

While she was secluded in her own shelter, the girl wore a large hood or bonnet that covered most of her body and stuck out several feet in front of her, so that no one, including her visitors, could see her face.

The hood was usually prepared by a girl's mother or grandmother. The oldtime hoods were made of finely tanned hide, and some were very beautiful. Often the skin was white, decorated with fur, beads, porcupine quills and red paint. There might be a black crow feather tied to it in the hope that the girl would always have black hair. Deer hoofs, beaver toenails or danglers of copper were attached to the fringes of the hood so whenever the girl moved she made a pleasant tinkling noise. (This also gave notice of the girl's presence so hunters could avoid her.) After the traders came, hoods were made of sateen or velvet, decorated with ribbons and fancy beadwork.

The girl was never allowed to take the hood off—only to lift up some of the fringe so she could see to sew.... Ideally, her father's sister or some other woman of the other side cut out the things the girl sewed at the beginning of her seclusion....

Cold water was never supposed to touch the menstruant's teeth or lips. She had a small, straw-like drinking tube made out of the legbone or wingbone of a swan or goose, so she could drink without breaking the rule. She wore this around her neck on a fancy decorated string. Water was given to her in the shell of a duck egg, a hollowed porcupine foot or some special kind of container made from an animal known to have its young easily. It was thought that if the girl drank from such a cup, she too would later give birth easily. She had to have all her own dishes as well, so she would not harm anyone else by eating from a common pot.

Like a boy in training, the girl had to keep busy all the time.

Excerpted from Part of the Land, Part of the Water *by Caharine McClellan. (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre Ltd., 1987). Reprinted with permission.*

just stuck more or less to sewing because it was sort of a necessity like for my family to, to sew like moccasins or mitts and things like that. So I kind of perfected that.

Who taught your mom to sew and crochet since that wasn't really traditional way of life like bead work and tanning skin and that?

Well like I say she did, she spent most of her life with Mrs. Captain Williams in the Lake Labarge Road house. And like she stayed there quite a bit because my grandmother and my grandfather used to go trapping all the time. And they live off the fat of land and they had to be away. So there was a little settlement there I guess of native people. So they left my mother with Mrs. Williams most of the time while they were out camping and hunting and trapping and that. And Mrs. Williams taught her how to cook and to sew and knit and everything. She was good at it, my mother was very good at crocheting and embroidery work and knitting. She could knit anything.

So after finishing school in, in Dawson City you moved into Whitehorse here? This was your home?

Yes we moved into Whitehorse.

What year would that of been?

God I forgot, around 1931 I guess. And then I went out trapping with my mother down the Donjek River. My mother and my step father went trapping down the Donjek River and we stayed there all winter. Come back by dog team in the spring.

And what did you trap?

Well we trapped for whatever we could get, for mink and for fox and for coyotes for anything like that, anything, any fur bearing animal I guess. I had my own dog team.

How many dogs did you have?

I had four I think it was yeah. And the winters were really cold in those days. It was around fifty and sixty below during the winter. We were all prepared for that kind of weather every fall but, October and November we would get prepared for the real cold winter. It was like that every year. The weather was the same every year.

Most of the other Elders mentioned that the weather was colder then. So when you went out on your dog team, it was pretty well a day trip then when you went trapping or did you?

Yes, well it all depends on how fast you wanted to go or anything. But on real cold days we couldn't go out. We mostly stayed in tents, try to keep warm. But we were always prepared for real, real bad weather, I mean we had, we worn big moccasins and a lot of duffels in it and socks and everything, big mitts.

You mentioned you went out trapping and hunting with your family. Did you ever kill a moose yourself, actually kill a moose?

I did later on in years. I had pictures of the moose that I killed, helped to skin and it was usually someone around to, that would help you to left it around and skin and everything. And you always shared the meat anyway.

It's nice to share, did you find that most Natives share a lot, like they share and don't ask for anything back they just?

Yeah this is it. They know that, they pretty well know they will get the treatment back when they need it. And in those days, in those days that was the way it was. Now a days you have to be careful like, who you you are going to give it to I guess. But usually the people that do hunt like, for the meat for their family and that they, they usually share. And if we got anything we shared with them. It was the same we just, give back and forth.

In those days was, that was a matter of_ of surviving I guess, helping each other out and?

Yes it was. It was all right cause everybody lived off the fat of the land. And actually it was our fun. It was, it was interesting and we'd like to go out camping and we thought it was great fun just to go out for picnics and take everybody, take something along that they had at home, like something nice to eat. We'd all put it all together and share it by a nice big roaring camp fire somewhere. That was our fun. We'd all go out hunting together, some friends. Like we'd hunt small, small game together like the women. And we'd have lots of fun.

So you must have dried meat to then to help you get through the winter?

Yes we dried meat. We dried meat more in those day then we did now. Because we didn't have, we didn't all have refrigerators and freezers and that. Like it was, it was easier for us to dry things then too because we could, we just, all we had to do was build a little cache out the back and smoke. Put a little fire in there, smoke it like, slice it all up and smoke it. And take care of it that way. And keep a little fire under it so to keep the flies away and dry it.

Okay we were talking about drying meat, did you dry a lot of fish too?

Yes we dried a lot of fish. It's a delicacy, dried fish. A lot of work, a lot of work to fish, cause you have to, lot more cleaning to it and that. You

Ann Geddes

have to get the scales off and all the slime and everything. And you have to cut it all up and well most people cut the back bone out and that. If you are going to dry it you have to made it, just like drying you meat, you have to make it as thin as you can. Cause if you don't and you leave it in great big thick chunks well it just spoils. So you have to cut it, you have to know how to cut it as thin as you can. And it has to be done quite neatly. You can't just leave little chunks hanging down like and. It's got to be neat.

Did you find that different native families or Native bands cut their fish different?

Yes they do. They do. I'm learnt to cut it almost always, I mean anyway I seen it done. I seen it done all over. I've been in a lot of places in the Yukon. And I could do it the Dawson way or the Teslin way or the Klukshu way cause I have seen it all.

Did you find there was a lot of animals, years ago, like they were more plentiful?

Yeah, oh way more. If we, if we needed meat or anything, if we were out of meat moose all we had to do just go out into the bush and get whatever we wanted. Like they were a lot of grouse, a lot of rabbits. A lot of gophers. Like people up here eat gophers, up here because they are, they're different type of gopher up here. They're called Richardson gophers. They are not like the prairie gophers at all. These are edible up here. They're a real delicacy actually to a lot of people. Like we'd, there's a lot of small game we could go out and get. A lot of us fished if we, we didn't have a butcher shop to run to all the time. We didn't always go to the corner store for our food either. We'd go for the main things like, like rice and flour and stuff like that, sugar and tea and coffee.

So did you pick a lot of berries?

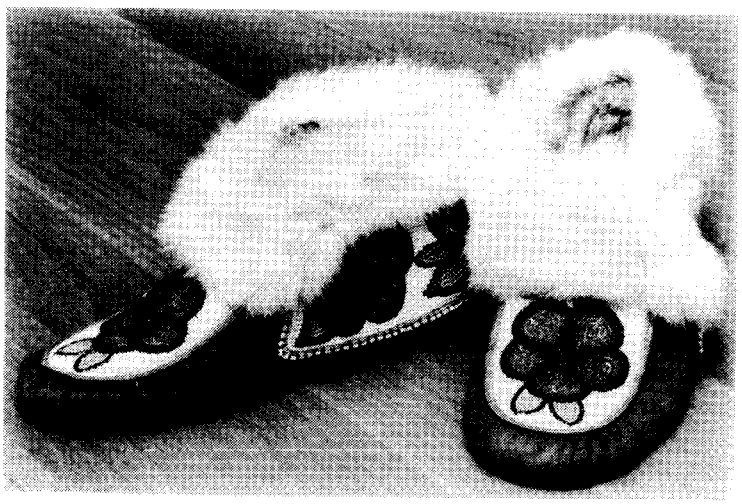
Yes we picked a lot of berries, it's the only, well that was our dessert. We picked every type of berry. We pick barrels of them, make them into dessert, pies or whatever. We'd had certain ways of making, like the moss berries, we make pies out of them, make the best pies. A lot of times we'd make, just thicken it, and cook it, and thicken with flour or corn starch, put sugar in it and eat that way. That was really good that way too. And the same with cranberries. If you didn't want to make a pie just make, just make fruit out of it.

If you wanted to store it for the winter how did you preserve it?

Well in the winter we never had too much trouble. We just, it would last until it get cold enough. Just keep it, just clean it all. Don't wash it or everything, just make sure all the leaves and everything are all cleaned out of it. And put it in a safe place to keep it cause by the time you pick it, pick that amount you, it's turning cold already outside. Then it naturally freezes in the winter or you just make jam out of it.

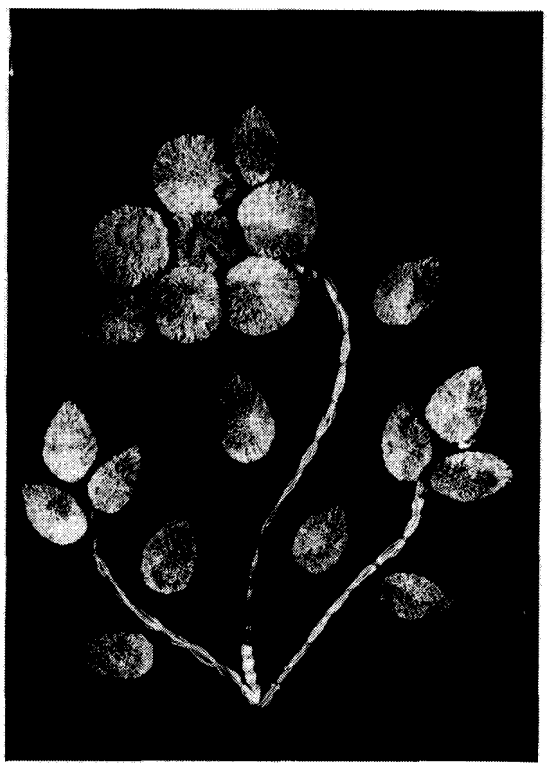
Can you explain how to tan a hide?

Yes, I helped my grandmother quite a bit. And helped some others. But everybody does it different. I'll start with the way my grandmother used to do it. She, she used to, they used to start out just about practically the same as everybody else does because first of all you have to, you have to get all the blood out of it. Like after you skin a moose then you have to hang it on a post of some kind. Flesh, what you call flesh it. Cut all the flesh off of it, so it doesn't have all this thick flesh hanging on it. And then you, after you've done that, you have to turn it over and then you have to, on the same post, you have to cut the hair off of it. And that just leaves parts, parts of the hair just, the grain on it. And you have to cut all the hair off. And then you have another kind of a smooth post that she used. And you put your hide over that and then have, either you have a bone that's made like a draw knife. And you have to hold it in each end and pull it down and take the rest of the grain off. A lot of people just use a draw knife to skin all this grain of this, the hair, what left of the hair on there. And after you done that you, you do this all over. It's takes, it usually takes a long time to do that. It's a tedious job. And then you have to start soaking it a lot. You soak it in a big tub of water and keep doing that, keep changing the water. Like you soak over day, over night, spill the water out and soak again, get some more blood out. Keep changing the water until the all the blood is right out of it. Cause the blood just dries it up. Then you hang it to dry. You hang it out doors to dry. Then the air seems to help to soften it. Then after a while you can leave it hanging there as long as you can. Like I say long time ago you used to be able to hang your things out the back in the shed or whatever. Then you would have to soak it again. You have to soak it in some sort of solution, in these days you used brain, like moose brains or caribou brains. They'd put it in a sack, squeezes all out into that water. And let it soak in that for a long time, for about, maybe two or three days. And then squeeze it all out again. You'd have to squeeze the hide out again. And hang it up to dry again. Then you have to do that about five or six times. Every now and again you



Old Crow Boots by Hannah Netro, Courtesy Rumkee Collection
Photo: Yukon Government

have to keep putting it the water. And squeezing the solution through it until you think it's practically soft enough to start softening it another way. And, most Southern Tutchone people just hang it over a pole, a pole that made sort of, like a ridge pole. Just hang it over there and scraped it along like. You have to scrape it with a scraper and it kind of stretched it and soften it the same time. You have to do this all over it. And you have to do it on



Artist unknown, Moosehair Tufted Flowers, Courtesy Rumkee Collection. Photo: Yukon Government

both sides like. But the Teslin people usually make a frame, a big frame. And they have this great big thing that they used to, to soften it with. It's got a big stick on the end and then they just put all their weight on it. And bring down on the hide. After they have laced the hide right into this big frame. And then they just do this all over the hide until it's dry, like in the sun or so. And you have to keep working at it. Don't let it dry by itself, because if it dries by itself it just gets hard. But if you keep working at it, and working at it until you know it is dried the way that you want it. It leaves it soft. So it's, it's awful lot of work right from beginning to finish to make a moose hide.

So they put the brain in the water to help the hide to...?

Soften, yeah to soften. This is sort of solution that softens it. But now a days they have more modern things, but they, some people use soap and some people use baking soda. And I don't know, I've heard, just heard of these things. I heard of them using alum I think it is. Some people even use diaper softener, that they buy at the store.

What was the best kind of wood to use again to smoke the hide?

Well they used rotten wood or dried pine cones. It all depends on which way they wanted it dried I guess, I mean smoked I guess. Cause either one made smoke. Anything that leaves smoke, like after it's tanned. They sew it, they sew it together so it's shaped like a stove pipe. And they light a little fire underneath it and just keep it smoldering. And you don't dare let it flame up or anything cause it'll, it'll dry your hide. And, you just let this smolder underneath there. And you have to keep watching it to make sure it doesn't flame up. You have to keep putting more dried wood on it or pine cones. So just keep it smoldering until, well some times it takes two or three hours I guess to smoke it all depends on what colour you want it. If you want it dark, you have to leave it longer.

When you were out trapping and hunting with your parents if you, say you had to build a shelter for some reason, what kind of a shelter you would of built?

Well if you, if you just catch out, got catch out and it got dark before you figured it would. You just, what we call a brush camp. You just chop down a few little green trees with, like spruce trees with a lot of branches. And put it in a u-shape, all around where you are going to sleep. And put your camp fire out the front. And you could build these little branches as far as you want, as high as you want. And that's where you make your bed. Just to, just to stop the wind or whatever. Or if it's raining you just get about three poles and you make this sort of a u-shape brush camp and stick your poles over the top your brush and throw a canvas over it to keep it sheltered. That is if you have a canvas if not you just have go under a big tree or something. But most of the time the people had tents. Like if it was cold they would have a tent and a little stove. Like when I grew up we didn't have electricity. We were lucky to have a stove, when I was little. That was after, after I quite school and we were out camping a lot with my grandmother.

What was the old way of government? Like how did they choose leaders or chiefs or?

Well that's the thing that we never, I never had very much we never had too much to do except my father. Like he, he was around the men more or less, it was the men that talked about things like that and. That he, but we never thought of any, anybody being elected anybody. Well the chief I guess was elected the same as they are right now. Like the elder or the one that was the smartest, that could give advice you know. That had the, that the right to be, to give advice, to give good advice. That's how he was picked.

Was there a special role that women played?

Not very much. I mean they were pretty well in the background all the time in those days. They more or less kept everything going around the camp or their home and their family. The men brought in the meat or whatever and the fish. Well women did their part too like, with the small game and cleaning and what not, saving the meat. Preserve it.

Do you have any ideas of helping young people learn about their own, their own ways?

I have thought about it a lot of times, but there's too much interruption like they, their education is all different now. And there's no way that they can learn about, like the wild life, like to live off the fat of the land anymore. So that, that's against it right now, because a lot of your, your education you're learning come

from, came from survival and there's no way that you'd can do it now because it's so populated everywhere. There's no game everywhere or nothing anymore and nothing is the same. So they're learning, they turning over this whole new leaf. And they'd already, most of them have already learnt that, that way of living. Like we think nothing of using a coal oil lamp and sit in a tent week after week in those days. But now everybody got to have electricity and just turn the switch.

How do you think we can make things better for ourselves in the future?

Well like I say that's, that's hard to say because the times have changed so much now. There's nothing you can change actually because it just seems to be going the white, white man way like they call it. Everything is commercialized and everything. So it's almost a necessity you know that they learn this way that's going now. It's a hard thing to think of like, native population but what else can you do because like I say it's not the same, like it used to be. Nothing is the same anymore.

Josephine Holloway is of Tagish and Inland Tlingit descent. She belongs to the Crow moiety and is a member of the Deisheetaan clan (split tail beaver). She was born and raised in the Yukon and still lives there today. She has worked with the Elders' Documentation Project for the past year and as a receptionist for the Council for Yukon Indians for the previous eight years.

Moosehair tufting is a traditional form of decoration used by western Athapaskan Natives. The moosehair most suitable for tufting is winter fur, usually six to eight inches long, from the centre of the back. It is hand picked then washed and dyed with natural dyes. A picture is drawn onto velvet or a hide with a small stick dipped in flour and water. About 15 to 20 hairs are held on the pattern, a stitch is made around the hair about one quarter inch from the end, pulled tight and knotted at the back of the material. This makes the hair stand up in a brisk tuft. The remainder of the hair is worked in the same manner until the pattern is complete. It is then sculpted with scissors.

Annie Ned

Mrs. Annie Ned, well-known southern Yukon elder and member of the Crow clan, was born more than a hundred years ago in the old settlement of Hutshi. Her mother died when she was a small child, so she was raised by her two grandmothers, Dakwa'äl (her mother's mother) and Däkäläma (her father's mother). Growing up under the guidance of two women born around 1850, it is not surprising that Mrs. Ned developed a deep understanding of the "old ways."

In recent years, Mrs. Ned has worked very hard to pass on her knowledge—through her dance group, the "Annie Ned Dancers," through storytelling, and in her recent book, *Life Lived Like a Story.* In August 1990, she was awarded the Order of Canada for her contribution to documenting the traditions of her people.

When she talks about her early life, her stories are sometimes set in her childhood home at Hutshi, and other times in the country around Kusuwa Lake where she moved after she was married. Her detailed descriptions of landscape in these two areas include place names, songs and stories associated with the land.

Together, she and her husband raised eight children. He worked for big-game guides each autumn and while he was away, Mrs. Ned provided the family with fish and small game. In the late autumn, he would return to hunt for the winter's meat. "He hunts for me, I fish for him," is the way Mrs. Ned described how they made their living together.

Mrs. Ned knows that as one of the last Elders of her generation, she is a particularly important teacher. In her childhood, most instruction came directly from "long ago people" who taught with stories.

Long time ago, what they know, what they see, that's the one they talk about, I guess. Tell stories—which way you learn things. You think about that one your grandma tells. You've got to believe it, what grandma says... old-style words are just like school.

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