

**Interview with Joseph Lomack in his home in Akiachak, October 13, 2005. The interviewer is Sophie Kasayulie, with translation and transcription by Frank Chingliak and Anna Jacobson, May, 2006.**

*Sophie Kasayulie: First of all, tell us when you were born and if you would like to include your parent's names, you can do so. Please tell us when you first became aware of yourself. Tell us how Akiachak was when you were a little boy and tell us who taught you how you should live your life.*

*Louann Rank opens with her introduction. She also gives summarized information about Elder Lomack's influences in Akiachak and the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta region. Joe is asked to start from his personal and family history.*

*Joseph Lomack: My name is Joseph Lomack, and I was born and raised in Akiachak. My Yup'ik name is Uyaquq.*

When Akiachak was first settled, it was a small community. There was an epidemic after the year 1900. After that, the first school was constructed in 1933-34. The schoolteachers wore blue jeans, a work shirt and a necktie. Out of curiosity, I asked why he wore a necktie. He said that a necktie could be used with a splint if someone broke an arm. That was one way of using a necktie for emergency purposes.

Then in 1933, as we walked hand in hand, my father Louie told me that he was taking a person by the name of Garber, since at the same year, the hospital in Akiak had closed its doors. They'd have us play checkers in the *qasgiq*. An Elder chuckled and said that playing checkers taught us how to make strategic moves and therefore develop our minds. When we first learned how to play checkers, we lost most of the time. But with practice and more wisdom, the Elder said we would begin to win more games.

Then as we entered the *qasgiq*, at that time *cigyaaq* [*split strip of spruce used to make fish traps*] wasn't available. The Elders would have us sit down and talk to us about how we were to live our lives. The women were also taught their roles of life separately. Then Garber and my father left by dog team. There was a hospital at Mountain Village.

There were no airplanes. Then one day in Akiak, we heard that a plane was going to arrive. The plane landed across from where the present village settled. We had no idea what a plane was. The white people called it a "spirit plane". The plane was unpleasantly loud. The school children had planned to line up and march in procession to see the plane arrive. When they heard the loudness of the plane, they forgot to march but they ran frantically to and fro! The teacher reminded them that they had to march, but because of all the excitement and astonishment at seeing a plane for the first time, they forgot to march despite having practiced.

Then again, students would line up to take their daily dose of cod liver oil. The school we attended was heated with Coleman stoves and was not heated. The floor would get very dirty. When the weather got too cold, 70-80 below zero, mopping the floor halted until

the weather got warmer. Only when the teacher insisted that we mop the floor, it would finally be mopped.

We would go to school in our traditional parkas, then as we entered our classroom we would recite in unison, “High Diddle, Diddle” practically everyday. Eventually I learned it by heart, because we recited it everyday! Then again, we would recite “Humpty Dumpty” everyday; then again, I learned it by heart because we recited it everyday.

Then one day after reciting “High Diddle, Diddle”, someone asked me if a cow really jumped over the moon. I said that what they believe about this was just a fairy tale. Our shamans went to the moon and back, round trip! And this was a fact! They couldn’t reply at what I just told them.

When a student didn’t pay attention, they would sit in a corner all day! That penalty wasn’t beneficial for anything because nobody learns anything by standing in a corner. When a student was caught chewing gum, the teacher would stick the wad of gum on their forehead. *Taqiikaq*, *Murusaq* (Moses Henry), and also *Irneryuq* (Herman Hawk) of Tuluksak were notoriously famous for having gum stuck on their foreheads. Teachers back then were very strict. I heard *Irneryuq* would be bound to a chair all day as punishment. *Irneryuq* confessed that he felt he was fortunate that he did not lose his cultural values and adopt western practices. His father’s name was *Tanuuller*. Then there was a head nurse named Lulu. She had planned to move to Bethel, and then one day fulfilled her plan.

They named a slough between here and Bethel “Church Slough.” They had large dance gatherings there and in other villages as a form of worship. For those who were less fortunate, those who did not have enough food to sustain themselves, they would be given food equally along with other participants.

Those, specifically orphans, who weren’t fortunate to own a rifle were given brand new rifles. Young boys and men were taught how to handle a gun safely and shoot with accuracy. Then, when they were able to shoot a blade of grass from the top on down, that was when they were considered qualified as a sharp shooter and able to hit an animal they would be hunting. They became very familiar with their firearms so that the shooter could determine the distance of an animal and determine how high to aim even when the target was a long distance away. For example, if a target was a long way off, the shooter would aim above the animal, pull the trigger, wait a few seconds, and when the animal fell down the shooter would say, “I have hit the target!” They would then walk over to the animal and find that the bullet had hit its mark.

Those days were sometimes stressful. Back then, the teachers traveled by dog-team. When there was shortage of water, without concerning themselves with germs, they would fetch a kettle of water to boil. Sometimes a five-gallon [white gas] can was used to fetch river water. It was more recently that they became better known as Blazo containers. The outboard motors they had were 1 or 3 horse-powered Johnson outboard motors. We would sit on the riverbank and observe those who had Johnson outboard motors taking off on their boats. They seemed to travel very fast to us! We admired their

speed. When the motors ran out of motor oil, seal oil was sometimes used as a substitute. Once mixed with gasoline, the motors would emit a familiar smoke of fried bread! The single horse-powered Johnson motors were so slow that a person rowing could overtake them.

The people back then were very patient and resilient. We were taught what areas in the wilderness always had fish. The people were very familiar with the conditions of the wilderness, and which areas didn't freeze. They didn't abuse but took good care of their dogs.

There used to be lots of snow back then. I remember a time when I became aware of myself, there was a passage and I climbed the passage and went outside and found that the snow was level with our house. Most of the houses were covered with snow and only the smokestacks were visible. There used to be a lot of snow and when spring arrived, there would be a lot of water. Flooding in the spring caused concern for everyone.

We were cautious about drinking too much water. My late older brother [William Lomack] sipped water from a tablespoon when he was thirsty. When we said we were thirsty and our spittle was still watery, we were told, "You weren't thirsty yet." When we were really thirsty, we were allowed only to sip a little bit of water, just enough to quench our thirst. Water wasn't liberally used like it is today. The reason we were disciplined this way was to maintain our stamina when food was scarce.

During the famine, when they lived in sod houses, some women would hide food under their grass bed mat on the floor. They say these women were corrupted. But, when their husbands realized that these women were hiding food from the family, even though it was a woman's charge to serve food, the husband would take charge of the food and share it in morsels so as to make it last with the rest of the family.

When there were severe food shortages, people were alarmingly frightened. And there were some reports of a small camp, where one woman lived near what is now called Oscarville. During a time when there was a famine, a man traveled up-stream and came upon this camp where the lone woman lived, and saw that she was stout despite the shortage of food. Everyone else was lean and skinny, because of the food shortage. As he walked up to the camp, the woman invited him to eat. Hesitant to respond to her invitation, he peered into the cooking pot and noticed a small hand bob from the boiling water for a second. Then the woman told the man to eat. The man responded, "Because I didn't know you lived here, I had my morsel of food and I would like to reach my destination." The man then realized that the woman was cannibalizing her own children.

The people's advice during food shortage concerning certain plants, such as: grass and wormwood (*qanganaruat*), because they were able to cleanse the digestive organs when the body is starving and cannot digest food properly. And although food becomes readily available after a shortage, the people would continue to internally cleanse themselves by consuming certain plants.

And although food (fish) was plentiful, especially in the areas north of Akiachak, in Nunacuaq and Nunapitchuk or elsewhere, during times of plenty prior to the famine, there were instances when broad whitefish gizzards and roe were being thrown around playfully. Then a wise elder warned that Ellam Kilgartii [spirit who watches] would rebuke or reprimand people who wantonly waste subsistence resources when they are plentiful. When that happens, some people who've stored fish in woven grass baskets would find out that the fish they stored were all skin and bones and inconsumable.

After telling stories of those incidents, they would ask us [boys] to sit together along with some girls. We would be shown the bones of a fish and told, as an example, that even if we took those bones home to cook, they would not have any food value or taste.

During shortage of food, even the undesirable mice would be consumed in order to survive. In areas where blackfish were usually plentiful, a blackfish trap would emit loud noise like there were many fish being caught. But, once the trap was brought to the surface, there would only be a couple blackfish and a lot of ice chunks.

Then the two blackfish would be brought home, one to be cooked and the other saved for a later time. When preparing to cook the blackfish, the woman would pierce the fish so that it would bleed. The blackfish would be pierced until it bled to death. It would be prepared thoroughly then cooked. Once the cooking was done, the broth would be cooled off and then sipped.

Across the river at my fish camp, there is a pit with dried fish roe that was buried sometime ago by my mother. I've looked for it, but haven't been able to find it. I've heard that although fish roe have been buried for many years, they are still nutritious and edible for years. Men who went out hunting would place a single fish egg inside their mouth and refrain from hunger for a period of time.

Hunger is a condition that is very unpleasant and undesirable. An elder who wasn't able to hold himself up in a standing position said, "When famine happens to the generations to come, they will have modern weapons to sustain themselves with. But despite this convenience, they will kill the rich and take their food. But once the food is gone, they will die of starvation.

Now, people from the Yukon River, the Inupiaqs and other tribes from the northern portion of the Yukon River, had post-famine instructions to travel on to the Kuskokwim River during the spring when the smelt are migrating upstream. There is a place a little ways downstream from here, as reported by my late uncle, Jimmie, where two piles of dead people were buried as a result of eating too much smelt, even though they were warned prior to eating these fish not to eat too much.

There is a site across from the present site of Bethel called *Mamteraq*. An elderly woman had pointed to the place and said it was called *Mamteraq* and that today Bethel is called by that name. The name *Mamteraq* derives from a cache built on four wooden stilts.

It was in the later 1800s [1885] when missionaries first arrived from the outside. I don't recollect their names right now, and they arrived before I was born. They first stopped at Togiak, a Bristol Bay village, and because of the relatively low and flood-prone area of the place they moved on. Then they stopped at Quinhagak, and after staying awhile they moved on toward the Kuskokwim. From there they moved up the Kuskokwim River to what is now called Bethel. Their spokesman said they were going to name the place "Bethel," translated as the "House of God."

There was a young man who traveled to *Qinaq* to speak in their *qasgiq*. The elders prepared for this because it was going to be the first time someone was going to lecture to them on the scriptures. The elders of *Qinaq* often mentioned *Ellam Yua* or *Ellam Kilgartaanek*, and *Ungalek* or *Cingilek*. On the other hand, people of the tundra (*Akulmuit*) referred to Jesus as *Umikucimek* because he was generally an unacceptable person. [see \*\* below for continuation of this story]

But when the first missionaries arrived in Mumterilleq (Bethel), all the first helpers of the missionaries were former shamans. Because the grace of God is so strong, these former evil shamans repented, became missionary helpers, died and went to heaven. When these shamans were alive, they often practiced taking lives and their spirits as well. This evil practice was done through song and dance. There are two practices of dancing through song: one is evil that takes the spirit (*yuirayaraq*) and the other is good. There were mentions of story telling and mythology, because the traditional lifestyles of our ancestors are often taught through stories and songs. There is a popular story about *Apanuugpaq*, but I will not tell the story at this time. He was a very noble and successful hunter/provider (*nuqallpiaq*).

Then, as state schools were constructed in Bethel, many of the non-Natives that I got to know learned how to speak in our Native language. Then as they learned to speak the language, they also learned to eat our native food. They collected and prepared food just as the native people did. Sometimes, because we collaborated with the non-Natives frequently, we'd smell that they'd been in the smokehouse smoking their fish.

Sled dogs were strictly advised by our elders not to be physically abused. Dogs were able to save their owners' lives and the dogs had a keen sense of detecting thin or open water on the frozen river. When they detected dangerous conditions, they would bark a warning and divert the sled toward the shoreline, therefore saving the life of their master.

That's part of the reason why people were advised to treat their dogs nicely. Because I took care of my father's dogs a lot, I was advised to cool off broth from the dog food and then feed them solid food later once their thirst was quenched. We had to treat our dogs respectfully.

Kayaks and canoes are very useful, although not very many people were fortunate enough to own a kayak. The people from the coast normally had kayaks that were able to withstand rough seas. Their traditional raingear was made out of dried sea mammal gut. These garments were worn when traveling in the sea and during stormy days. There were

also boots made of king salmon skin. They were waterproof and kept their feet dry. Only when they forgot to dry them out, the ankle portion of the boots tended to rot.

\*\* [Continued from previous page] The young person preached from the Bible to the people of *Qinaq* and then the elders of the community agreed that they would spare his life because he was still so young. He preached in English with Yup'ik translation. The message the elders heard was exactly the same as their own traditional maxims. The elders realized that although their teachings weren't documented, their sayings and rules were identical to some of the scriptures in the Bible. We called them "*Kass'at*." Their stories and teachings stirred our curiosity and interest.

During the early, fall months when we were out hunting and gathering and would come upon another trapper's trap that caught an animal, we were advised to hang it high above the ground so that a fox would not be able to reach it. When the owner of the trap realized what we had done, they would thank us later for hanging the trap and its catch. The price for a mink pelt during those days was a reasonable price.

Fish was a main staple of our diet. During early fall, they taught me how to make blackfish traps, and even though I didn't think the fish trap was well done, the elders would compliment my finished products. When they complimented our fish traps, we would feel very grateful. Eventually, the fish traps we made got better and better.

When we were done using the blackfish traps, we were advised to place them on the ground with the funnel opening side on the ground so that birds wouldn't build their nests inside them. We were taught how to use the bow and arrow and some became quite proficient with the bow and arrow. But, once we learned the basic fundamentals of how to use them, some made long bows. Only the strong were able to draw back the bows that were large. Back in those days men were very strong.

The arrowheads were made of hard stone called *umiq*. The purpose of the arrow with the stone arrowhead was to penetrate, and the arrowhead would disengage and sometimes travel inside the animal to stop in its heart. That way they were able to provide food for their families and they were very good at using the bow and arrow.

I've felt rather apprehensive about our young people today. They are taking for granted what is available to them. And the food they are consuming is not native to us. During my childhood, the Yupiaq people didn't have butter knives, but they used their index finger like a butter knife. Even in Bethel, butter knives weren't readily available and I would sometimes see *Kass'at* using their finger like a butter knife.

I would make fresh coffee with freshly baked coffee beans. I drank my first cup of coffee when I was eighteen or twenty-one years old. We weren't allowed to smoke cigarettes unless we were twenty-one years old. It was the same for chewing tobacco, twenty-one was the required age. The first tobacco products I saw were the Bull tobacco brand; they were very strong. Some people also used chewing tobacco leaves to dress minor cuts, and the wound would heal.

The people in those days were of no comparison to those of today because they were hard workers. They constructed ‘flat-bed’ sleds to carry their sea going kayaks. They also made freight sleds to gather and haul woods with. The sled runners were made of very sturdy raw material, and their dogs were very strong. That was how the people I witnessed were.

Then one day the reindeer herders (Laplanders [Saami]) built a sawmill in Akiak. They cut lumber to built boats with, using a plane to smooth and shape the lumber at the same time. Then *Pekaq* (Roy George) and *Caulaaq* (Willie Nick) with the help of each other constructed a wooden boat. The boat looked very good when it was completed. When they were finished building the boat, they complimented each other for the nice boat they built. One of them hammered a nail, and as he hit the nail, the whole boat just sprung apart! Then they decided they had to reconstruct the boat using larger nails. They tried to match where the nails had been as they carefully reconstructed the boat using larger nails.

Tree pitch would be used to waterproof wooden boats by burning dried grass to soften the resin. And then spruce tree pitch would be used as waterproofing material especially for skin boats, but it was advisable not to apply the resin on very warm sunny days. Skin boats had to be moistened and kept in the water as much as possible because when the skin becomes dry it shrinks. This kind of skin boat was to be cared for very closely because loose dogs may gnaw on the skin. The skin boats would have to be stored high on racks so that dogs would not gnaw on them.

The wilderness was abundant with edibles. Sphagnum moss (*uruq*) was collected, dried and then washed before being eaten. Our mother would prepare it carefully, and once ready it was eaten with a little bit of seal oil. Once we were finished eating, we didn’t feel like eating anything for the rest of the day. Everything in the wilderness was edible and many people don’t know the edible plants in the wilderness at the present time.

Warnings of dangers to come in the future were often given in the *qasgiq* or in other communities, and we were often warned and told that we were becoming foolish. We heeded what they had to say because we deemed their warnings to be true. If there was just one case of stolen fur-bearing animal from a trapper’s trap line, it didn’t take long to make the incident known to all. The incident was dealt with at the first incident; the perpetrator was met with and reprimanded so that he would never repeat what he did again. Then, the case was closed and the perpetrator was closely monitored.

Then one day there was a discussion about our forefathers. It is said that when a person disregarded tribal authorities repeatedly, the person was banished from the community. Only when the person who was banished felt remorse and confessed that s/he would never again disobey, the elders’ authority would allow s/he back into the community.

Then one day a person shared insight after reading from the Bible that an erring member of the church should be removed from the fellowship of the congregation if s/he does not comply with the requirements of a believer. The scriptural reference says that the person

will then be treated as an unbeliever. Only when the church member confesses and is remorseful of his/her unfavorable conduct, will they be reinstated to the membership of the church. We realize that our ancestors were disciplined in ways similar to ways given in scriptural guidelines, despite their inability to speak and understand the English language. They respected and honored everything around them.

During the first cold spells of the year, when temperatures reached down to –80 degrees below zero, I remember a time when it was eighty below zero here in Akiachak, and it was eighty-five below in Bethel. This was the time when winters would become extremely cold. We had no idea what radios were during that time either. Schools didn't have insulation whatsoever. The teachers during those days would dress very warmly in their classrooms.

The classrooms used candles and kerosene lamps for lighting purposes. There were many things that we didn't have that were introduced to us that amazed us. Then during the summer months, as the teachers learned some of our cultural traditions, they would also collect rainwater to use during the summer months. What else did you want to know?

*Sophie: During those days, were you one of the first health aides?*

JL: I was a health aide at the same time while I was working at the school. I didn't know medical terminologies or illnesses, but I contacted the hospital through the Northern Lights radio. And when my hearing was good, I was able to detect broken bones by the creaking sounds of broken bones. Doctors were amazed at my diagnoses without making mistakes with my sense of hearing. That was when my hearing was near perfect.

During that time I also used a piece of wood, about a foot long with a piece of soft cloth wrapped on one end, and I would place the other end on my ear and the other end on a person's chest and listen like a stethoscope. People who've begun to have tuberculosis symptoms would emit rattling sounds. People with tuberculosis would have itching throats and cough a lot with those symptoms we knew they had TB. The more conventional method for testing TB was with the modern testing methods.

But, people who've been diagnosed with cancer would eventually become very skinny and it was amazing how long they survived under those conditions. Consuming and utilizing traditional medicines such as willow tree bark would miraculously heal some people from tuberculosis.

Then, there was an incident where there was a report of someone smoking Buhach. There were confirmed reports that the person recovered from tuberculosis. When people were infected with tuberculosis, they had to take a lot of medicine tablets. Some infected people chew medicinal plants to help them get better. Certain tree products with medicinal value were consumed and helped cure tuberculosis in many.

*Sophie: What kinds of tree leaves were consumed?*

Soft edible willow leaves. There were other tree products that had medicinal value; there was also the birch tree. The birch trees sap or juice was extracted and it resembled apple juice, as I later saw how apple juice looked. The dosage recommended was one teaspoon of birch sap a day. There was also extract from boiled pine needles. There were a variety of traditional medicines that the Yup'ik people made.

When I was a health aide, there were many times when I would have to skip regular mealtimes. Someday I would go all day without eating when I was tending to the needs of the sick people. But it was very stressful for me when the diphtheria epidemic hit. A person was diagnosed in the morning and would be dead the next day.

If only I had known during that time what an old man told me when he asked, "When there were people dying of diphtheria, did you know what the remedy was?" I said I had no idea. Then he said, "If you had known, you could have opened their mouths wide and given them a little incision in their throats. They would have been healed of diphtheria."

When the diphtheria epidemic hit, we were nearly decimated. Military and State doctors assisted me during that time. A person would contract the illness in the evening and die the next day. Because so many people were dying, the bell ringer ceased to notify people by ringing the bell. The epidemic nearly spread but the military and state medical officials helped out. People were quarantined and weren't allowed to travel to other villages.

When people traveled to Bethel to go shopping, they would have to stop at Hangar Lake, pitch their tent and then *Kelucaq* (Joe Andrew) and others would accompany the people to the store. During that time a hundred pound bag of flour cost \$6.00. The price of gasoline at that time was very pricey for us at \$12.00 a drum (55 gallons). And also a drum of stove oil (heating fuel) to us was very expensive at \$8.00 a drum. Compared to today's prices, the prices then were very cheap as we later realized.

Those were some of the results of our teachings. We realized that the advice given to us by our Elders was identical to the teachings of the Bible and many of our traditional and cultural values, advices and warnings were alike in every respect to the teachings in the Bible.

And then during my time as a young man, reindeer were used domestically for traveling and hauling heavy loads. The reindeer were trained, harnessed and used for traveling up to the tundra villages. When riding in a sleigh behind harnessed reindeer, people would have to face backwards because the snow from their hoofs would feel like snow pellets on the face. Caribou were slightly bigger than the reindeer and many people mistakenly call the reindeer caribou.

I am a shareholder of reindeer and I have the document to verify that I am an owner and I've shown the document to the Department of Fish and Game. And also, after a teacher gave the signed documents to me, I still have the original document but it has become

orn. So, if moose hunting season opened I can utilize the document as an official permission to hunt moose and authorities cannot do anything to me.

There were others who were given this official license but they've lost theirs. Officials from Juneau and the Department of Fish and Game had deliberated about my license but concluded that there wasn't anything they could do about a lifetime license. I still have mine stored somewhere here in my house.

*Sophie: We've met during this week, but I just remembered an elder who lived here in the past, Marie Forrest, who had children who grew up here and were about your age. Can you share a little about that?*

Marie lived here and as young boys, Harry Samuelson and Oscar (Samuelson). Oscar had a wife from another part of Alaska. *Cakayaq* (John "Datu" Samuelson) inherited a store as did Nani, Chris Nerby and Marie Forrest. It was a fairly large store that eventually grew.

I grew up knowing them. Marie's children were able to speak Yup'ik very well and we were about the same age group and I grew up together with them. Although I didn't feel up to it, they would even let me sleep over at their house. Teddy (Samuelson) was the person who let me sleep over, and they had a bunkhouse.

Then Morgan came and they built a sawmill. The small sawmill was a scary place to be around. It required water to cool it off when logs were sawn. The late Wilson knew how to operate it too. They had a store, all of Marie's children ran the store, and there was Harvey, Teddy, Billy, Lala, and Sammy, all of them.

Although being the merchant's children, the children had to ask before they took anything. They couldn't take anything without asking because they honored their parents. One day they told me that their mother was cooking something very nice. They said it was a big bird called a 'turkey'.

We got ready to eat and were being served and everyone anticipated a delicious meal. I also agreed that it looked delicious and the meat was nice and white. We ate, but the merchant's children said they didn't like the turkey because it was too dry and caused them to choke on the dry meat. I agreed and refused to eat anymore. Everyone refused to eat anymore of the turkey and most of the dishes were left uneaten.

Then the late Sammy told a Bible story, although he opposed the Word of God. He taught me a few things and I later began to speak and understand some English. He also taught me the names of stores. There were some things that I was taught in school but I never learned too much there. But *Aqsatayuq's* wife, an Indian woman, told us Bible stories by teaching in English and then interpreting what she told.

And then there was a person named Cuuqvak who was a translator for the Moravian missionaries and the Russian Orthodox Church. He was of the Orthodox faith but served in close collaboration with both denominations camped together in Bethel.

Harvey loved to attend Sunday school. Being fluent in English and Yup'ik, he interpreted for us and helped us learn better. Sammy was a very good friend of *Kingutiq* [the late Lott George] and one day they got a bicycle. There were a lot of tears shed while trying to learn how to ride the bike. There was only one bicycle and whoever was trying to learn how to ride would run into the side of the smokehouse then start crying.

Then it was my turn to try and after balancing on the bike I took off toward the smokehouse. I didn't know how to steer the bike so I rammed into the side of the smokehouse and started crying. Every single person trying to learn how to ride the bike shed a few tears while trying to learn.

*Sophie: I remember Marie's store being brought supplies by barge. Can you tell a little about that?*

When the barge came everyone worked, including the women. When there was a death in the village, she provided clothing for the deceased and food for the surviving/grieving family. That was what she did for the grieving families. Also, during the Easter season, she loved to attend the Easter Sunrise services and her favorite song was "Hallelujah, He is Risen." She really loved that song.

Before the church bell rang, she would come into my house and then we'd have coffee. It was about the time I started to work at her store when her late husband, Samuelson died. Then a well was constructed in the school basement. Anna McDonald traveled outside to the lower forty-eight and came back by ship. It was made known that each one of their family members died of cancer including her. Anna was our schoolteacher here in Akiachak.

It was during the excavation of the well for the school -- it was a well about fourteen feet deep -- that a fatal gas poisoning occurred. *Curaqaquller* (Jack Johnson) insisted on borrowing my father's hip boots, back when hip boots were very hard to find. Jack then went over to the pit and I went over soon after. When I got there, the people were running to and fro excitedly, including the women. They were all running toward the school. There was a person whose name was Blitz. He went to Anna McDonald's place and found her crying, and Blitz didn't understand why she was crying.

He went down quickly to the excavation site and found people there. They warned that the well was dangerous. The gas coming out of the pit was so strong that the gas fumes would extinguish the Coleman lamps.

Flashlights weren't able to turn on either. Then, when Blitz stooped to look into the pit, he fell in. Every person who peered into the pit fell in. Then, *Tacungqaq* (David Steven)

went down to the pit. David made an effort to secure Robert Nick (*Anirtuun*) and pulled him out of the pit.

I went over to the shop, but I was forced out of the shop and sternly advised not to go back in. There was only one person who died at the scene. Harry, Marie's husband, came over and peered into the pit and realized that it was gas fumes. It was confirmed to be gas poisoning. Then *Curaqaquller* (Jack Johnson) was pulled out of the pit. There was a little sign of life in him but since he was exposed to the gas he died later.

Then my late older brother was advised to hastily go to Bethel by dog team, and after forwarding a letter to the commissioner, he traveled to Bethel. He was gone for only about a couple hours. He said the trip took less than an hour to Bethel. After taking care of what was needed he returned as fast as he could. He said it took about a half hour to get to Akiachak.

After the letter was delivered, I approached McDonald in the basement and noticed his eyes were bloodshot. That's when we found out about the death of Jack Johnson. I was instructed how to properly fill out the necessary paperwork. The paperwork was called a 'guardian' [not clearly audible] and the court hearings were done in Fairbanks.

Mail service didn't happen for a month to two months. The court system utilized my services about four times. I was required to pay \$40 to the court. Money was tight during those days. I reported what was happening and let Eugene know that I was required to pay \$40 court fees to the government and Federal agencies. I was refunded for the money I paid.

It was a very unpleasant situation with *Nugeppaq* [Jack Johnson's widow, Elizabeth] because losing her husband caused her a lot of mental anxiety. The loss caused her a lot of stress and she would spend a lot of time in the wilderness. The loss devastated her mentally. When she came back from the wilderness, some elders would check on her. The only person that she made contact with was *Lilleq's* wife. And, also the one that was married to a lady from Kwethluk. Jack Johnson was *Lilleq's* son-in-law. These were the others who were staying at the wilderness. Their mother would periodically check for her well-being by bringing her food to eat. Sometimes she wouldn't be there. The father and mother of *Nugeppaq* would tell people not to make contact with her even if she came back from the wilderness.

There were a couple instances when the U.S. Marshal would fetch *Nugeppaq* from the wilderness. The elders would all agree to give the marshal authority to fetch her. Then, one day the elders said that the commissioner from Bethel exercised too much authority and so did the marshal. The people inquired about the authority of the commissioner and the marshal and they were told that their authority equaled authorities from Washington D.C. After a little difficulty communicating, the two were titled a magistrate and state police officer.

There was an incident where a person who spoke very limited English wanted a cup of coffee. He wanted someone to interpret for him, but someone advised him to ask for a cup himself in English and that the man would understand him. At first, he drew a stick figure sipping a cup of coffee. And then he walked over to the white man-- I can't remember his name-- and said, "I want some man, walking man drinking coffee." He was trying to describe the Hills Brothers label of the man drinking a cup of coffee.

The storekeeper's face was blushed from trying to hold back his laughter. He would give out a partial laughter and trying not to smile. The other person with the man asking for coffee finally clarified to the storekeeper that he's asking for some Hills Brothers coffee. The storekeeper was red from trying very hard to hold back his laughter. Only when the man got his coffee he went on home.

There was a similar incident in the Yukon River village of a man trying to speak to an English schoolteacher. He asked for someone to interpret for him that he had poked himself with a nail. They insisted that if he would tell the teacher, the teacher would understand him. At first he wasn't able to be logical. The others advised him to speak in English to the best of his ability. So, he finally decided to go over to the teacher in person. The teacher asked him what he wanted. At first the teacher couldn't understand what he wanted. Then the Native man raised his cut, pointing to it, and said, "Wii, usuqcaq kapeq." ["Me, poked on a nail."] When the Native man showed his cut, the teacher understood and provided medical attention and sent him home. When he got back, the others curiously asked how he had asked the teacher. He replied, that he said in English, "Wii, usuqcaq kapeq."

Then some people asked Daniu where the white people originated from, Aniak or Bethel. Daniu was reminded that he had previously attended school and would be able to inquire directly to the white people. Then after hesitating, he inquired where they were from. The white people were amused at the questions by Daniu. Daniu asked them, "You want some *Anyaraq?*" Actually, what Daniu was trying to ask was, "Where are you from?" I don't have anything else to say, but I will have a lot of stories to tell when I have more time.

**[End of recording]**