**ROBERT ALOYSIUS TEK STORY PART II**

Fish camp produces food for you, food for trade, and food for the dogs. Some people filled their smoke house twice. The first fish that come up they put up as eating fish, after they dry they push those up to the top of the smoke house, or put them in a cache. The second time they fill the smoke house up with all dog feed. All those fish are boney, and are all different beautiful mixed colors, red, yellow, orange, brown, green, purple, black, brown.

Then in August when the weather is cold and rainy, the elders treat the next fish that come up differently. Because the Silver salmon come so late they do not put them in the smoke house, and cannot dry them because its rainy season and because of all the moisture they will spoil. These days they salt most of them, and can, or jar the Silver salmon. At this time the people always use salt. There is one process that I have only seen my mother in law Mrs. Anna Okitkun brine/cure out of Silver salmon, and hang but not dry. They slice really thin. When I first tried this Wow! I ate a whole half. Its almost like Lox. Like the Norwegians have their own way of making this. Nevertheless, this is one of my favorite way of making fish. My one regret is never getting a recipe from my mother in law. Now I think its lost. Unless someone somewhere still know about this way of preparing fish. It is a delicacy. Because it’s a Silver it cannot be dried because it’s too late in the season.

Also in August was first salmonberry picking time then blueberry picking. These were put in barrels because they are soft berries. Also at this time Chee fish come up, special nets were made for these fish. The Chee fish were caught for their oil. We cut up and boiled them using ½ drum for a pot, and the fat skimmed off the top and put into containers, then buried them in the back corner of the smoke house where they will stay cool. They cover up the containers with boards, or sticks so people won’t fall into the hole, and disturb their oil. The women used this oil to fry bread with. Later in time we start getting sugar. The fry bread is great dipped in sugar.

The women also used the Chee fish oil to make akutaq, which was mixed with the first willow shoots, and the first rhubarbs which was collected in the spring, mixed with salmonberries, or blueberries these were collected later in the season. Sometimes all of them were put together. Oh man, those were the best. By the end of the summer there was no more rendered fat. No more oil. So they turned to bear fat, or moose fat mixed with red or black berries. The red and black berries are harder berries and picked after first frost.

After fishing, they move up to Aniak and school starts first day of September regardless of when the first fell on. If September 1 fell on Saturday, or Sunday that is when school began. That’s when fishing is over, and you cannot hunt yet. Everybody, the whole village that consisted of maybe 50 people would gather at the school every night and play what we now know as softball. We made our own ball. The ball was made out of moose or bear hide. We used any kind of wood for a bat. Nobody kept score. We only kept track of how many outs the opposing team got. After three we would change sides. Everybody joined in, even children and, women. The women would say, “We don’t know how to play.” And they would be the most expert players. Nobody ever kept score. We could play this game with as few as 8 players. When we had few players we would rotate the players. That was a fun game to play.

Fall time moose hunting season is open, bear hunting season is open. All the eligible hunters would go hunt moose. Some of the young men would go up Aniak river and bring back caribou. The caribou would mix with reindeer. Jents Quami had a herd of reindeer up by East Fork. Nobody ever went after brown bear because they were thought to have no fat, and nobody ate brown bear meat. Until some men came and said that brown bear has really nice fat. The men would always go hunting after fat. Black bear has lots of fat all the way around maybe 3 inches thick. And black bear meat is delicious unlike brown bear meat. So the brown bear meat became dog feed. We don’t get seal that far up the river to make seal oil. Therefore, we had to get fat where we could.

At the same time the men are hunting the women berry pick. The women went up river in canoe’s where there’s red and black berries. The women always knew where to go. These were harder berries, not easily mashed. The women would park along the river in the canoes and in the morning climb the bank and go far back there to pick; packing a lunch so they won’t have to come back to eat right away. The women also brought with them 5 empty kerosene boxes to fill up, and store those berries in them. Sometimes they fill about 10 or 15 of those boxes before they go home. The women stored the filled kerosene boxes on the top rungs in the smoke houses, or cache.

In late fall before freeze up we move to “Bung House”. It was a cute name we gave our winter camp. We go up there for fall camp. We collected anything to make our fall camp whole again. First thing we did was take a boat load of dogs tie and take care of the dogs. Then cut five-foot-tall grass and bundle them up for the winter dog insulation on the ground. Some of the dogs had dog houses, some didn’t. We always had to take care of the dogs. Next thing to do was collect dry wood for the wood stove inside the homes for cooking and baking. My grandmother had a huge 4’ x 6’ wood heated cook stove.

After the men get the camp all set up, old Uppa Sam would go and collect the women. We had 3 cabins at Bung House. My Mom and Stepfather had the house furthest up from the riverbank. Then we wait for the river to freeze first then await the arrival of snow. After the ice get thick enough, we make a hole and pack water every day without fail. And if you want fish, you make a separate hole to manaq. The manaqing process is different than they do here in Bethel. People take a six-foot line and put it into the hole and allow the current to take the hook, when it feels like you have a snag, it’s usually a fish on the line. We fish for Dolly Varden trout, Rainbow trout, Grayling, sometimes even Silver salmon. And if you want Pike, you have to go to a slough and manaq there. We always had fresh fish for akutaq. Slurp.

After the first snow fall you start seeing tracks of Rabbit, Ptarmigan, Willow Grouse, Spruce Chicken tracks, and we set snares for them. While the elders prepare for our trap line. Sometimes when I think back I think how lucky I was to grow up outdoors, not in the house playing games on electronic devices. Every season we always had something important to do for our survival, we accomplished a lot.

Everywhere we went we always had a tent. Once I saw a picture of that in Dillingham and remembered that was how I lived, that was how I grew up. We always lived in tents spring, summer, and fall. The only time I lived in a house was when he went to school. And now everybody is wondering why people start getting sick. We used to have eight grades in one room. Then people start getting colds and flu’s. Because people don’t live outdoors anymore. Sad.

Everywhere we went. The elders had a tent. Especially on their trap line. Our trap line stretch up to 40 miles, and we had a tent every 10 or so miles. It could be thirty below with the wind blowing. We never got cold because we always had tents, and we were always active. After we get done for the day, and the dogs are taken care of we go inside the tent, cook, eat, and sleep. Get up in the morning and go to the next tent to check all our traps, and snares. We trap mink, otter, beaver, martin, wolf, fox, lynx, and porcupine and beaver were hunted more towards spring season. Lynx was the best eating. Taste like a big four legged chicken, it has white meat. I remember my mother pot roasting a Lynx after my father brought it home. Oh that was delicious.

Couple weeks before Christmas the men went home, back to Aniak. That was the time it would get so cold outside that everything would stop moving. Even the animals. The men used this time to prepare for the spring season. Than the old people start working on snowshoes, sleds, they repair or made new nets, nobody ever bought nets. All the old people made their own. And us young people helped. They made nets for all different types of fish making different mesh sizes. They made different mesh sizes using a type of stick for measurement. 5 ½ mesh was used for chums.

In the summer time after breakup the water gets low, then when the salmon hit, there were so many fish that the water would rise 3, 4, 5 feet high. The fish brought the water. People don’t believe that there used to be that many fish; they would jump ahead of each other. The last time I saw that was in 1962. When I left to go to school, and when I came back I never saw the fish jumping like that again. This is the time I saw a man fishing with a 50 fathom net. I asked. “What is he doing? Commercial fishing on the river? That’s crazy.” That’s what they do on the Yukon and Kuskokwim now. The elders said, “Whoa, we are going to run out of fish, the money will eat them all.”

Especially the King salmon, because the Kings are heavier. Big fish make big money. Back then they would target those Kings, sometimes 24 hours a day. I keep thinking about the elders saying, “Whoa, we are going to run out of fish, the money will eat them all.” That’s when commercial fishing began. The people never think about the consequences. They just want self-gratification right now. Big fish, we give you big money right now. The worst thing is that the Japanese even start buying salmon eggs. Any kind of salmon eggs. Yupik’s get a boat load of fish, take the salmon eggs and toss the fish over the side of boat. That was heartbreaking to see. All for money.

Winter time. The one thing that is really missing in this area is potlatch. Back then, one village would invade the next village. The people paid attention all year long to what their iluraq (male cross cousin or male friend) to see what kind of mischief they get into. At potlatch, the men would sing about the mischief someone else got into with someone else’s wife. Without naming names, a song would be sung about someone’s mischief doings. But everybody knew who they were singing about. One time during potlatch at the old school, here come a pair of bloomers on the clothes line. With a song along the lines of, “Here comes a pair of bloomers you may recognize.” Everybody start laughing, and everybody knew whose bloomers they belonged to.

It wasn’t all fun. The elders would practice old, old songs. Nobody knows those ancient songs anymore. Those songs were about life and how your supposed to act, how to behave, how to be human. And always sing songs about all the different animals. Like today, people sing about hunting, fishing, gathering. There is a funny song about a bird we call Qaleqcuuk (fish ducks). They have heavy bodies and slim wings, with no webs on their feet. It is difficult for those birds to get enough momentum for lift off. These birds are just like a 747, they always take a long time to take off. And when we see one about to lift off we would clap our hands and they make a dive into the river.

There’s a man in Tuluksak, one of my Uncles his name is Qaleqcuuk. Every time I sees him I always start clapping because his Yupik name is the same as that bird, Qaleqcuuk my Iluraq. I will do the same thing when I see Qaleqcuuk’s wife. Qaleqcuuk has been gone for 10 years now.

The elders would always get the young people involved. Always included them in their dance ceremony, and learn songs. Especially the motions. One instruction was, “When you dance don’t be stingy.” Meaning, don’t only make small hand motions in front of you. God gave you a body to express yourself. When you reach up, reach all the way up, and when you reach down, bend down and reach. Even your shoulders, and eyebrows can dance too. Joe Chief Jr. was good at that. He knew how to express himself wholly. I would tease Joe; some people dance with their toes as well. You can do that too.

When my middle daughter was dancing for the first time, I told her that she is named after my Uppa, and his instructions on how to dance properly was never be stingy of yourself and your motions. Even an elder from the village of Emmonak down on the Yukon Delta his instructions were also, do not be stingy. When you go dance. Don’t dance for yourself, dance for them, dance and make your guest have fun. The more you are animated the more they will like it. Use your hands, elbows, eyebrows, shoulders, toes, and neck to interpret what the song is about. Now a day is mass production which loses the importance of individuals expressing themselves. Joe Chief was great at expressing himself, along with all the old people from across the slough.

At the end of the winter, just before beaver trapping, people from Kalskag come up to Aniak and challenge us. The next year we go down and challenge them. They always send messengers, with a list requesting things for a particular person. The next year we sent our own messengers, with our own list of things we want. And we always try to have things they may want available beforehand.

St. Mary’s right now. In 2007/2008 they had a big potlatch. With 17 groups of people. That’s from Savoonga to Anchorage. They had over a thousand people. Everybody had a place to sleep, and a place to eat. The elders used to talk about, one day the people are going to have a huge potlatch. So when I saw this my heart cried a happy cry. Wishing that the elders would have seen the gathering they talked about. But I knew that the old people were watching.

During that huge potlatch, I had prime seating. The potlatch was just so awesome. I sat there for three days, and counted the rows of seats. Which was 15 deep and 20 wide. That’s 300 people. When they sing a special invitational song, everybody goes down to dance. My heart just cried with joy. That’s just what the old people would dream about.

This was the way of life I caught from the elders. I am very lucky to have caught these lessons, of this way of life. I did not grow up with my mom and dad, I was raised by my grandmother Qumaq, and her friend I called Ala, but her name was Tutalik. Every chance I got I went camping with my grandmother. Fall camp, winter camp.