Nick-Tucker-Interview

Interviewer 1: So Nick we're here to film a little bit about Yuman the culture and we're interested in talking to as many people as we can. We've been told to get in contact with you and we just want to know your name and a little bit about where you were born, just some background.

Nick Tucker: My name is Nick Tucker, my Yupik name is [unintelligible0.00.30] and I was born about few miles from here [unintelligible 0.00.36] Alaska but I grew up in the village down towards [unintelligible0.00.42], south of here, throughout region there. That was back in 1945. I grew up knowing my culture and both now the western culture.

Interviewer 1: How was it like back in the '50s growing up in this area?

Nick Tucker: Back in 1950s I didn't know white men and I did not speak a word of English. At about 8 years old I was taken into BIA education, just taken suddenly away from my family. The entire children in the villages were just shopped out of the village and it was a traumatic experience for all of us. I am very fluent in English and Yupik and also I know my culture and lived it very well. This is what I do today.

Interviewer 1: When did you return?

Nick Tucker: Say that again?

Interviewer 1: When did you return to this area, Emmonak?

Nick Tucker: We came here back in 1968 when my father moved, my family moved to get to the school here**.**

[00.02.00]

But then back in 1970, just prior 1970, I had been shipped overseas in South East Asia, Vietnam and I returned here, discharged from the regular army back in 1970 and I've been here since then.

Interviewer 1: What was it like when you returned? How was it different? What was--?

Nick Tucker: Very much so back in my young days in the 1950s and '40s, we didn't have anything in the village, absolutely nothing sort of any modern way of life, technology. Everything was done by word, by hand. There was absolutely nothing of a kind the way of life today. We had no running water, everything.

Interviewer 2: [inaudible 0.03.11]. I just wanted to stop you because you were about to get into the description, it was very good.

Nick Tucker: You're a natural.

Interviewer 1: Basically our cultures continue. Everything that we do as a culture in traditions and our beliefs and our way of doing things and raising our families our and

children, most of that is still intact. We hope that it will continue because it brings up, makes men and women out of children**.**

[00.04.00]

Interviewer 1: Tell us about the subsistence lifestyle. It must have been awesome out here.

Nick Tucker: The what?

Interviewer 1: The subsistence lifestyle, it must have been incredible?

Nick Tucker: That's the area that we price most because it's our entire being. It's our spiritual life and its survival. It's something that's intertwined with our culture, our traditions, our beliefs, our rituals and communicating with our children and our grandchildren.

In subsistence way of life we take our little ones and we relate our experience to their growing to become responsible men and women of our culture and also what we know today as our western culture.

Interviewer 1: So, fishing game must have been plentiful. It must have been a lot of it.

Nick Tucker: I believe to be a Yupik, it trains you to grow up in character and in spirit in your mind, heart and body. It teaches you to become persevering. It teaches you how to grow up to put up with anything and we want to continue with that, it makes our aim. A man and woman, so to speak, to be able to relate with your fellow men and women in the village and as well as anywhere in the world.

[00:06:00]

Interviewer 1: Would you use the environment as cues to how many fish are in the river or how big the snow geese are going to be? Would there be something to tell you that the fish are going to be plentiful this year, traditional ecological knowledge?

Nick Tucker: Yes there are different signs that we use to be able to use to predict return of say, like salmon that comes into our system by the length of the grass or a consistent wind either from the South or west or north. It determines which part of the region the fish will be arriving.

There are other signs that you use to determine what will-- you see swallows flying around, the fish are there. At the same time, unfortunately, the world has become different, unpredictable, whether the climate, the whole environment is changing today.

Interviewer 1: You've noticed the environment changing. So, climate change is that less snow, the direction the winds are changing?

Nick Tucker: We used to be able to predict year to year on consistent basis those things that go on with our lives. The things that we need to do. The things we need to survive. For some reason today, whether day to day sometimes, is very unpredictable.

Interviewer 1: When did you start to see or notice a decline in salmon, specifically king salmon or any other species?

[00.08.00]

Nick Tucker: 10 to 15 years the most noticeable part for me that I can observe.

Interviewer 1: Would you say the fish are small, the kings are smaller now?

Nick Tucker: Yes. They don't seem to be as large as we used to see them, there's a difference.

Interviewer 1: How has this affected your family, the declining king salmon?

Nick Tucker: Well, since 2007 we have not been able to have any commercial king salmon fishery. That most certainly has affected our families, our communities and our entire region. The king salmon, we call chinook, is the prime resource for our income.

We have a very small, meager commercial fishery here. We were getting back in 2007, at $5 per pound. We don't get that anymore. Today we get the smaller fish or the chums at 60 cents per pound. You can see the difference on the provider of the family, what difference that makes in the ability to take care of your family, ability to take care of your electricity, ability to feed your family, the ability to take care of the necessities like having nice clothes. In some families so traumatic that they don't have very much

[00.10.00]

at their homes to have three meals a day, it's so traumatic. It compounds the region, it's [unintelligible 0.10.15] district. This district is the poorest in the nation. It's half of that of Alaska and half of that of the United States. When you take from that region within unemployment at the rate of consistently from year to year about 80 percent. You take away that primary income, from $5 a pound to 60 cents a pound, you can see the socio-economic impact that has on our region.

Interviewer 1: I'm wondering if you could compare what it's like to be a young person in Emmonak today to when you were a young person in the '50s. Like how they spend their time, their days. You talk a lot about the traditions…?

Nick Tucker: Yes, there's a wonderful difference, let me put it that way. During my years, having absolutely nothing, TV, grass, airport, [unintelligible0.11.33] motors and no modern

things in the house. It was a very peaceful life that you relate your whole being with your family, your parents and everything around you. The life was very peaceful.

[00.12.00]

It only took nature to keep us alive and it took nature to relate ourselves like the fish are brothers, the moose are brothers, the birds. We were taught to take care of them well because they will return to us. We will talk to them and things that we relate naturally. But today, as western culture brings in whole material things and things that we need to exist today, it has become an expensive way of life and with a declining or some of the natural wildlife and game that has become so scarce to gather close by the village. That part is due to a lot of noise in the villages: snow machines, airplanes, four-wheelers, [unintelligible0.13.10]. It drove our subsistence way of life further into the country.

Sometimes we have to do 200 miles round trip to get what you need, 60 miles round trip. And it's just become an expensive way of life. But in order to live our culture and way of life that we are demanded of today, it takes, even cash, even the subsistence way of life has become a cash economy.

Interviewer 1: Could you tell us, some people might only think of salmon and moose when they think of living off of the land in Alaska

[00.14.00].

I was wondering if you could give us a description of the different animals that you hunt up here and the different foods you collect and berries--?

Nick Tucker: Yes, you take your ground there are different types of vegetables. There are different types of plants. Some are even used for medicine. Summer time we have four species of chums that we can use to keep us alive for the winter that we put away. There's the chums, the kings, the chums, four chums and the Kings.

Of the land there are a variety of uses from every different type of animal imaginable. We take the foxes for your caps and clothing and gloves. In various places they use the moose hide for their blankets and different other things. Other source even the skin of the fish mainly the king salmon was used as a raincoat and boots back then. You take any animal that is within reach. You can use that animal, every part of it for every use from daily life to keep you fed, keep you warm, hunting clothing and for the village.

Rabbits, you can also use for you gloves and for your [**unintelligible0.16.00**] and even the **[unintelligible0.16.04]. I** have been told by my uncle who is 98 years old that you can use ducks for socks and keep your feet warm. We had no western culturally made clothing at the time but it was a comfortable surviving life back then.

Interviewer 2: I'm curios to learn more about what you're saying using the elements that are available in the environment, the animals. Do you find that exists today? What form of this idea of using what is available, subsisting on this stuff, what form does this take today?

Nick Tucker: Much of what we can get today has become very scarce either because the environment or something has possibly killed them off or natural disasters like floods and everything else that come throughout our village for food hardship during each season of the year. Especially for these resources that are some natural and dear to us. They've become so scarce today that we have no alternative but to use what is available today in place of what we used to use daily back in the 52 years back, for 10, 000 years.

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Interviewer 2: There's a reverence and respect that you have for the environment and the that sustains life up here. And I'm wondering what you think of when you see people that hunt and kill animals just to stuff and put them in their living room? I was wondering if that raises any feelings.

Nick Tucker: Well that depends on your nature to the animal. If it's for just to kill an animal to elevate yourself or to make it a prize, that to me is misuse. But today if you take that as an honor in terms of sacredness and you put it on a wall because you don't have any particular use for today as it was then, I think that is honorable, if that's the question you are asking.

Interviewer 1: Yeah. We see people in the lower 48 that only hunt for trophies, you know, for instance.

Nick Tucker: Yeah, we have to understand it's natural world, the natural earth that is keeping everybody alive. I believe in natural process, however anybody believes but I believe in, personally I believe in creation by a mighty God. How you relate to that animal, to another person, it depends how you treat it.

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There can be a mistreatment, you misalign a sacred relationship to [unintelligible 0.20.13] what became our basis and foundation of our culture, western culture.

Those were the basis that made us become who we are and should always be respected and honored and allowed to continue to live with respect. Get it only if it means to survive but not misuse it to the point that it's self-honor or recognition or something to that effect because the world is made of nature and there's an ecology that relates to one another.

If you probably kill off one species of anything, that would likely put imbalance into the natural balance of our way of life on earth. So we do that to too many animals, I think we'll begin to see imbalance to the fact that our [unintelligible 0.21.32] can't be working right.

Interviewer 2: I have two questions for you. What do you want to say to someone like me, a white westerner or from the lower west 48? What would you want to say?

Nick Tucker: I think we have a basic cry. We are as rest of the

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citizens of the United States, first Americans. We are a nation that makes a part of this wonderful United States. We are a people that have for 10,000 years been a people of good cultures and traditions and beliefs, everything put together. We have a lot to contribute to our country by the way we grew up, the way we teach our children. Making responsible men and women of our children but the way we do that here is for people outside of our villages here, is to understand that not one mixed culture or one makes up the free country that we have. It's that each culture, just as ours, is so important that when we speak of anything that would help us to maintain, to perpetuate our culture, we cry out to be recognized.

Unfortunately, we live in one of the most impoverished regions in the United States. We need to have …

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You understand us of the way we are trying to survive and in a way that we cry out that this region is unique in the United States. Let's take commercial fishing, commercial fishing not understood by anyone, is intertwined with our subsistence way of life which makes people out of us. It's intertwined such that what we earn—or let's go back a little bit. Commercial fishery to us is such that it's a different ideology or understanding as different from our [**unintelligible 0.24.55**] region here.

Commercial fishing as understood by others is a profit and last proposition, here it is not. It is so intertwined it enhances and it helps to perpetuate our way of living, our Eskimo dancers, our beliefs. Everything that we live as Yupik people, that's what we cry at, understand us. We need your help. We need the world to help us respect the salmon so that we can have our way of life continued in our villages. Respect the salmon. Do everything you can to save the salmon. That's when we talk about commercial fishing, that's very important. I think it will help us to live a life that would help us become balanced men and women**.**

[00.26.00]

Interviewer 2: How do you balance that with the socio-economic conditions of a place like Emmonak?

Nick Tucker: Let's go back to when we have lived a life that was healthy for the businesses and buyers and for our people. We go back to chinook, king salmon fish was at $5 a pound and today at 60 cents a pound for chums. The outboard motors and the skiffs and the nets and equipment and the supplies that we utilize to subsistence salmon is caught up with the commercial fisheries. That means we can go out there picking, we can go out moose hunting, we can go out seal hunting, we can go out caribou hunting, sea mammals for water [unintelligible0.27.28], everything.

It's a basic reasoning with the current so strong and you cannot row up against the current. It takes something much stronger to get the necessities you need, load them up and bring them to your home.

So, in terms of economy, I think it has devastating effect in that it compounds our ability to get the basics you need and necessary clothing, ability to feed your family and pay to keep

a healthy way of life from taking a shower, keeping clean and hygiene. Those are part of the economy in our way of life system here.

It has devastating effect on the fish buyers. How do you pay people at 60 cents a pound? How do you take care of yourself? It's like what is that? If anyone can understand, you take a 90 percent cut in your income for city revenue from one, three percent that you get every year from commercial fishers. That is gone from city services and taken care of any public services that you have in a village: water sewer, the public safety area, you name it. That certainly has devastating effect.

Every day way of life, even the service related companies like your local stores, your private counsel. They've lost 75% to 90% of their income the last 10, 15 years. You talk about losing income

[00.30.00].

In our way of life it can be harder to go out there picking or plant gathering and other subsistence way of life. Repairing our boat motoring and your boats. Everything that you touch and feel to stay alive and also ability to procure and get something from the local stores, it becomes more and more a hardship.

Interviewer 2: What are you hopeful for? What are you excited about in the future? What feels positive? You talk about some of the things that are difficult, what is positive now and what are you hopeful for?

Nick Tucker: Well, let's put it this way. As hard as it is, we can hope that we can all work together to continue and improve our way of life. So that we can continue our Yupik way of life that we have been living for 10, 000 years. We can work together to make things happen.

Let's take salmon that's big part of our lives that we use at our annual gathering Eskimo dancing and so forth. If we can work together to preserve that salmon and get back our commercial fishery,

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that will take care of much of our economy, to stabilize it a lot more than what it is now. But it takes cooperation from man to nature, community to the nature, region to the nature, state to the nature and the federal government to nature.

It also takes enforcing some laws that should be there. Law enforcement along our Yukon drainage system to put a stop to any illegal fishery, illegal row stripping. And also it takes the commitment on our part that whom we trust so much to take care of us and help us out is the United States through a high seas ban on drift net, enforce that with other countries.

If the United States doesn't do its part enforcing that and banning or we have a ban on high seas drift net fishing. It's good to have a treaty but we've got to enforce that with different countries throughout the world that are [unintelligible 0.33.30] salmon where this country can't do anything about [unintelligible0.33.36]. If you have a treaty, I think we have a

responsibility to our citizens to enforce that law because it helps us become who the United States wants us to become.

Interviewer 2: Two more questions. First one is what would you say to David, a young person in your community?

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What would you want to communicate to him?

Nick Tucker: I think the best way to do is—I'm a father of 12 surviving children and I have over 30 great grand and great grandchildren, is to try to follow what we do. Respect everything that you see and you touch and that helps you become a responsible man.

You will certainly have difficulties. Some of them will seem insurmountable but that's for that moment, it will pass. You pull through that and go on to the next hurdle because there will always be hurdles. Your elders and your parents, they are wise people. They've a lived life. Take myself, I will be 70 in less than a month but it took a real hardship to survive through this day. You'll have problems in your personal life. You'll have problems in your village and with your peers and in your jobs and everything that you do but you persevere, especially no one hardly will notice you. You look around, look at the grass

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the beauty of it, the way it helps you to breathe. You look at the fish, the way it keeps you healthy and everything that you use for your life, respect them especially in relating with other people. That becomes very important because if we don't have peace, everything becomes rather disorderly and that throws everything off balance.

I'll use myself as an example. I started working about 53 years ago. Much of the time I have been working. Do your best in everything you do to the nature, to yourself, to other people and to your work. I've never gone to work in my life, I've never gone to work. That means the morning I go to work, I do my 100 percent all day and go home without any regrets. I don't think I've, all these years since 1961, I ever thought much of having coffee break but enjoy what is given to you today.

I keep relating to salmon because that's the issue today, take care of and respect and honor what is given to you. Your life and other people and at the same time I think make your daily life the best. At the end of the day, you will not have regrets especially those things that are good. As I'm saying this

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I'm relating to the resources we have to live, animals and things that are around us.If you want a peaceful life, you'll relate to everything the best you can and don't go to work like me. Go to a place where daily life is a challenge, not work. People talk about, "Oh men I have to go to work." It's not work, it's a challenge that you can overcome and do the best you can. You fail, you try again.

Talking about resources, you fail in the way you understand or treat the things that are with you and among you and your entire being like the exceptional resources that we have, you take care of them well. And never giving up anything, even when the world seems to be turning upside down.

Interviewer 2: That was great Nick.

Interviewer 1: Sum it up, can you tell us one thing in your language and translate it for us just real quick, to sum it up? In your Yupik language, can you tell us just one thing to sum up this interview and then translate it for us?

Nick Tucker: [foreign language 0.39.33-0.40.00] I'm very thankful that you have come here to ask me some questions with regard to our way of life. If you don't understand and if we don't work together and understand that the nature provides everything for us and that we work together to take care of it, we won't get anywhere.

Interviewer 1: Awesome.