

A LONG TIME AGO

A life story told by Mr. Christopher Collin of Fort McPherson.

I will tell you a story. A story I remember. When I was 12 years old. People from Old Crow, Dawson and Fort McPherson use to always go moose hunting together. Me and my mother and some of the local people among were Big Simon; Big Francis, we use to go and do some fishing. At that time I was a little boy. I made a bone arrow and use to shoot little birds. When everyone use to returne from hunting they all would meet down at Cannon by the Peel River. At that time the food was very plentiful. No one would ever want to waste food. Plenty of dried meat was made. Plenty of meat was also dried. Everbody stayed at Wind River. They made four skin boats there. At the mouth of Big Wind River near Hungrey Lake, my uncle named 'he talk' and near there they made two more leather boats. They put the four moose skin boats in the water meanwhile they brought another two leather boats from Hungrey Lake, They all shot their gun powder and hence there was smoke all over. At that time there was lots of people. People from Red River, Peel River were all there I remember, that there was many many people. Mang good people were there, but today they are all gone. All of us who were kids them days are today old people in their 80's.

At that time Skinny Abraham's father was chief of the Hudson's Bay. When the boats were launched the women and children and dogs raced through the portage after the boats down to Swift Canon, only the men went by the boats. Skinny Abraham's father and Nethroo's father were among them, Nethroo he was made the pilot of the boat. He didn't know how to do it for them so the chief took over. They then proceeded to Snake River. As Snake River six more boats were put into the water. At the mouth of the Snake River all camped for the night which 150 miles up the Peel River. Then the next day they loaded up the six skins boats with dried meat and dogs and all the family. They all gathered above John Charlie's place on Rhoads River. From there everyone gathered at Fort McPherson. In those days there was no sand bar at McPherson and there were no trucks and whitemen. There was only the Hudson's Bay Manager who was white and the old Arch-Deacon McDonald Anglican minister who was at Fort McPherson. People stayed there in the summer to fish. No one knew about Miners in those days. No one knew about money or white people.

Some whale boats were coming in from down the MacKenzie River and Peel River. Only white people were on this boat. The white people challenged the Loucheux people to a football game. And the Loucheux won the game. They stayed at Fort McPherson all winter and fall. They use to track their boats all the way up the Peel River. They stopped on the other side of Bonnetplume River over to Big Wind River, thats where they passed Winter. There was a lot of native people here from the Dawson area and Indians from Arctic Red River and Peel River. There was alot of people with these white people. They hunted carbiou and moose. And I remember one particular whiteman named old Camble. He was an old miner and also a millionare. He had tweleve men and two doctors travelling with him. One time old Camble was going to pay his men and doctors. Oneof his men brought in a small suitease filled with small bills. And them days nobody knew anything about money . The money they had was paper money. And on the money was a picture of old Queen E Victoria. So Camble paid all his men. Old Campbell was going to the Gold Rush. That was way back in the year '98' in Dawson.

I use to see Eskimos people in the Delta. Those days Eskimo people use to have a small bone in their lip or cheek hanging. Couple years ago when I was in the Inuvik, General Hospital I see lots of Eskimos but I see no more bones in their faces. And that means there is no more Eskimos. I am pretty old now and I can hardly remember what I did long ago. I am 87 years old.

Now I am going to tell you of the time I tipped with a canoe up the Peel River. This happened to me and my bor(brothers).

Me and my two brothers and 3 other men. I was the youngest of all the men.

Those days we use to hunt beaver in September. My brother Justin and Charlie & William Thompson and David. There was six of us and we were hunting beaver and carbiou. Tht was around Carbiou River hills, theres a few lakes around there. Four of the other guys went in one direction and me and my brother went in the other direction hunting beaver.

As we were coming back we didn't have a canoe so we made a raft with logs and we floated down the Peel. The other four guys had a canoe. A canoe mad of canvas homemad. And these men paddled down and they thought we were still up river, but we were ahead floating down with a raft.

When we were floating down, the men in the canoe caught up with us.

One of the men wanted us to get into the canoe with them, but we didn't

want to because we were all loaded . We told them we were alright on

the raft. But anyway they forced us to get into the canoe. We got into

the canoe. It was a 20 foot canoe and there was six of us. And we

were going just below Carbiou River just above Bear Creek. There

was really strong water at the particular place. There is one small Island in the

middle of the River and separated by two channels. When we hit strong water we

couldn't decide which side of the channel to go. But before we could decide

the boat sunk on us. I don't remember which way I was swimming there was so

big waves. I looked out after I got to shore and saw my two brothers

holding each other crying and I kept trying to walk. When I got up and

looked again, there was nobody left. I was stuck on this Island alone. It

happened in late September and there was little ice along the shore.

There was a big spruce tree on the island. I rolled the tree to the river.

The only thing I had left was my clothes and my gun belt. I tied my

gun belt to me and the tree and floated down river. I got across the

river and the tree got stuck into a really strong current among the rocks.

I got loose and swam back to shore. I started walking along the bank of the river and I was all alone. When we were coming up we left a small birtch bark canoe and gun powder , a shot gun and other things we had left under the canoe. When I got to the canoe; I put in the water and I found some beaver skins floating in the water. On the way I came to an old fish house and I got some dry leaves and I wet the gun powder just enough so it could catch fire. I mixed the leaves and gun powder together, then shot the gun and it caught fire. And I took out all my clothes and I dried them just enough. Even though they were damp I put them back on. Befor I started back on the river, it was really dark. But befor I started again I screamed into the darkness to see if anybody was alive. There was no answer only the sound of the water. When I got back home the five men's wives were in a tent just laughing. It was on a sunday eveing. I went up to my father's house and told him what happened to the five men. So my father told the women what had happen to their husbands. And they all started crying. It was really sad. The next day we went down to McPherson to report it to the Police. The Police went up with a whale boat, but nobody was found.

After I got married we stayed at Trail Creek. People had moved there when the chief was there. From there the people moved. After I got married my father-in-law Old William Kouch made snowshoes for me and the people started moving through the mountains. I put my snowshoes on and I remember old Snowshoe was moving with us, he and his family. We moved over to Carbiou mountain and hit Carbiou river and we went right up to Hungrey lake. Its about half way from Dawson to McPherson. And the people were staying around Hungrey Lake. I remember one time we were moving over and the people use to move more during Christmas and New Years. I remember on New Years Evex everybody went out hunting. I shot one big bull moose. I came back late at night. Everybody had bad luck and came back empty handed. My father-in-law use to come over to my tent and look for me to come back. When I came back my father in -law told all the people that I shotx moos.e Even Chief Julias thanked me. The chief told a few men to get their dogs team and to go and get the bull moose, while its good moonlight. The men went out and loaded up their sleds and returned with sleds full of meat.

The meat went to chief Julias tent. The meat was then disturbed to all the people, for a new years feast. Everyone had a fun loving time. The people were very religious in them days. The minister travelled to these campes. And I remember that everyone use to listen to the chiefs orders. From here we moved further to Hungrey Lakes. And one place I was hunting moose close to the Peel River. I was chasing five moose. and I killed all these moose. While I was shooting these moose I heard a dog team. In those days RCMP use to make Patrol from Dawson to McPherson and back. Well Serg. ~~Dampster~~ ^{Minister} and one young constable and with them ~~x~~ was their guide Charlie Stewart. They were coming so I was in a hurry and never skinned those moose. All I did was cut the moose open and took the main parts of it and fulled a pack sack and then went home. The patrol madeit to my tent when I arrived . Everyone was waiting for my return. Just before the patrol reached my house there is a steep hill. The young Constable didn't put any chain or rope under the sled and he went down the steep hill with his dog team and he had a heavy load. The sled hit a bit of a big tree and the sled and the head of the sled was broken right off. Also a dog was killed during the collusion. After they had a goo meal of

moose meat with us. Dempster told me I know you travelled around here and your always moving around with your family and friends. And I know you really need your dogs and sleds. Me myself I am travelling from Dawson to McPherson and I am stuck. I have to ask you for a dog and sled. I said alright your stuck, I will have to give it to you. So I went outside and picked out my leader among the dogs and that is the dog I gave to Dempster. I gave Dempster my britch sled. In those days everything was so cheap. I sold Dempster the dog for twenty-five dollars and the sled for another twenty-five dollars.

The next day they pulled out. They ,the patrol pulled out heading for Dawson. A few days after that, my father-in-law old Kouch had some furs and and lots of meat and he went after the patrol to get some supplies for winter. While he was out there along he had Andre Koe was staying with him. Two of them lived around there hunting carbiou. One time he and Andrew shot eleven carbiou with eleven shot. They bought a spy-glass from Dawson and they spotted seventeen carbiou. They trailed the carbiou and then we shot all the seventeen carbiou. In thos days everyone was a good hunter and we never missed our game.

Long ago when my parents use to stay at Rhode River (above) in my father's cabin. All the people moved to the mountains and we were there alone. My mother was sick and she wanted something good to eat so me and my brother went hunting for her. We shot a bull moose and we also killed one porcupine. We brought the porcupine home and some meat from the moose. My mother didn't want the moose meat. Insead she wanted to eat the porcupine. I was cleaning and I fixed it up to cook. My mother was sitting up in bed telling me how to fix the porcupine to cook. While I was working with it. My mother laid back on the bed. ~~Me~~, my, brother and my father went to see her, and thats where she died. The next day we took my mother's body to McPherson. From my fathers cabin to McPherson it was 48 miles. We brought my mother body down to 15 miles from McPherson. We left her body there. The same night William Huskey went up to get my mothers body. After the funeral we stayed in For McPherson for the winter. For Feb. and January there was a patrol from Dawson. People from Dawson were coming in from in. Serg. Dampster and I forgot who the guide was. They stayed in McPherson for a long time and when they were going back to Dawson we went with them.

We camped at Three Cabin Creek. From there next day we went to my father's cabin up Rhode River. The next morning the patrol kept going on its way. We stayed at the cabin for two days. After two days we started moving after them, up the Peel. We went through Three Cabin Creek over the Carbiou Mountain across Carbiou River and so on.

That time they brought my mother to MacPherson the Anglican minister Woodiker buried her. From there we started moving from Carbiou Mountain over to the Carbiou River through the country over to Peel River along side Rhode River to Wind River. And then from there we went to this side of Hungrey Lakes, that's where all the people were staying there. We got there and stayed there hunting carbiou and moose. Every body was living off the land. In early spring my brother and I went to Dawson City. On the way near 12 miles we were travelling down 12 mile and saw a bunch of miners and that's the first time I have ever seen whiteman. When the whitepeople spoke the sounded like birds for me. My brother and I went to the whiteman's place to eat. They were setting the table to eat. They put round things on the table, it was colored red. This was the first time I saw oranges.

I didn't know how to eat it. My brother said you have to peel it before you eat it. I peeled it and ate my first orange.

From there we went to Dawson City and 12 mile and got all our supplies for the winter. We went back to where the people were staying. We went pass Black Stone River, there was a bunch of people staying ther. These people moved to this side pf Hungrey Laakes.

Justing and Albert Bonnetplume was there with us too. From there we were on our way to Dawson, we saw 8 horses in harness. These miners were building a pipe. First time I saw horses.

First time I saw horses. I am old and can't remember much. People stayed in the bush those days. All they did was hunt, trapp and then they go to Dawson to get supplies for the winter, and by the way and time they get back to their camp it is pretty late in the Spring. I remember one time people were moving, they hit ax moose. A ~~smoose~~ moose came sliding down a mountain. I remember the peo le feeding the dogs out of the dead moose. It was pretty ate in the spring. There was water all over the creek .

One time I shot a rabbit with rifle and when I went to pick it up, there was two more dead rabbits, I got three rabbits. I told my mother and she made a fire and cooked and ate it. So that was the time I got three rabbits with one shot. Another time I shot one grizzly bear with three cubs on the side of a mountain. I also shot three lynx with three shots. I also shot one grizzly bear at Grasshouse through Stony Creek. It was in September with caribou were going South. I saw a big grizzly sleeping on the flats. I fired six shots and only then the bear fell. I went over and I poked it and the bear was dead. I forgot my knife. I once shot 30 caribou. Across from Sheep Creek which is through Rat River there is a creek full of rocks. I went hunting through there. I seen 17 sheep. My father-in-law was there watching me. I fired 17 shots and got all 17 sheep. That's the time my father was really proud. I was married to Old William Kouch's daughter Anna.

Another time I was hunting caribou at Hungry Lakes this side of Yukon. I saw, and shot 18 caribou and skinned them all. I never got tired. I was young then days. All my life a person as old as me, killed lots of moose, caribou and sheep.

It's pretty hard to count them. I killed nearly over 108 moose and 50 sheep. I also killed lots of carbiou. One time when the people were moving up river with their families I shot five moose. We made lots for dry meat.

One time around Bonnetplume River I shot 4 moose. I gave it to the people and the people divided up among themselves. One time too I shot 7 moose in one day I also gave it too the people. When a person is old like me, its hard to remember all what I did all my life. One time I had a scoonher and that was lot long ago at the mouth of the Peel River.

I had a good 12 horse universal engine init. I use to be a mechanic too.

Now adays I am pretty old but I still work with wood and I get wood with dogs.

I cut wood with axe and saw. These people in Fort Mcpherson really look after.

Lots of epeople in Fort Mcpherson live in new Government houses but me I still work with firewood and goods dogs for myself. I still go fishing at Mouth of the Peel in summer and fall. I make dryfish and fish in the fall when its cold. This fall I looked at ~~my~~ net when it was cold South wind, I came home and cut some wood. I really don't tired. In the old time way my knees I catch cramps there and it gets sore. The old time paying is; you shoot a small bone arrow into your joint and thats what aching. Thats the way I am.

I remember when Old George Rovers (he died long ago). I sit with him one time and he said when a person is old he is always sleepy.

Its not the way old people use to be. You are and get so sleepy you always want to sleep. Your always sleepy and weak. Now my son Neil always look after me really goo and the rest of the people in McPherson too.

I still try to work for myself. I thank everyone who has read my story or heard my tape.