



*Courtesy Yukon Archives, Claude Tidd Collection*

# Conversations with Our Elders

by Anne-Marie Miller

*Cet article contient des passages tirés d'entrevues avec trois aîné(e)s de certaines communautés du Yukon.*

I have interviewed Elders from the Kwanlin Dun First Nation in Whitehorse and from the Ta'an Kwach'an from Lake Labarge. I have also travelled to the communities of Haines Junction, Dawson City, Mayo, and Pelly Crossing. The First Nations Elders I have interviewed have contributed immensely to the teachings and knowledge of the traditional way of life. They have shared the experiences of their traditional upbringing and how changes throughout the years have affected them and their roles as women.

Mary Hager is an Elder from the Na-cho N' Yak Dun First Nation in Mayo, Yukon. She is from the Wolf clan and was born in 1907. Growing up, Mary lived a very traditional lifestyle. She was taught by her parents and spent her childhood sewing, tanning hides, assisting her dad trapping. Mary speaks Northern Tutchone, and is also fluent in the Gwitchin dialect. She enjoys meeting people and loves to share her stories and knowledge. She brings laughter and good feelings to everyone she meets. She especially loves to make bannock and always has a welcoming smile for everyone.

*Where were you born?*

Way down my grandfather country, they call *Dagou*. That's the place I born, I born 1907. I'm really old now. And now we just stay here, use to be when we go move somewhere, we got to go with a dogpack, that's for our food, long time ago people do that. And now this time, everything just easy, everything, camping too. Easy life now, this time. That's why some of the boys, young people lazy, don't want to do anything. Use to be

just kid, even kid, he set snare. Now this time, it's so different.

*When the highway come through, there was a lot of changes.*

Yeah, lots of changes. And the highway, they bring cow and pig and they bring to here, that's the moose for Mayo.

Martha Taylor is an Elder from the Dawson First Nation. She is from the Crow clan and will be celebrating her 94th birthday in May. She was born and raised in the Dawson area. She has a good sense of humour and enjoys meeting and visiting people. Martha has shared much of her teaching and knowledge. The kindness, warmth and sense of humour Martha bestows onto others is a strength that is not forgotten. She spends her past time doing occasional beadwork.

*Can you tell me where you were born?*

At the mouth of Klondike, other side, where that slide there. And that's where we all born there. My mother and my dad they come from Alaska. We got nothing to do with it us. We stay there, we born over here you know. Oh, talk about you don't know nothing. Look at what they got for needle, we just try and make mocassin, everything.

*Did you go to school?*

No, we don't know, we don't know what school.

*How were you taught?*

My mother.

*What things did your mother teach you?*

Oh, lots of things. The way they got to be it. Not like this girl run around all over the place, we gotta stay home, do work.

Irene Adamson is an Elder from the Ta'an Kwach'an First Nation from Lake Labarge. She is from the Wolf clan and was born in 1923. She spent her childhood in the Lake Labarge area. Irene lives in Whitehorse with her husband John, but still enjoys

going to Lake Labarge whenever time allows. This helps her to maintain her traditional lifestyle of hunting, trapping and fishing. Irene is an inspiration to all who comes in contact with her. She has contributed immensely to the teachings of traditional living and is quite active in offering support, guidance and direction to individuals, groups and organizations.

*You were raised down in Lake Labarge, can you tell me was there an Indian name for that place?*

Well, Lake Labarge is known as *Ta'an*. Well, Lake Labarge we use to when I was growing up all my aunt and uncles and we were hunters, all the Indians are hunters. That's our livelihood, we're hunters, we're fishing, I guess a long time ago, that's what our ancestors were doing is fishing and hunting. So we still do that. When I was growing up, that's how we use to make our living. We use to trap in winter time and then we sell our fur. I seen a lot of changes here since I was growing up.

*I want to ask you a few questions about education.*

I didn't went to school. There was no public school here, I mean there was no school here for the Indian children. I was taught how to read and write by my uncle, Frankie Jim while we're out in the trapline. That's how I learn how to read and write but other than that, I haven't got no education.

*Anne-Marie Miller was born and raised in the Yukon Territory. She lives in Whitehorse and works as a researcher on the Elders' Documentation Project at Council for Yukon Indians. She is from the Ta'am Kwach'an First Nation. Anne Marie is the mother of three children, Owen, Becky, and Jeremy. She has a diploma in social work and enjoys working with people.*