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HIGHLIGHTS:

- Charlie Chief was 85 years old at the time of this interview. He lives onn the Seekaskootch Reserve. Both he and his brother (Jimmy) are good sources of information on the old ways.
- Memories of boyhood.
- Story of a greedy young man who was caught.
- Description of Give Away dances and Wolf Feast ceremony.
- Some anecdotes of medicines and medicine men.

Charlie: Oh, I will tell of the time we made hay beside the creek where Edward is now living. This was a long time ago. A man named White Head had an uncle named Nah-kah we knew (Saulteaux). This was the old man I worked for. He was a small old man and he could really work in spite of his size and age and he used oxen, one of which he called White Face. These oxen were well trained and would go, turn left or right, and stop as the old man commanded. We had no trouble with the oxen till the flies became bad. Then the old man had no control over his oxen. When the day became hot and the flies came out, the oxen did not listen to the old man but would make a run for the nearest bush. We would then have to chase them and get them untangled from the trees and bushes. I enjoyed working for this old man. At noon we would stop and over a campfire we roasted dried meat which I really enjoyed eating. Soon the old man had several large stacks of hay. The days were warm and sunny and it did not rain.

On weekends I would go home to my parents. My plan was

to take one of my father's horses and go touring around the reserve. When I told mother I wanted a horse to ride on Sunday morning, she had other plans for me. She handed me a large pail saying, "This is berry-picking time. We are all going to pick berries. When you have filled that pail with berries, then you can go riding." So the whole family went to the berry patch and we started to pick berries. Many families were there picking berries. I started to pick and picking was slow and the pail seemed even bigger. It would take a very long time to fill. Then I hit upon an idea. I filled the pail almost to the top with leaves, then 2 inches from the top I filled with berries. Then I sat down in the shade and waited what I thought was a reasonable length of time and then took the pail for mother to see. Her pail was three quarters full and Dad's pail was half full. Mother was pleased when she saw my pail was full and she bragged long and loud at what a fast berry-picker her son was and said I could take a horse and go riding the rest of the day.

So for the rest of the day, I rode around with boys my own age and had a fine time and all too soon it was evening and time to go home. For me the fun was over. I knew what to expect when I got home. I waited till it got dark. Maybe they would be in bed and wouldn't say anything. But such was not the case. The scolding I got from mother was really something. Father sat and listened with a grin on his face. Mother gave me a scanty supper then told me to go to bed. "Very early in the morning you will take that pail and go fill it up with berries," she told me. I did not pull that trick again. I knew it wouldn't work a second time.

Then one day some time later, Dad said we would move north on a short hunting trip. We would all go; women and children could pick berries. As it turned out, several families went

north with us. We would set up camp early in the evening and the men would hunt while the women and children picked berries. We had in camp with us an old man. This old man used to call me Son and I called him Sad. His name was Chah-chow. He was a clever old man with old tin cans and a pair of tin snips. He made brooches. These he gave to children who picked berries for him. Before very long, he had many berries and all the children in camp had a brooch or two. Many times I picked berries for the old man and had several brooches he had made. Old man Chah-chow had a habit of taking long walks in the woods by himself. One day I intercepted him as he walked by our tipi and asked him if I could go with him. "No, no, Son," he said. "It is a very long walk and you would be very tired. It is best you stay in camp." "But I am a very good walker," I lied. "Many times I go with my father on a hunt." In the end he gave in and let me go with him. We walked and walked and I began to get tired. Then I fell behind and kept falling farther and farther behind. I could not keep up with him. Old man Chah-chow was a very tall man. I became so tired I called him, "Dad," I said, "I would like to see some of the country around us." "You climb a tree, Son," he said. "No," I said, "you carry me on your back." The old man guessed my trouble.

"Son," he said, "you are tired and cannot walk anymore." So he carried me on his back all the way back to our camp. I must have been a big boy already at the time because I remember the time well and had helped an old man put up hay.

My father and others had killed moose and everyone in camp was busy drying berries and dressing meat. Then when everyone in camp had plenty of meat and berries we started back for home. One evening, Dad killed a moose some distance from camp and old man Chah-chow took a horse and brought the moose into camp where he skinned and dressed the meat. For his age, Chah-chow was a good worker.

The time I am speaking of there was not much money but things were cheap. A package of tobacco and papers cost ten cents. Cloth for making shirts and other things was ten or fifteen cents a yard. For fifty cents, a pair of pants could be bought. Food was also very cheap to buy. A person could buy many things if he had ten dollars but money was hard to get. There was no one around to work for. Hunting and trapping fur-bearing animals was the only way people made money in those days. As a young boy, I used to go with my father when he checked his traps. I carried muskrats for him and also helped him skin and stretch them. For this he gave me one pelt for every three he trapped. The muskrat tails I kept. I skinned them and hung them up above a camp fire to smoke and dry. My dad was a good trapper and I had many muskrat tails which I later boiled in a big pot. When they were cooked, I invited the boys in the neighborhood and we had a feast of boiled muskrat tails.

Some men are kind and never get angry or don't often get angry. My father was one of these men but I saw him get angry once. As I became a big boy, I used to go with him when he went on a hunt. My job was to carry a gun for him. He had an old gun which was very heavy and the more we walked, the heavier the gun became. One day he bought a new .22 rifle for shooting small game. Then I refused to carry his big gun for him, thinking he would carry it and would let me carry the new 22 rifle. I wanted to shoot with the new 22 rifle, but things didn't work out that way. He carried the new .22 rifle and we left the big gun at home.

We hunted and got a few small game, then headed for home. I was walking behind Dad when he stopped and pointed. I looked and just below us stood a very large bull moose. "Now, he will get away because you were too lazy to bring the big gun," Dad said to me. "You stay here and don't move. I will sneak up to him and see if I can get a shot at him from close range." Then he got down on his hands and knees and started to crawl towards the moose. I stood there and waited. I had heard that bull moose when wounded were very dangerous and I became frightened and scared the moose away. With such a small gun, Dad would only have wounded the moose and we would have been in very serious trouble. Dad was so mad he gave me a good bawling out right there and when we got home I got another scolding from Mother after Dad told her what I'd done.

Soon after this we moved camp and we took our furs to the store. The storekeeper there could speak some Cree. From my father I got my share of muskrat skins. These I sold to the storekeeper and I bought a straw hat and some clothes. Also I bought a small bag of tobacco and matches and a small curved pipe. Then we returned home. One night we camped at the place where Eric is now living. Many people were living there at the time. I remember walking into one house and seeing a clay stove, I suppose the kind Jimmy was talking about the other day.

That was about the time Kah-ski-tay-oh-kwa-kahn got a very bad burn on her back. She refused medicine men and the burn became a large scab, and I would suppose it was very painful because she asked her husband to treat the burn, who claimed to be a medicine man of sorts. At once the old man left the camp and headed for the woods. Soon he was back with what he said was medicine to cure a burn. After boiling the stuff he spread it on a cloth the size of the burn. Then when it was still very hot, he applied the poultice to the burn. His wife jumped and howled with pain. The poultice he had applied to the burn came off bringing the scab with it. Now the burn was worse than ever and the old man got a good bawling out from his wife Kahskitayohkwakahn (Black Face). It was only then she agreed to let a medicine man treat her burn. The medicine man came and in a short time Black Face was well again.

Once we left to go hunting. With us were several families, also an old medicine man who drove a horse single hitched to a light wagon called a buggy. The first night out we camped at Frenchman Hill. The second night we made camp at Elk Hill. Also camping there were some Saulteaux Indians who had many horses. These people invited us to a ceremony called Chee-pah-koo-chi-kay-win (for which there is no adequate English translation). We asked our old medicine man if we should accept the invitation. He advised us to break camp early next morning and to keep moving. The next day he told us the ceremony was a very dangerous game. It was a game of bad medicine and had on numerous occasions resulted in death. We were glad we had this wise old medicine man with us.

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A long time ago people did not eat rice. They ate meat prepared in many different ways and they also had flour from which they made bannock. Flour and meat was all they had. They knew how to cook it in many ways and did not tire of it. Talking about this reminds me of a story I will tell you. A man named Eyah-moo-wok went on a hunt and returned empty-handed as did others in camp. Eyah-moo-wok was newly married and wanted very much to kill a moose for his bride, but at this particular time the hunters had no luck. Moose or other game could not be found and every night Eyah-moo-wok and other hunters returned to camp with no fresh meat. One day the

hunters gave up and stayed in camp. They did not hunt that day but Eyah-moo-wok left the camp to go hunting. He walked and walked and later in the day he saw and killed a moose. He dressed and quartered the meat on the spot. Then he made a camp fire and roasted the choice cuts of meat. After a big meal of roasted fresh meat, Eyah-moo-wok sat and wondered what he should do with the meat. Finally he decided to leave the meat there and go home. On the way home he killed a prairie chicken which he took home. At home his bride dressed and cooked the chicken. Two other people lived in the lodge beside Eyah-moo-wok and his bride and when the prairie chicken was cooked, Eyah-moo-wok would not eat. He told the people in the lodge to go ahead and eat. As for himself, he could tough it out and would not starve for awhile. He had not mentioned the moose he had killed that day much less the big meal he had had that day while hunting.

Very early next morning he again left the camp to go hunting. After leaving the camp he went straight to where he had left the moose. There he stayed most of the day roasting and eating moose meat. He also made a place where he could have a sleep between meals. Late in the afternoon he started for home. On the way he killed a rabbit which he took home. At home the rabbit was cooked and soup was made but Eyah-moo-wok refused to eat saying his bride and in-laws needed the food more than he did. Again he went to bed supposedly

hungry but his father-in-law knew something was not right. Here was a man who never ate and was growing stronger and stronger.

This went on for many days, and one morning after Eyah-moo-wok had left the camp his father-in-law followed him without his knowing it. Eyah-moo-wok was being watched by his father-in-law as he cooked the last of the meat. After he had eaten he wrapped the bones in the hide and threw it in the fire. Then he went home after the fire had died down. The old father-in-law picked up what was left of the hide and took it home. When he arrived Eyah-moo-wok was stretched out on the bed resting after hunting all day. The old man threw the scorched moose hide at Eyah-moo-wok asking him why he didn't eat that too. "You are so greedy and selfish we are afraid you might start eating us," said the old man to his son-in-law. "It is best you take your clothes and leave right now. Our daughter will stay here. With you she is not safe. You are such a glutton you might eat her when you get hungry." So for being so selfish and greedy Eyah-moo-wok found himself not only hungry but also homeless. Eyah-moo-wok was a Stoney Indian. This must have happened a very long time ago.

The old man who told me this story said it happened a long time ago and when it happened the people were in camp at a place called Give Away Place. I know where Give Away Place is. The people who lived there when I was young were always holding Give Away Dances. At Give Away Dances in those days the server would collect, from people attending, all sorts of clothing. Even old worn out clothing. Later four bundles

would be made from the clothes collected and hung up on spruce trees as an offering to the bone spirits (Pah-kah-koo-sak). I was present when some of these Give Away Dances were held.

I was also present when they had what they called a Wolf Feast Ceremony. They had hanging on a wall, a large bladder which was full of grease or oil of some kind. Eyes, nose, and mouth were drawn on the bladder. When the singing started, the man sponsoring the feast grabbed the bladder and walked about among the spectators carrying the bladder and singing as he went. Then he would offer the bladder to someone who would take the bladder and go to the center of the lodge. The singing and drumming would stop and the man with the bladder would sit down and begin to pray. After he had prayed he got up and the drumming and singing would again start. And he would do what the man before him had done, walk about carrying the bladder and singing, finally giving it to someone who would take the bladder to the center and pray. This was repeated many times till many people had prayed. When this was done, the singer started to sing Give Away songs and a Give Away Dance was under way. Four boys and four girls got up to dance and exchanged gifts. It was interesting to watch. When they had danced and exchanged gifts they would take their seats and four new couples would take the floor. And so it went on and on till many couples had danced and then I thought the dance

was over but I was wrong. Now it was time to eat and offer food to the wolf spirit. Prayers were said by an old man as he held the food in both hands. His prayers were directed at the wolf spirit. Then the server picked up the food, which in this case was balls of meat. He walked around the lodge throwing balls of meat into the crowd. If you caught a ball of meat, you ate; if not, you went hungry. If you caught 2 balls of meat, you ate one and took one home. The server at the time was, I think, John George's father-in-law. I do not remember his name. This Wolf Feast ritual went on for four nights. I was a very young boy when I saw this strange ritual. I have never seen one since. It may have gone out of fashion. After seeing a Wolf Feast ceremony, some of us young boys would go some distance from the camp and we would have a Wolf Feast ritual. We used to have a lot of fun at the time I speak of. I was a very young boy and in those days parents would once in a while send their children to an old man who would preach a little sermon to the children. We listened to these old men as they told us the facts of life. Also they predicted things to come. Many of the things they predicted I have seen come true.

Inter: Do you remember some of the things they predicted?

Charlie: Yes. Like I said, I have seen some of them come true. Once my brother and I were sent to an old man who would speak to us. The old man talked at length as we listened. At the time, when two men met they shook hands, and women wrapped their arms around each other and kissed one another. "In the future," this old man told us, "that custom will stop." Today, it is not done. That custom is not used any more, just as the old man predicted when I was young.

Sick people did not go to a white doctor for treatment. When someone was sick the relatives of the sick person would get out their finest clothes or their best blankets. These they would offer to a medicine man to treat their sick relative or friend. Also, medicine could be bought from a medicine man if he was busy or for some reason could not come to treat your sick friend. For this service he did not expect much, perhaps a little tobacco. He would then give you the medicine and with it, instructions on how it should be used.

While I was growing up, white men around here were very few. One I knew was called Maple Top and another was Jim Sowvie and another who lived near the reserve whose name we did not know. The Indian people just called him Corner man. Not too long ago a girl came here. I think she was an Indian girl. She asked the white people around here a lot of questions. She spoke to many old-timers; then she left. It was said she went to Fort Pitt. Now and then people would make a trip and would be gone for several days. They would go

somewhere to get pipestone, a stone from which pipes would be made. I never went on these trips. I do not know where or how they got the stone. It was my good fortune to go with the people here when they went to get salt. The salt was used as a laxative. I used to stand and watch as people threw all sorts of things in the lake before taking the salt. They threw in plates, knives, cups, spoons, and many other articles. By doing this they believed they were paying for the salt they took from beside the lake. There must be many things at the bottom of that lake.

Inter: I wonder if that salt could still be taken today?

Charlie: It could not be taken when the weather was hot because it had dirt in it. It was taken after the cold weather set in. Then the salt was pure and very clean. Every time we passed by the lake mother would drop something in the lake and take some of the salt. It was also given in small doses to pregnant women. A cousin of mine named Wah-nah-case told me this little story. "Cousin," he said, "the salt from the lake is really powerful medicine. Some time ago when my wife was expecting a baby, I went and got two old women. I brought them home and left them there to act as midwives. Then I went to the neighbors and would return only after the baby was born. I was sleeping at the neighbor's about the second or third night when someone knocked on the door about midnight. 'Wah-nah-case!' he said, 'you are to go home at once. Do not waste any time. Go home now,' he said.

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