

Stseptelwle – Healing through the Art of Storytelling

Title: Splatsin Hunting Trip – September 2009

Purpose: Hunting camp story - Promote community participation and learning

My name is Anne Cook and I am here to share the story about a hunting trip that myself and my husband Don, and Splatsin Elder Florence Nicholas took. The purpose of the trip was to teach about and promote community participation in hunting activities.

Early in the morning on September 25, we set out for a very spiritual place in the Upper Salmon River area that our Elder Casimir Felix talks about from a dream. Our ancestors have visited this place for thousands of years. It is a very serene locations near one of our most sacred areas – it's not the only place we go to hunt, but it is one of the most important ones. The place we set up camp is near the timberline and protected from the wind. It seems like it is in a bowl between the mountains. An arbour and pit house still stand there.

It seems as though there are fewer and fewer places that we can hunt and we have to go farther and farther away. There is a lack of respect for the deer which has resulted in fewer numbers. Where we used to see 20 – 30 deer, we're lucky if we see 4 now. As a result, we can't just go hunting whenever we want to anymore. We have to wait until we see the deer.

For this reason, it is just as important if not more important than ever to follow cultural values and spiritual protocols. Cultural values teach us that we must have respect for the animals and we are taught to never shoot unless we have to. Praying and making offerings to the spirits and remembering to never walk over our guns are ways to observe spiritual protocols.

It wasn't by accident that we decided to go hunting on this day – I prayed so I just knew in my heart it was time to go. Sure enough the spirits reward us and after two days, we returned with two deers at which time we proceeded to hang, cut, wrap and preserve the meat in family sized portions that we shared with Elders and community members.

There is also a lot of practical knowledge that is required to kill, butcher and preserve the meat from a hunt. First of all we need to know the land and the different places where the deer visit. We start scouting out a place for the camp early in July. When scouting, we look for where the bucks scrape the trees to mark their territory. Scraping higher up on the tree means a bigger buck and lower down means a smaller size. Deer visit their scrapes regularly and they scrape with their horns and pee to leave a scent and discourage other males from encroaching on their territory. The sense of smell is a very important for the animals survival so it is important for hunters to clean away the human smell before going hunting. For this reason, men are taught not to sleep with women on their menses the night before and are encouraged to go to the sweatlodge to clean off the man smell. He can also rub the scent from the animals stink pads all over his clothes to

disguise the man smell. In the old days we used a bow and arrow, but now we use guns and need to ensure safety. Therefore, it is also an important part of preparation to clean your rifle and buy bullets. Once we have purchased gas and packed supplies for the camp, we head for the hills.

Moose and deer are so well camouflaged they are able to hide effectively behind one little tree. A good hunter will learn to spot a well camouflaged animal by developing skills and knowledge that will help to understand animal behaviours by observing the sights, sounds and smells.

We go out in the early morning or evening when the deer are moving to and from their feeding grounds in the lower elevations. We always walk against the wind so your smell is carried downwind of the animal. It is easy to just throw grass into the air to see which way the wind is blowing. It is also smart to always walk on a ridge so you can see for a long way in both directions.

My husband Don can call the bucks right to him – this takes a special skill. He makes a noise that mimics another buck with his mouth and blades of grass between his hands. He says that you can also learn how to hunt by watching cougars and if you walk really slow and look around and listen for birds flying up and squirrels barking, they will tell you when an animal is coming closer.

Of course, the scouting and the hunt is only one part of the work that needs to be done. Once the animal has been shot, hung and cured, we must also know how to butcher and preserve the meat in the right way. Knowing how to follow the sinew and cut along the grain of the muscle makes for better eating. We were also thankful that Karen Cook, Donna Antoine and Roberta William shared their knowledge about drying meat with us.

Our ancestors and parents have gained and passed on a lot of knowledge and skills that they gained by experience and learning from one another. That is one of the reasons that we believe family and community involvement is also important. We see that the strongest families are the ones teaching grandchildren how to hunt and feed themselves by living on the land.

We know that we are competing with modern technology for young people's time and attention. We hope that this story will encourage young people to take the time to learn all of the specialized cultural knowledge that goes into hunting, preparing, preserving and sharing deer meat.

We invite you to join us on our yearly community hunt where we share our knowledge and model our skills with the hopes of teaching young people how to hunt and live on the land. I feel content knowing that we taught our children how to hunt and fish – they will never starve and they can feed the Elders deer, moose, Elk and fish.