
Versions 6a and 6b, told by Albert Isaac

The Narrator

Chief Albert Isaac, Eddy's older brother, is a much smaller wiry man, who is now almost totally deaf. He is in his eighties. Although Albert was the elected chief of Aishihik before its final abandonment in the summer of 1967, he himself is quick to explain that he was never a traditional chief in the sense that his father was, for he never gave enough potlatches to win the position. Nevertheless he is a strong character and has tried to exercise some leadership. Some people claim that both he and his wife are shamans, but they themselves have never admitted this to me. Chief's younger sister was married to Charley Stevens (see Version 7) as already indicated in the remarks on Eddy Isaac. Charley, in turn, is a close classificatory brother of Albert's wife, both of them (as well as Mrs. Eddy Isaac) having come from Fort Selkirk, a Northern Tutchone settlement (now also abandoned). Albert and Charley are not very close, in spite of their brother-in-law relationship because in recent years difficulties between the children of the two couples have caused grave concern to all. Today Albert and his wife have but one living son left from nine children, and Charley and his wife have only one daughter left from four or five children.

Although his life has been filled with tragedy, Albert has always been an extraordinarily successful hunter, and he still hunts and runs a trapline, most recently with a classificatory son-in-law from Mile 1016 or Haines Junction.

In the somewhat happier days before he and the others left Aishihik, Chief used to spend almost every evening in my cabin telling stories, talking or singing songs. Usually his wife came with him. He told the bear story on

December 16, 1962. The evening was punctuated by a dog fight and the knocking over of my only kerosene lamp, but Chief sat imperturbably through it all. His wife came for a visit during part of the evening, but Chief had recorded the story while we were alone in my cabin. This is Version 6a (Reel Ten, 1962, Side Two, Story One). He told it in both English and Tutchone.

About four months later, on the evening of April 23, 1963, Chief came to visit and found his sister and brother-in-law Charley Stevens already there. Charley was telling about the girl who married the bear, evidently prompted by our discussion of some bear dens, which Eddy had recently located. Chief sat absolutely silent in the background until the Stevens left, in deference to the presence of his sister, who was seated at my table. However, as soon as the other couple had gone, Albert launched into the songs that Charley had been trying to remember (or perhaps Charley really had known the songs, but did not want to sing them in front of Albert, for the two are rival story-tellers and singers). Albert also made some corrections to details in Charley's story (Version 7).

Albert's English is just as erratic as his brother Eddy's, but he enunciates a bit more clearly than his brother, even when his mouth is full of a tobacco quid, which is most of the time. I have had relatively little difficulty understanding and recording what Albert has had to say. He has told me more stories than any other Yukon Indian.

The Story

Somebody goes hunting berries, any kind of berries. They are picking berries. And a young girl sees where a grizzly bear has defecated. He just freshly defecated, the grizzly bear. That's the time she says,

"What the hell does he defecate for? He goes right around the trail! " That's what she says. She jumps over top of it, and she laughs.

Well, that's the time she fills her pot with berries, and then she spills them all. At the same time the rest of the women want to go back home. That's the time she says,

"Wait! You wait while I pick up my berries! "

The other old women pack right on down. And the girl walks around and picks up her pot and fills it. She tries to pick out the spilled berries. At the same time a young fellow comes. He asks her, that man,

"Shall we go into the bush? "

That girl says, "No! " Oh, she can't get away from that man. The girl says,

"I'm going to tell my mother about you first! "

He said, "I can't let you go. We might as well go into the bush! "

"Well, all right! " She leaves the pot of berries, and she goes with him.

They go. That man doesn't change. He's just like a man, all right. When the man comes, she doesn't know he's really a grizzly bear.

The man and the girl stay together all summer. Pretty soon it's fall. It comes to October.

And that man says, "Where do you want to stay? "

Now he shows himself. He turns to bear this time. She is a little bit scared now.

Well, that bear says he'll find a place. He says,

Version 6a

"We'll camp right here all winter. We'll stay all winter right here," he says.

Then he makes a den. He wants to stay right there. In November month they go inside. But they say that when they sleep for four months' time, it seems like just one night. For the bear one night is four months. But that time the girl knows how many months are gone.

In March month, she makes a ball out of bunched up grass. At the same time she rolls it down the hillside.

That grizzly bear dreams bad. He tells his wife, "Did you make something out there? "

His wife says, "No, I didn't do it! "

"Well," he says, "I dream pretty bad," he says.

Then he says he is going to sharpen his knives.

His wife says, "No! "

"Well," he tells his wife, "my brothers-in-law are coming along on this trail. You don't want trouble from them," he told her.

They sleep and he [?—possibly 'she'? The actual pronoun used was 'they'] throws away that knife.

Well after not quite two days, four dogs come to the den. They bark right out here [gesture]. Well, the bear tries to take one more knife. The bear says he wants to go outdoors. His wife makes him stop.

Well, at the same time they hear somebody talk.

That's the time the bear jumps out, and they kill him with a spear.

All right, he dies. Somebody shoots the bow and arrow [too]. You see that wood—that bow and arrow wood [i.e., the shaft?], it drops down.

They don't talk about anything out there [?], and right away they roll the bear right down to the bottom of the

hill. They make a fire down there, and that's the place they skin the bear.

The older brothers told the youngest brother, "You go get that arrow shaft. You know where we shot, the shaft dropped down."

Well, that's the time that young fellow went back up. A long time ago an Indian man didn't talk to his sister. This time we do white man's way. We talk to our sisters now. [This is not actually the case so far as the narrator is concerned. He maintains strict cross-sex sibling avoidance.] That youngest brother is up there. You see, at the same time his sister had tied the arrow shafts up in a bunch and left them right here [gestures to indicate they are in front of the den].

He didn't [know how that happened]. He holds them right here [bundle out in front of him]. He wants to show his brothers, so he takes the shafts down to his brothers.

The oldest one says, "We'll go up together. Come on! "

They come to that bear den, and the younger brother talks, he says,

"What kind of being is in there? Who the hell tied those arrows together? "

Then they know that their lost sister is the one who is talking. She says,

"Me! "

Well, that's the time she said, "You killed your brother-in-law. You hang his head way up in the tree. That bear head, you hang it up in the tree! "

At the same time she says, "Tell my mother to come, and bring my clothes! Bring my clothes! "

They brought her clothes. She said she had babies. That bottom [indicates the belly] is all fur. Those kids have fur

the colour of a bear. The lady is the same. They have fur on them just like a bear.

The girl put the clothes on all right. And she took the children down home too. About a month later they [began] to stay with the Indians. The children are big boys now.

A. to Q. She has two children.

The youngest brother says, "We are going to play with you my sister," he says.

His sister says, "No, I can't do it. If I do, I will change pretty fast! I can't do that. I can't play that I am a bear," she said.

But her brother told her again another time, "We want to play. Go on sister! I'll make a hole in the snowdrift. You pretend it's like a grizzly bear's hole."

That time the girl began to cry. That girl cries.

She says, "What do you want to try to do? "

All right. She goes into that hole. Pretty soon the younger brother thinks he'll begin to play. He says, "Ha, ha, ha! "

He thinks that she will play, all right. But that's the time she starts to fight. She just tears that boy to pieces. The boy can't do anything. She kills him—her own brother.

Nobody knows why she kills her brother. When somebody looks out, he sees her already on the top of the hill. She walks there. She has turned to bear now. She'll not come back any more. She'll no more come back. She goes for good.

Nobody follows. Nobody goes after her. They leave her alone. [Albert then proceeded to tell the story in Indian.]

The Story

Version 6b

... That bear wakes up. He dreams pretty bad. He sharpens his knife and sings: [Chief sings in Tlingit].

"... aḡ ca... [my head]

... a qanau [hurts]..."

Besides, he sharpens his knife. He told his wife that no, he doesn't want to do it, because he doesn't want to kill his brothers-in-law. So he breaks his knife when he is sharpening it. He tells his wife,

"The dog will come first."

He tells his wife, that time he dreams bad, "Why did you roll down that ball?"

She says, "No!" She didn't use hard berries. [Chief is here correcting Charley Stevens' Version 7.]

She got grass for the den, and she makes a bunch as big as this. [Chief points to a small teapot.] And the dog gets it at the bottom of the hill.

"What for did you do that? What for did you do that?"

He says 'Two Eyes' is coming first. [This is the name of the dog, which had white spots in front of its eyes.]

He told his wife on the same day they killed him,

"My head, my skull—when they clean my skull [tell them to] hang it up in a tree. Don't throw it on the ground. And you see, some kind of soft feathers, caRu [i.e., bird down, Tutchone], [put them on it]. And put it on the fire."

You see, the same way Indians do that when they make k'owakan [i.e. gowakan, deer, Tlingit, term used for a peace hostage]. They put feathers.

You know, [when they kill] a bear this time, everybody quits [observing the ritual]. When you kill him, you should put feathers on top of the bear head. Take the skin off and cut off the head and put feathers on it. And put it in the fire. That's what he said to do

first. This time nobody tries to do it. The white man makes skulls [*sic*, i.e., Chief is referring to the way white hunters mount their trophies].

Old times they all eat the meat, and clean it all off [i.e., the head], and then they put on the feathers. Then they burn it. They burn it. And they sing the song: [Chief sings in Tlingit]

"uya yAn

a'ayi ye he he

aḡ ca

gana .u. . ."

"My head hurts."

[Chief then recorded the song. Reel 21, 1963, Song 14.] Chief prefaces the song by a spoken introduction in Tlingit in which he tells again about how the bear dreamed what would happen to him. Mrs. Isaac beat the drum. After they had sung the song, they discussed various kind of body portents and Chief added: "Put the bear eyes in wood. In a tight [crack], so they will stay dry. They don't want the birds to eat them. When you kill c/R [bear—any kind], put his eyes in your pocket and take them on the side hill, and put them in a stump."

Mrs. Isaac then said: "That time he died, he said that. He said that he likes it where the first sun hits on the side hill. This time yet we don't throw away his eyes."

[Chief then proceeded to tell other bear stories.]