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# Frank R. Peterson Sr. – Life about Alaskan Natives

By Frank R. Peterson Sr.

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# Box 4 Folder 25

Oral Interview conducted by Jocelyn Peterson

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Brigham Young University – Idaho

JP: Today's date is March 4th, 2004. The time locally in Rexburg, Idaho is about 2:47 pm. My name is Jocelyn Peterson and I'll be interviewing my father, Frank Robert Peterson Sr., who is currently in Kodiak, Alaska. Are yah there dad?

FP: Yes I am.

JP: My interview today is in regards to the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, and your history as an Alaska Native. Just an overview of what we are gonna talk about, we'll have a, I'm gonna ask you a couple questions about your history personally, and then also about the culture of the Alaska Native people, and then we'll go into the specific questions about the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. Okay?

FP: Okay.

JP: Great, so what is your birth date?

FP: July 9th, 1940.

JP: And where were you born?

FP: Lazy Bay, Alaska. Which is five miles south of Akhiok village.

JP: What were your parents' names?

FP: My dad's name was Davis Peterson, and my mothers name was Matrona Peterson.

JP: Are they still alive?

FP: Nope. Both of them are deceased. My dad died when I was two years old, and my mother died in 1971.

JP: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

FP: There are ten of us kids in our family, or were, there are some who died.

JP: Great, I'm gonna ask you about schooling a little bit. Where did you go to elementary school?

FP: Went to elementary school in Akhiok and Homer, Alaska.

JP: Can you describe the school a little bit in Akhiok; was it a large school or a small school?

FP: It was a small school, a one room school, where all of the grades were taught, from, you know, first grade through the eighth grade. That's all the grades we had when we were there going to school.

JP: And where did you go to high school?

FP: Went to high school in Kodiak for two years, my freshman and sophomore year. And then I went to Sheldon Jackson for my last two years, and graduated from Sheldon Jackson high school.

JP: Where did you go to college?

FP: I took some classes at Sheldon Jackson Junior College, but didn't do too good. Well, let me start backwards, go back a little ways. After high school I got a scholarship, a Lion's Scholarship to attend the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, but ah, the school was fairly large, there was something like twenty-seven thousand kids going to school there and I come from a small village of eighty people. So I dropped out and joined the Marine Corp, and then later on I went on to the community college in Kalispell called Flathead Valley Community College. Got an associates degree in Business Management and transferred to the University of Idaho, but did not achieve my bachelors degree yet.

JP: You mentioned that you were in the Marines or in the military, when did you serve in the military, you said in college, but how long did you stay?

FP: 1960 to 1965.

JP: And what was your rank?

FP: Four years, five months and sixteen days, and my rank when I was discharged honorably, was Corporal E4.

JP: Were you ever in combat?

FP: No. We were ten miles off of Vietnam, coasting for thirty days, ready to go ashore, but we were never called.

JP: Thankfully. Can you give me at this time a brief history of your work experience in Alaska in regards to the state and the Alaska Native people?

FP: Okay, it started out working in Akhiok for a public health service employee who was installing the water system and what happened there was he in order to prolong his work there, when he ordered certain plumbing parts he ordered purposely ordered wrong size parts and prolonged his employment and stay in Akhiok. But I didn't realize this 'til later, so that got me interested in the type of work I'm in now. And next I started working as a village aid, with the Alaska State Community Action Program, which became the Rural Alaska Community Action Program. After that I became, I founded and organized the Kodiak Area Community Development Corporation out of Kodiak, involving all of the villages and two of the villages on the Kenai Peninsula. Port Graham and English Bay.

Then after that I was promoted to assistant director, well first I was the executive director of the Kodiak Area Community Development Corporation and then I got promoted to assistant director of Rural CAP out of Anchorage and traveled throughout the state, organizing the Native associations and health entities. And then after that, let's see Rural CAP, I got a fellowship to go to Yale for six weeks and then worked out of Congressman Beggedge's Office for the year as his special assistant. Then while working there I was hired by my friend, Carl Jack, who worked as the director of Health Affairs for AFN. He hired me as assistant health director. I worked there for two years. And then 1974 he sent me down to Kodiak to reorganize the Kodiak Area Native Association so they could utilize a grant AFN was giving to organize a health entity.

I organized KANA administratively and got it going in 1974 and worked as its executive director initially and eventually became its first administrative executive president. And I worked there until 1979. And then while I was in KANA, we started off with a forty-five thousand dollar grant and when I left we had a two and a half million dollar budget. Started off with three employees and ended up with a hundred and thirteen people on the payroll. And after that, during my tenure at KANA I ran for the Koniag board and got elected. First time I ran I didn't know the ropes or the rules about proxies and all that so they disqualified my proxies when I first ran. And then the second time, or at the same meeting that they disqualified my proxies I called an attorney friend of mine in Fairbanks, Harry Jackson, and told him what happened and I asked him for help and he agreed to help me, represent me legally, and I started running for the board for the next annual meeting election which was a year away from that particular date and I got elected. Well I went to the annual meeting with my attorney and of course they had all of their attorneys, their accountants and consultants who are non-Native, but when I entered the meeting with my attorney they attempted to get rid of him, kick him out. And I said wait a minute, you know he's my attorney and you guys have your attorneys there and your consultants and your accountants, and I want to have my attorney here with me. So the board went back into a back room for about ten minutes and they came out with no solution. So the president which was Jack Wick decided to put it on a floor vote, and after I explained the reasons for having my attorney there and the fact that they had disqualified my proxies the year before, I asked that they allow my attorney to be present, which when they voted it was almost unanimous that they voted to keep my attorney there and then I got elected to the board.

I think it was 1978, so I served two terms through 1984, 1985 one of these those years. But Koniag then had lost all of its twenty-four million contributed capitol that they got from the claims act. So Koniag was essentially broke and plus we were ten million dollars in the red, when I was on the board and just getting off. Let's see, then I moved to, we moved to Larsen Bay. I worked as a, I got elected to the tribal council and got elected as president of the tribal council. So I was there for I think two years. And then I think I got involved with Koniag again some how during the de-merger process and I can't remember exactly what but then Old Harbor Native Corporation hired me to reorganize the Old Harbor Native Corporation which was merged into Koniag in 1980. So all of their assets, cash and land and whatever paperwork they had left was in Koniag so they asked me to work for them which I did and we then moved to Old Harbor in 1982 I believe, no 84, and I worked there in Old Harbor as the manager of the Old Harbor Native Corporation. I also worked as the acting manager for the old Harbor Tribal

Council and also worked as an acting manager of the city of Old Harbor. And plus at that time, me and mom and my older brother Joe and Victor went into a business. We formed the Martha's Kitchen business which was a coffee shop and then we also had a taxi service out in Old Harbor. Let's see, after that, 1986, I got terminated from the tribal council because of the local politics, I believe I was doing too much for the comfort of the local leaders so I got terminated from all of the positions I held within the community. Then we moved to Kalispell Montana where I went to school and achieved my associate's degree in business with emphasis in the hospitality management service, tourism. After that I transferred to the University of Idaho, attended there for a while but did not achieve my bachelor's degree yet. And then, 1993, I was called to come back to Alaska to check Ayakulik out because they were attempting to sell their 640 acres for one million dollars which was on the table from a conservation organization.

After I attended a meeting in Anchorage I told the group at the meeting of shareholders and board members that they should sleep on this proposal because I wasn't comfortable, because the guy that was working as a consultant for Ayakulik had a fee agreement to where he would get ten percent of whatever the sale price was which was a million bucks. He would have gotten a hundred thousand dollars. But the reason it didn't go was because he was busy trying to up the price from one million to a million and a half. I think simply for the reason of trying to get a hundred and fifty thousand rather than trying to benefit the corporation. So I couldn't sleep all night so about six o'clock in the morning I called the other board members and I asked them about their thoughts and they didn't sleep either so we had breakfast and I said you know this is not right, you should not sell because we don't know what the actual values are of those lands. So then I came down to Kodiak instead of going back to Idaho to check with the local shareholders here and in Akhiok while here I talked with some shareholders and asked them about what they knew about the sale, they knew very little. People in Akhiok knew very little, but before going to Akhiok I stopped in the borough offices here and found out that there were six five-acre parcels within the Ayakulik 640 acre parcel. And I found out that the assessed prices for those lots were six thousand dollars at minimum, and the one with the lodge on it was a hundred and ten thousand dollar value. So what I did was took the median between fifty and seventy, uh between seventy, fifty and a hundred ten and just used the figure of seventy five thousand dollar value per five-acre parcel. And I did a subdivision of the remaining lands of Ayakulik down there, and I forget exactly how many five acre lots they got, but the end result of my investigation was that the estimated value just based on the assessed prices by the borough government here was eight point one million dollar value for a assessment. And if it were to be appraised I think the appraisal would have gone higher. So, I think that brings me up to date. I work with Ayakulik from 1993, we built the lodge which took two years to build, and then we completed it two years ago, 2002.

JP: Great, so, a little bit… a few questions about your family. What is your wife's name?

FP: My wife's name is Joyce Helen Peterson.

JP: And how many children do you have?

FP: We have six.

JP: And how many grandchildren do you have?

FP: We have ten grandchildren, all living here right now. One of them is right here right now.

JP: Okay, now we are going to move away from the history, your history a little bit, and move on to the culture of the Alaska Native people. And remember when I talk about culture I mean the state of the people, not necessarily the traditional culture. But thinking back to your childhood and your school days before the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, was alcoholism an issue in the native culture of Kodiak Island before ANCSA?

FP: Before ANCSA, yes but not as severe as it was after ANSA. There was alcohol from the cannery. Before the canneries they had home brew. Okay, home-made alcohol, which wasn't as powerful as the hard stuff, whisky and stuff like that. And then the canneries came, they brought in the hard stuff and then made the situation worse, and it hasn't really improved since, it's still quite a problem in many of our villages right now.

JP: Do you feel that before ANCSA it was, alcoholism, was passed on from generation from generation?

FP: From my memory as a little child I remember when people used to drink home brew, and us kids used to eat the raisins or whatever was left in the cups, you know. And I didn't realize that they were, they had alcohol in em. And, I guess a couple times some of us kids got drunk just from the raisins or fruit that was left over. But the families who came, they rotated from house to house. I remember the people having a good time, having fun, with what little resources they had. They sang songs in the language, things like that. Then after the canneries brought in the hard stuff, it became uncontrollable drinking, and people were drinking to get drunk, fighting. I remember my step-dad getting in a fight with a couple people and then his brother, Moses Larionoff, you know he was skinny then, and because of the fights that he got involved with when they were drinking, he took Charles Atlas's course, both him and his wife, Margie, they're both deceased now, as is my step-father, Kalumpi, but he took the Charles Atlas course and really became tough. I mean he was muscular and heavier and when he fought now he beat those other guys up.

JP: Do you feel, how about abuse, emotional and physical and even sexual abuse. Was it a part of the native culture before the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act?

FP: I'm not really sure, well yah, now I remember. There was abuse, way back, down to my elementary school age level.

JP: How about after ANCSA, do you feel like abuse is still a part of the Native culture today?

FP: Yes, it has gotten really bad, really worse, because of the alcoholism and drug abuse which also increased the suicide rates for Alaska Natives. I think if you look at the national statistics on alcoholism and drug abuse you'll find that Alaska is number one.

JP: How about the school systems, do you feel that before ANCSA they were adequate and equal to surrounding schools?

FP: No. Our villages or communities which number 231 now throughout Alaska did not have adequate schools, they only had elementary schools grades one through eight, and after the Molly Hooch law suit it forced, that law suit forced the State of Alaska to build high schools in many, many of the villages. I don't think they build them in all villages but in many, many of the villages. The standards, even today of the high school education is not up to par. Like right here in Kodiak the village educational standards lag behind the Kodiak High School students by two years. And those who aspire to go to college are not doing well. The percentage of our children going to college from the villages is very, very low. I don't know what the numbers are, but if you were to check the statistics you'll find that the numbers are very low.

JP: What about the sense of community? In your opinion, what is the sense of community in the Alaska Native villages, especially of Kodiak Island?

FP: The lifestyle of the village people from the time that I remember was communal. When they went hunting or going after wood for their heat or whatever they always shared with people who didn't have that, people who were in need of food or firewood. I remember one time when the Bay of Akhiok was frozen over and the older folks had built a huge sled, that they drug themselves up to Dead Man's Bay to get alder wood. Brought it back stacked with Alder wood and they shared with people who needed it in the village. Like-wise when they went subsistence fishing up to a place called Ook-poock, right up the head of the narrows, big narrows: Olga Bay, we had to hike about an hour up to a lake to get red salmon from the lake, sometimes the lake would be completely frozen over so we cut a hole and do ice fishing, but most times that I remember when we went up there, the mouth of the river, the exit of the lake was not frozen and the fish were visible there so we would take a small ten-fathom and scoop 'em up and whoever could carry 'em down would carry 'em down.

JP: Do you feel that the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act has affected the sense of community in the Native Villages of Kodiak Island?

FP: Yes, I have a definite opinion about that. The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act has divided and separated many Alaska Native people. Initially in 1971 there was estimated 60-65,000 Alaska Natives. In Kodiak Island for example, the way the corporation system has divided people is we have not only villages corporations in each village, we have a tribal government, we have a city municipal government, and then regionally we have the Kodiak Island Borough, we have Koniag, we have Kodiak Area Native Association, all competing for power which contributes to the fighting amongst our people. And these corporation boundaries create false boundaries. I can't associate

now with people from Old Harbor or Ouzinkie because I'm in Ayakulik, or vice versa. So it's been a division of the community and it's not good.

JP: How involved do you feel the Alaska Natives of Kodiak Island are in their community? How involved do you think they are in the decisions that are made for them?

FP: Not enough. The power structures in Koniag and in KANA, they virtually dictate what happens or does not happen in the region. There are some exceptions like in Afognak, Port Lions, that corporation is very competitive and assertive and they're sticking up for their shareholders, whether it's legal or not, I can delve into that but I don't wanna do that right now.

JP: Moving on, we're going to talk about the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act specifically, and your involvement in it. Can you remember first hearing about the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act?

FP: Uh, let's see. When I was working with RURL CAP here under Kodiak Area Community Development Corporation we had heard about the claims to the land. Let's see, 1965/66, there was a guy by the name of Willie Hensley who was an Inupiak Eskimo from Kotzebue who attended Georgetown University in Washington DC studying political science. In that study he was required to study history, and in his study of history he discovered this aboriginal origin which goes back to when the Russians occupied Alaska from 1741 through 1867. In that period of time the Russians had established their own laws one of which was something to this effect, that if any lands used or occupied by Alaska Natives shall not be disturbed. I don't know if that's the exact language but that's the result of that aboriginal title, which is land ownership by use and occupancy titles. On the basis, when Willie Hensley came back to Anchorage and called certain leaders from throughout Alaska I remember that there were some twenty-nine people involved at this meeting where they discussed this aboriginal title law and what it might mean to the people. It was this period of time also that the oil companies discovered oil in the Cook Inlet area but could not develop their oil because of the problems with the land title. The natives had aboriginal title. And then they also had discovered oil up in the Prudo Bay area, North Slope, and likewise there they could not develop the oil because of the land ownership question. After these people went home and inventoried the lands that they used and occupied under that law they came back with transparencies on a map over Alaska and what they found was that Alaska Natives had owned all of Alaska including parts of the land into Canada based on that aboriginal title. So essentially the Alaska Natives had owned 375,000,000 acres that Alaska is.

JP: And just as a side question real quick, do you know under what provision they justified their claim to that much land?

FP: The aboriginal title of the Russians. That title which said these things in so many words, I don't know if they are exact but they were in the treaty of cession in 1867 between the United States and Russia. Then there was another organic act, I think 1884 which also included that provision. And then in the statehood act of 1958 the same law,

provision, was included in the Alaska statehood at with one little amendment by the congress. The amendment was in so many words, like this, any lands used or occupied by Alaska Natives shall not be disturbed unless done so by the United States Congress. And of course, following that was ANCSA in 1971.

JP: Do you feel that the discovery of oil in Alaska affected the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, either the speed in which it was formed or anything involving the legislation?

FP: Yes. That was the primary reason the settlement happened so fast. Because of the discovery of oil. With that discovery the Native people had not only the support of the oil companies, the State of Alaska, the religious organizations, the conservation organizations and the chambers of commerce because of the oil discovery. So normally if you study history of the Indians or the Native Americans down there, you'll find that any claim that the Native American's made through the Indian claims court took an average of thirty years to settle. In our instance, the Alaska Natives , when that aboriginal title was discovered in 1965 or 1966, it took from 1966 when Willie Hensley explained that and revealed that law, from 1966, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71. Five years. A record time in settling a Native American claim with the United States Congress.

JP: So therefore do you feel that the welfare of the Alaska Native people was a primary issue in the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act?

FP: No. That was not the primary issue; the primary issue was the processing of the oil discovery, and transportation of it.

JP: You mentioned before, you were talking about the Alaska Native compared to the lower-48 Native Americans, do you feel that the Alaska Natives are better off or worse off today than the Native Americans of the lower-48?

FP: Publicly, there's a lot of bragging going on that the village and regional corporation concept is working really great. In fact there's a report issued by ANCSA CEO and President's Association where the native corporations have 2.5 billion dollar value in their assets. But if you look at the social service agencies of the state of Alaska, the BIA social services, you'll find that many of the Native people are still in poverty. So the impact hasn't been that great, realistically, but publicly those who want to continue the corporate concept are fighting to keep that concept.

JP: Where were you located, or where were you working when the Alaska Native Claim Settlement Act came about?

FP: I was working in Congressman Nick Beggedge's office who was the congressman from Alaska. I had gotten a fellowship award with the national Urban Fellows Program out of Yale. This is what took me to Yale for six weeks on an intensive study on urban economics and then after six weeks I got accepted to work at Congressman Beggedge's office, I was there as his special assistant for the remainder of the year.

JP: Being so close to the actual legislation process, what are your feelings about the process in which ANCSA came about, you mentioned the aspect of oil, but are there any other areas of interest for you?

FP: As example what?

JP: Maybe just the being there in Washington DC, did you see perhaps enough representation of Alaska Natives in the actual process? Did you see any evidence that they had considered Alaska Native issues, or people or culture at all?

FP: There was a few of the 65,000 Native that came down regularly from the time I was there and they had come there before, like 1966 on through 71, there was a stream of Alaska Native delegation people coming to Washington DC to talk with congressional folks and others to try to convince them that something should be done about these claims. But representationally, none of the tribes were actually represented. The Alaska Federation of Natives Inc. which is a state recognized organization of Alaska Natives was not a tribal entity. So there was problem there. When Nixon was president he came on the TV screen, it was recorded of course, and talked about the claims act and whether or not he should sign it. He said that AFN should vote on it but didn't ask the tribes to vote on it which is the problem we have with` the claims act. It extinguished our traditionally and customary subsistence rights. So they're gone for all practical purposes. And any claims that we had they're gone, no more claims.

JP: At that time you were talking about how the government should have asked the tribes, were there tribal governments in tact at that time?

FP: We didn't call ourselves tribes back then, we just called ourselves village councils which were in effect tribal governments. And the BIA recognized that because they were providing assistance to Alaska Natives individually and to the communities, the villages.

JP: How well prepared do you think the Alaska Natives were in accepting or complying to with ANCSA?

FP: They were not prepared.

JP: In what way?

FP: Well, the Arctic Slope Native Association was the only regional Native Association who voted against ANCSA because they had some legal help in interpreting the provisions of ANCSA and according to their review, their opinions it was not adequate for us. I think you could say that they looked at the land they were getting and looked at the land that they were losing, they looked at the amount of money they were getting and the amount of money, the value of the oil that was discovered up in Prudo Bay and in the Cook Inlet and the 962.5 million dollars was a drop in the bucket in their view. I'm just guessing at what their thoughts were about the inadequacies of the claims act, but I don't

know for a fact what their objections really were but they voted against it. But they were the only regional association then who voted against it, and being part of AFN the majority ruled and they passed AFN but not the tribes. None of the tribes actually voted to accept ANCSA. But in affect, what ANCSA did was affected each and every one of the tribes in Alaska, 231 of them.

JP: In your opinion, what can be done now, in regards to the claims act and the Alaska Native people in bettering their welfare?

FP: In my opinion, I think a lot of these corporations should be dissolved cause a lot of them are not working, and what they're essentially doing, those who are on the board are stuffing their pockets like I always say, instead of working for the interest of the shareholders they represent. And if you look at the way the money is spent in many of these village and regional corporations you'll see that the attorneys, accountants and other non-Native consultants are the biggest beneficiaries of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act.

JP: You mentioned before that a lot of the native Corporations should be dissolved, so there's obviously a difference between some native corporations and other native corporations. In your opinion, what's the difference between those that should be dissolved and those that shouldn't?

FP: Okay, in order for a corporation to be successful there's two ingredients that are necessary to succeed financially. One, you need an economic base, okay? You need a resource. What was the other one… oh! And you have to have people to be a part of that economy. In the villages we have, now, 90,000 Alaska Natives plus living in 231 villages, but the biggest village is in Anchorage where we have over 30,000 of the 90,000 people living in Anchorage and Fairbanks, the largest cities.

JP: So, on those two issues there lies the difference between those native corporations that are successful and those that are not. Do you think that the sole purpose of a native corporation as recognized by the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act is to be just financially successful?

FP: Well, people are trying to do other things like preserving the culture, but there's no economic returns for that. The education scholarships I think is the best investments that they're making as far as for our Native students is concerned. But otherwise, what's your question again?

JP: Do you think that that should be their sole purpose, to be financially successful?

FP: Yes, that's the purpose of a corporation in my understanding. Now if you are talking about General Motors, where they have a lot of revenue, a lot of assets, they can afford to get involved with museums or scholarships or charitable contributions but those of us who are very small, Koniag for example cannot afford to make those kind of investments or contributions, but they do and it's to our detriment of the foundation.

JP: Whose responsibility do you feel that it is to address issues of alcoholism or abuse or poverty in the village?

FP: They'd be the social service organizations and the State of Alaska are the ones who are responsible.

JP: I think that's it as far as the questions that I have, would you like to say anything else in conclusion?

FP: In conclusion there are many issues being revealed now at the present time where there's a lot of corruption going on within our native communities, especially the regional corporations. You've heard of the ENRON. World COM corruption where people are being convicted of certain crimes, well, there are similar activities going on in many of our regional corporations especially. But they're just not being caught yet. The laws, securities rules, for the State of Alaska were written by the attorneys to accommodate them and the leadership of the corporations, to the detriment of the shareholders. There is very little corporate democracy being practiced throughout the native community because of that. The leadership in many of the corporations, I'll mention CIRI, Koniag, Selista, are using lawsuit threats against their own shareholders, shareholders who are disagreeing or dissidents and asking questions about what is going on and they use threats and intimidations to keep them quiet. Well there is a lot of our shareholders, native shareholders are catching on to what is going on so I think there is going to be a challenge here in the next few years.

JP: Okay, I think that's it.