

Mentoring: What it means to me

By Nathan Nagaruk

I grew up in a village of about 300 people in western Alaska. My father died when I was nine years old and was the only son. This made me man of the house at a young age.

I needed as a boy, examples to follow, even though I was close to my father and knew him well. Some one needed to fill the void, and it couldn't only be my mother. After dad died I felt I grew up fast. I had friends that were older than me. Older boys that taught me how to hunt and men that helped me with my snowmachines and four wheelers and boats. There were many men and older boys that taught me. I was lucky to be blessed in that way.

The things I remember were commercial fishing with my best friend and his dad the year my dad died. We weren't paid much but we were around to watch how to make money commercial fishing. We worked hard and learned. I'm sure we were greener than anything but he put up with us. Running the boats continued all summer. I remember running the boat as we looked for berries to pick. It was during this time that I was taught how to be a man of the family and it was my best friends dad that was coaching me along.

My older friends and I would haul wood during the winter for our wood stove. It was a continual effort to maintain our wood pile for heat. I was taught how to fall a tree, branch it, cut it to length, skid it out of the forrest and tie it to the sled. This was a great way to learn to drive a snowmachine with a load and navigate through the trees with no trail. At the end of the day this gave me a sense of accomplishment. I was providing for my family. It would have been more difficult to learn without older friends to show me the ropes.

Mentors in my life came in many ages. As a nine year old when my dad died I quickly realized I needed to learn much. I am happy for the many men and older boys that filled a huge void in my life.