



“Jake from State Farm”

Jacob Wise

March 20, 1993 – July 28, 2020

“What you wearing Jake from State Farm?”

We used to tease Jacob about that T.V. commercial all the time. He’d laugh and say “Uhh...Kakis”

I first came to know Jacob as a little fellow when he started living with his Gram Nas and Ap’a Little Man in Chuathbaluk. From the time school got out in the spring until it started back up in the fall they lived full time at their fish camp a little above and across the River from Napaimute. In later years I told him how lucky he was to spend so much time with them – especially his Gram – in the fish camp setting away from the distractions and negative influences of the village. During those years at the fish camp with them Jacob learned many old time traditional skills and heard stories that many young people today don’t get to experience.

I also observed him always being respectful and always being helpful to his grandparents. It was good to see. As he grew I began thinking “Hmmm maybe he would be a good worker for Napaimute”

In early June of the year he turned 14 – the legal age to work – I went across the River to offer him a job.

He was still somewhat bashful of me. Throughout the years as we grew closer the bashfulness faded. But he was always respectful – even when teasing.

I asked him “You want a job?” He quietly answered, “Yeah”

I told him, “This is a real job. We start at 9 AM every day. You can’t be late. We work 8 hours a day – sometimes more. We work 5 days a week – sometimes more. You’ll get paid by check every 2 weeks. You still want to work?”

“Yeah” again was his quiet reply.

“Ok be over at the office by 9 Monday”

I went back to Napaimute.

6 AM Monday morning, I was awoken by the sound of boat starting up and coming across the River. In my sleepy mind I didn’t think nothing and dozed off for a couple more hours.

A few minutes before 9 AM I made my way over to the Napaimute Traditional Council Office. To my surprise there was Jacob sitting there! Then it dawned on me....that boat I heard at 6 AM....that was Jacob coming across. He was so eager to go to work he sat there for 3 hours waiting for his first job!

Jacob worked for the Native Village of Napaimute for 12 more years and he was never late. I could always count on Jacob to be there. The only time he was late was on those foggy fall time mornings. His Gram would make him wait until the fog lifted. Dependability like that is hard to find these days – anywhere. And to find it right here at Home along the River gave me a lot of hope for the future of our young People.

Over the years Jacob became much more than employee. We shared many important times together – both good and bad. I was there when he caught his first moose, first goose, and first King Salmon with a drift net. He was there when we buried our loved ones up on that hill. He was there many other times when I just needed help with something.

A wise man once told me we have one Father but can have lots of Dads. A Dad can just be an older guy that spends time with you and teaches you things – hopefully good things. Jacob used to tell me I was like a Dad to himmaybe. I know I’ve had lots of good Dads myself. I just wanted to pass along some of that to Jacob.

Jacob was taken from us by an epidemic far worse than the COVID-19 pandemic that is currently in the news every day and affecting our lives even here along the River.

The epidemic that took Jacob has been with us for so many years maybe we don’t even see it anymore. We just keep going to the never ending funerals and going through the motions of grieving.

In my little lifetime alone it has killed enough of the young people in our region alone to fill a couple of villages.

Now it’s taken our beloved Jacob.

The epidemic is alcohol abuse.

I wish the media, our national, state, and local leadership gave this sickness as much attention and threw as much money at it as they do COVID-19.

Maybe there would be more good young men like Jacob still around.

There will forever be someone missing from Napaimute.

Rest in peace my almost Son.

