James Dean Stories

Potential intro quote? Pulled from the questions: 51:09 – 51:42

“A few of the many stories that I can tell. But these ones, I guess, like, are just a little insight of who I am today, what got me here and just showing that I guess second chances and everything are real and it is all up to how you take it. And of course family and the importance and the culture and history.” – James Dean

**For the love of a child** runs from 28 seconds in until 8:06

Well originally when I was a baby actually, um or before I was even born, my mother originally wanted an abortion and my grandma she used to be a heavy drinker at the time, she would always have a beer in her hand and she would get like those big 20 cases or whatever size you get and she would always drink and that made her kinda not the best parent we’ll say. And she would only stop drinking when she ran out or when she passed out. And when my mom came to her saying that she was pregnant my grandma was actually excited but my then mom was still in high school so she wanted an abortion so that she can I guess carry on living her life. My grandma she begged my mom to have me born. She wanted a grand child but my mom was set on having the abortion. So then my grandma made a promise. She promised to my mom if I were to be born she would stop drinking. She would quit the very next day as a promise. My mom was hesitant at first but she agreed. She agreed that if my Gam or my grandma would stop drinking that I would be born and I could be under their care. SO my Gam made that promise. She said so that as long as that child breaths she would never touch a drop of alcohol and the very next day she got rid of all her beer and stayed sober ever since. Well in a sense her and I saved each other. My mom mostly used to have this kind of medical condition where she would always have seizures. So she wasn’t exactly fit to be a proper parent. But one of the things that kind of like drew the line was my mom used to end up going out to these parties with her friends or brother of her sisters and she would drag me along. And a lot of times I would be kinda forgotten about at these parties. And one day my uncle, he had a ball tournament in the Okanagan and they were partying here in Kamloops. And so he was pretty drunk but he wanted to get over to the Okanagan so he could be at the ball tournament the next day. So he went to find my mom who was already passed out and there was my just crying with a wet diaper and everything. So he took me and put me in the back seat in the baby seat in the middle of the car and started to drive to Okanagan. About an hour into the drive he made this turn and there was a big 18-wheeler making the same turn. The 18-wheeler ended up hitting the back of the car and kept on driving. My uncle was so drunk he didn’t even realize we were hit. The whole back end of the car except for the wheel was gone. It wasn’t until he kept on driving he started to feel cold. That is when he turned around an saw that the back half of the car was gone; there was just this big hole. And I was right in the middle. Basically right here, just a few inches away was where the truck hit. If I was any more to the left I would have been hit as well. So my uncle he pulled over, he got out of a car and he stumbled to try and find a house with a phone in order to call someone, leaving me in the car. So about like another hour or so later my grandparents were at home and they are almost like a two-hour drive away. They get a phone call at the time and it was the cops telling them that there son and their grand son was in a car accident. Immediate, it was like 3 in the morning, immediately they got into the car and they raced to where they said the car accident was. What would have take like a couple hour drive only took half that time. They were that worried. When they got to the accident there was ambulance and police and everything. The police were questioning my uncle cause he was drunk and under the influence while driving. And they were wondering where I was. I was outside of the car. And I was sitting in a puddle of mud with a diaper and my glass and everything. And I was just playing; I was just playing in mud having fun. My Gam immedialty rushed over to grab me but the police or the ambulance said they can’t take me right away they had to like check on me to make sure I didn’t suffer any like I guess injuries or like I guess cuts from the glass or infections. And like I said my diaper was full of broken of glass from when the window shattered. But when they checked up on me I was perfectly fine. I didn’t get any cuts not even from the glass the only thing was I just had a wet diaper full of mud and glass now. And I was playing, having fun. And that was like the time when my grandparents took me in and they made sure to be my legal guardians and take care of me and to make sure I was always home or with them and not to be taken out. And ya they are always there for me, raising me. I still got to see my mom and uncle. They both lived in the same house for a while, while I was growing up. SO I still love them both like despite what happened. They are still family. I hold, ya, I don’t hold any ill feelings. They are still apart of my family especially my mom.

Shannon (Interviewer): Ya, and where is you mom now?

James Dean: She’s living in Kamloops as far as I know right now. Like I see her or have seen her a couple of times. You know she is always happy to see me, I am always happy to see her. She always likes to invite me to have dinner with her. And well, we all come from difficult times within my family. We never exactly grew up with much. But I think that just made us appreciate each other more. It made us appreciate what we do have and to never take anything for granted.

Interviewer: Awesome. And how is Grandmother? Like what is she doing now? What’s your relationship with her?

James Dean: They are still both back at Marble Canyon, back where I grew up. They still live with each other. I get, I got this intern the winter break and honestly it was the best time I had for a while. I miss them. Like even though they are not too far away like and hour and a half drive away I still miss them. I miss hearing my Gam laugh when we watch comedy or funny stuff together. I miss sitting down with my Poppa and hearing about I guess some historical stories or part of culture our history or even just learning from him.

\*\*\* Possible Connection to this story from later in the interview\*\*\*\*\*\* runs from 16:24- 17:32

In a sense like I get a lot of influence from quite a bit of my family. But of course mostly I am influenced by my grandparents. Like I get, I get my comedy and my sense of humor and my light side from my grandma. Cause growing up with her she would always watch movies with me, she would always like to watch comedy, and I would watch them and laugh. And she even, she was even the main reason I started to art and drawing. She got me drawing since I was two years old. So ever since then like she would draw with me, she would draw me all these cartoon character from my movies and put them in a book and then tape over them so that they don’t get smudged or anything. And I always liked seeing her draw. And of course that got me drawing.

And as, like I said my grandpa he was like my main influence as well. Always trying to do my best like he did. Always trying to learn about our culture and about our history. And always I guess striving to do good for our people as well

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**The Fastest Stick-Horse Runs From 8:07 until 11:47**

Interviewer: And what are some of the stories that your Poppa would tell you. Like what is your favorite story that you’ve heard growing up?

James Dean: (Laughs) A couple of them are his own stories. One of my favorites that, there is a couple that I always remember. One of them is the “Fastest stick-horse in Leon’s Creek. He grew up in an area called Leon’s Creek which is towards Lillooet across the river. Before that used to be a big reservation a little village for First Nations. Where they would live off the land like the old style. They would grow their own food, they would hunt, they had a water source and they never really had to go to town unless they wanted to buy tea and sugar and that was the only thing that they would need from said town. And he grew up in this area as kinda like a hunter, trapper, cowboy. He did all sorts of things. But when he was really young he had, you know those stick horses right? Where it is just a stick and a horse head? Ya, him and a bunch of the other kids would climb on someone’s roof that had like one of those steel pipe chimneys that would stick out and they would tie ropes or strings around their horses and the said chimney. And they would run around in circles around the chimney having a horse race. And you can tell where they were because of all the dirt and dust that was flying off. And there would just be a cloud on top of a roof. And as they were doing this my poppa was young, pretty young at the time, his string actually snapped and he ran straight off the roof. And fell on someone’s porch and he ended up breaking his arm and a little bit of his back. He was unconscious rom the fall and none of the kids even noticed he was gone. They were still playing and even when they were done racing they went off to play somewhere else not realizing he fell off or was even missing. It wasn’t until I guess many hours later that his mom called them all to come and eat so they all went to his house and sat at the table ready to eat and Kia, I guess or I should say my great Grandma she just kinda looked around the table like where’s Buddy? And all the kids were like looking around like Hu, where is buddy? So they went down to look for them and he was still behind that house broken arm and everything behind a porch unconscious. Of course kee was extremely worried. And the thing was where they live they didn’t have cars. They had to basically ride all day by horseback to get to Lillooet which was the closest town. And even then they would have to cross the river using a pulley bridge kinda thing. So my poppa had to be put in the back of this horse that bouncing and everything on this dirt trail with out, with broken bones. He had to take this trip a lot when he was younger we’ll just say. But he always says whenever that happened even when he had his broken neck and broken spine, he was given some sort of yellow plant, he doesn’t know what it was. It was some sort of yellow plant that the medicine man would give him and make him chew and he would feel nothing. The pain would be gone. He says he doesn’t know, he doesn’t even know what it was that they gave him but it always worked.

Interviewer: Wow that’s amazing.

James-Dean: Ya, so after he got to the hospital had his arm and everything all fixed up, he ended up coming back he was declared to have the fastest stick horse in Leon’s creek. (laughs) Ya, I always loved that story.

**What to Do With Buckaroo! Starts at 11:51-14:01**

Interviewer: So what other types of stories would your Grandparents tell you?

James Dean: Well my poppa always told me like stories like Leon’s creek. And like how he used to be a bull rider and he used to break horses and everything. He was also always very athletic as well, even when he ended up going to residential school and even at St. Anne’s academy here, he was like the top rank at like soccer, boxing and basketball. And honestly there are so many stories I could tell about my poppa right now. Like if we were go back to Leon’s Creek, one of the ones that make me laugh was the story about when he was trying to break this one horse that was always giving him trouble. And I think his name was Buckaroo. But um this horse was very wild and it turned out to be one of his best horses. But for the longest time he couldn’t break him. And one of the stories he likes to tell me, he was trying to attempt to break, to break in Buckaroo one time. And the horse was trying to buck him off and actually jumped over the fence where he was trying to break him and ran into the village of Leon’s Creek. My poppa wouldn’t give up though. He wanted to break this horse. And his grandmother, who I just call momma cause was a clan mother; she had a garden and everything with like cucumbers, tomatoes and all that. And the horse started to jump through her garden crushing all her vegetation and my poppa was still holding onto the back. And momma heard the commotion and when she looked outside, she stepped out and started to cheer on my poppa like “Go Buddy GO! Come on, hold onto that horse! Don’t get bucked off just hold on to that Son of a bitch…” and my poppa was holding on but then he got bucked off. As he fell in, as soon as he got bucked off Momma came up to him and was like “ Look what you did to my garden! Look at my tomatos, look at my cucumbers, look at that! What did you do?” And started giving him hell for crushing his, crushing her garden when just a few seconds ago she was cheering him on and proud of him. (Laughs) That’s always one of my favorite stories too.

**What Goes Up Must Come Down Starts 26:26 to 29:50**

I guess like, I grew up fishing with my grandparents. We always fished in the traditional way of going down to the river and drying salmon or filleting them. (Cough) Sorry excuse me. But um, I guess like one of the funny moments I could think of was before I actually started to fish, like actually fish I was always stuck as like the pack mule, we’ll say, I always had to carry the fish or I would end up filleting or cutting the fish. And I would get bored down at the river cause I didn’t do as much work as my poppa who was actually fishing. Cause I was just too young at the time to learn how to fish. And there was this one day where we were down there all day and everything and I wanted to go home. And my poppa said we needed to catch ten more. So we were sitting there for a few hours and we ended up catching eleven. And I, I put them in the bag but I was in a rush to get back up, up to the top where our drying rack was. And I didn’t double layer the bag like I should have. And as I was climbing up, the bag ripped and all of our salmon just slowly slid down back into the river. And I just sat there watching it all sink in. Just very disappointed. And my poppa just laughed his ass off. He just sat there laughing, he wasn’t mad. He just laughed. He watched it all happen and laughed and laughed. And just said, “ Well, now we gotta catch ten more” and he just sat back down and got ready to keep on fishing. Of course like later when I actually started to actually fish, like my poppa was I enjoy fishing, it feels good and I actually enjoy it. That reminds me of another time when down at the river. My older cousin, who actually plays for the football team here at TRU, um, he was down with us at the time and him and I were down by the river and I was on the net and he would club the fish. And I end up catching a big one so I pull the net out and he grabbed the fish and he started to club it. And It was tangled in the net. He was like getting it out and everything , just when he got the fish out like that, the fish gave one last flinch and slapped his hand which made him let go of the net. And because I was holding the bag for him to put the fish in, no one was holding the net so net ending up falling into the river. And just kinda drifted out. But it was connected to a rope and a line so it was just out in the middle of the river. And me and my cousin look, “Oh NO!” like “We gotta get that net back!” And we didn’t want to have my grandparents up on top know so we tried to do it in secret. So I went around to the other side and I grabbed onto the rope and he grabbed onto the other and we kept on pulling until like the, trying to figure out how to get the net back over to where it was. So a good like half an hour we were trying to do that and everything. Actually no it was probably just like ten or twenty minutes but him and I were just trying to get this net back to where it was and everything, afraid to lose it. And it turns out like, poppa looked down and saw what we were doing. He always like to watch and laugh at stuff I did.

**United Through Speech, United Through Pain Starts at 36:34 ends at 41:40**

We had an aboriginal storytellers gala here at TRU. And it was a, it was a awesome thing for me because it was the one time that him and I got to speak together. A lot of times like he would, I would be up on stage giving speeches or talking and he would be in the crowd. Or he would be speaking and I would be in the crowd. And this was the first time ever that him and I were up together and we got to speak side by side. And that for me like was a very heavy and important moment. The moment that I wont forget. Cause again, the main reason I ever started speaking was because of him. And if felt hon, I felt very honored to actually be by him and speak.

Interviewer: What did you speak about?

James Dean: We were talking about the childcare system actually. Of how a lot of aboriginal children have been taken away from their families and being put into white families and everything. Basically like back in residential school, they will be taken out and be put into these different families and be raised. In a lot of cases these kids aren’t happy. There is, there was one story that hit me of like a young boy he was taken away from his sisters and everything and put into this one family and he was miserable. He missed his sisters and he wanted to go home. And he was posting stuff on Facebook about how he felt alone. And probably one part that hit me hard was he missed his grandma. He wanted to see her and talk to her. But because of his family he couldn’t, he wasn’t allowed to. And sometime after he ended up committing suicide. After hearing that like, it hit me in the heart when he said he just wanted to see his grandma, he wanted to talk to her. It made me think how I could have been in the same situation. I could have easily been taken away and put into a different family. I could have easily been never taught about my culture. About my history and most importantly I could have been taken away from my grandparents. And thinking about that, I don’t even want to know what I would be like. And it broke my heart hearing that a lot of these kids go through that. They are not given the chance like I am. A lot of them are taken away and never truly knowing about their culture or their people. And I feel like if you take that away from someone they’re lost. They’ll question who they are, they will try to question where do they belong in society. So this whole thing that we went with, it was to try and prevent that from happening. We wanted to give help to the kids who have been taken away. Showing that there are websites that they can go to, to express how they feel so that they don’t feel alone. So that they don’t feel isolated. So that they can seek that help. Then we gave information of how to prevent it for those who are in trouble. Again because these kids, they have a long proud culture and history behind them. And if they don’t learn about it, it’s not just affecting our culture it is also affecting their future. So this Aboriginal storytellers Gala, when we were tackling the childcare issue, we want, I was, passionate about this. Because I wanted to make sure that in the future, kids will have a chance to learn about their culture about their people. And to be able to stay within that culture and not be taken away into another family. I want other people in the future to have that sort of second chance like I was blessed with. To be raised by my grandparents. To learn about my culture and my history. I want that for everyone else too. I don’t like seeing other people suffer. I don’t like seeing people lost. I don’t like seeing people give up. And it’s sad to know that there is so many people in the world who feel that way. And feel lost. If I can help them I will try my best. Even just by talking. I guess, I just don’t like seeing suffering or sadness in general. I don’t like seeing other people being treated anything less than people. I guess that is why I am proud to be part of the equality committee. Cause that’s what we stand for. Equality for all people.

Starts at 49:14 and ends at 50:41

One moment, important moment in my life , I guess, was when I was really small. And my Poppa had to give a speech at a graduation at the Lillooet high school. And he was giving a speech congratulating the kids at the time. And Gam which I call my grandma, she was at home and she was by herself. And I guess my Poppa ,again I am just going to keep saying that because it’s more natural for me, my Poppa was giving his speech and I guess he was taking too long, so at a certain point in the crowd as he was in the middle of his speech I climbed onto a table, stood up and yelled, “Poppa hurry up!” and everyone turned and looked and said, “ Gam is waiting for us back at home you’re talking too long.” Everyone laughed and everything, someone quickly ran over and got me off the table sat me down. And he quickly finished up his speech grabbed me and we went home to Gam. And that was the first time I ever spoke in front of a crowd. And it was to interrupt his speech. So I never had a problem talking in front of a big crowd or speaking up when I had too. That’s never been a problem I had. So that was like the key starting moment I guess. The first time that ever happened.

**The Two Wolves Starts at 58:40 until 1:03:47**

Within the first nation culture we usually have our spirit animals. I guess I am going to tell another story of my poppa here, his animal is the bear. When he was small or when he was a baby the clan mother, which was his grandma, took the oldest son, which was him, since he was the only child at the time, and wrapped him in a bear skin and they left him outside for a winter night. A whole night. And they just laid him there and left him. And within the next morning that they came out to find him. They had to dig him out of the snow for a bit. But when they unwrapped the bearskin he was perfectly fine. He was still sleeping. He wasn’t awoken or anything. He was warm thanks to the bearskin and ever since then he was blessed by the bear and that was his animal. I will just tell you now he has a strange connection with bears even……

But I guess to the wolves’ story. I originally grew thinking that my animal was the bear like him. And one day during elementary, I believe, he just kinda shook his head and he said he doesn’t believe my animal is the bear. I was kinda confused so I asked him what my animal was. He looked at me and took and moment and said that he believes that my animal is more of the wolf. I guess it is because of my personality. Of how a lot of the times I am kinda like the loan wolf. I don’t really go around talking to too many people. But yet with the people I do talk with I make strong bonds. And in a sense they become, I guess, my pack. My family. And I guess that’s why he saw me as the wolf. At that time I didn’t know anything about the wolf. Back then I only saw it as a wild animal. Or a wild dog. So I decided to research the wolf and I grew to love the wolf as an animal. It’s a amazing creature I would say when I looked into it. But during my search I found one old Native American story that I still like to this day. It’s the story of the two wolves.

The story goes that there is this grandchild and he is very angry and upset toward his friend. SO he goes to his grandpa who is a medicine man. When he finds his grandpa he is looking into a fire and doesn’t look at his grandson. The grandson sits down and goes,”Hmpf”. The grandfather doesn’t even acknowledge him. Again but louder, “Hmpf”. The grandfather would not look or talk to his grandson. So the grandson would just start to say, “Grandfather I am very upset right now. My friend has done me wrong and I want to get payback on him. But yet I don’t know if it is the right thing to do. But the thing he has done is very bad. This is making me very angry right now. What should I do grandpa?” The grandpa would not say anything. He kept on looking into the fire just watching it. After a while the grandson got up and was about to leave. Until the grandpa said, “Inside of me there is a battle going on. Same battle is going on inside of you. It is between two wolves. One is white, one is black. The white represents, happiness, compassion, joy, selflessness, intelligence and…” I will just keep it short, “ it represents everything good that you can feel and do. Everything positive in your life. And the black wolf represents anger, greed, pride, well I guess like, again to keep it short, the black wolf represents everything negative and evil you can feel. From anger to sadness to hate, jealously. All the negative emotions you can feel is the black one. So the grandpa continued with the story saying, “These wolves fight what’s inside everyone, they fight to dominate the spirit. And they will continue to fight until the very end. To determine whether you will be good or bad. And so he puts the fire out and he is walking away. The grandson quickly turns and asks, “Grandpa which wolf will win?” I would usually ask like what would your guess be… but I guess I will just tell the answer, The grandpa turns and said, “Which ever one you feed.”