

Call number: 02-00-133-05_PT.8

Barrow Christmas, 1971

Summary created by: Summer Dougherty

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Notes: Originals on 7 inch reels. Master copies on CD.

Series:

(Continuation of the interview at the end of 02-00-133 PT.5)

A raspy-voiced man, Willie Sielak, is speaking in Inupiat and his son Clyde Sielak, translating for him.

They wrote down what the villages wanted. [Presumably they marked on a staff either what goods the villages wanted or which games the villagers wanted to play for the traditional competition during the shortest days of the year.]

The runners would go back to their home village with the staff that had the wishes of the villages marked on it. The village that would be hosting the games then knew, by the markings on the staff, what the other villages wanted.

When everything was all set, the people at Barrow or wherever the games would be hosted would have dogsleds run to the different villages with meat, foxes(?), whatever the villages asked for. The dogsleds would bring stuff to all the villages. After they dropped the things off at the villages, on their return trip to Barrow, they would bring back the people from the villages that were coming to compete in Barrow.

When the time for the games came, there would be two teams one for Barrow and one for Wainwright. They would have some kind of a race for ptarmigan to see which village would get the ptarmigan first.

Two men would run ahead of the rest of the team following. They would run all day long. If a man would fall down because he was tired, another man would take his place. Just before they reach the game, the last man has to run really hard to get it.

[There is a loud motor sound at this point.]

The younger man translates something about teams running around the house but not going into it.

They would then enter the house.

When everyone is in the house they start preparing for the games. When they are done preparing, the Barrow team and the Wainwright team come to one place.

When they are ready, they start having an Eskimo dance.

Just before the games are started, there is a feast and people give food to the runner from Barrow and the runner from Wainwright. The runner gets whatever he wants to eat, since he ran. After the feast, there is drumming and dancing.

They start singing songs. The translator says that the man with the raspy voice knows the song, but he isn't sure if the raspy voiced man will perform it. The translator says that this is his first time translating Eskimo and he doesn't know if he is doing a good job but he is really trying. Some parts he understood and some parts he didn't. The man with the raspy voice continues speaking in Inupiaq.

The translator says that when they start, there are two women on each end who follow the beat of the drummers. The women have wolverine tails and do slow dancing to the beat of the drummers. While this is going on they start singing songs and telling stories while the women dance.

The man describes a tradition involving the runners and a box(?).

A woman is having a conversation in the background.

The translator describes traditions about dancing. One man and one woman are leaders. When they start dancing, the leaders go first. After the leaders have started, people follow behind and they keep dancing until everyone has had their chance to dance. When the last two people dance, the drummers start to dance. When they come to the end, they let that drummers stand and start singing for the drummers. The two teams all go out. A man goes out without his parka. He has a bow and arrow and he is disguised so no one will recognize him. People come out of the house and they can start shooting at each other with bows and arrows. The man with the raspy voice was a small boy when he saw this. When the person's string breaks on their bow, this is bad. When the string breaks, the people know he is the bad one and that he is going to die. The man with the raspy voice gives the name in Inupiaq of the one whose bowstring broke. The following year he died.

The translator expresses concern with the quality of his translation again. They give their names, Willie Sielak and his son Clyde Sielak, translating for him. The tape cuts out.

There are sounds of a crowd. Hymns are sung. A woman speaks in Inupiaq between some of the songs.

The tape ends.