

Call number: 74-06 SIDE B

Grandma Minnie Tucker with Francis Baker, Minnie's daughter Edna Wilder and Margaret Harris.

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Notes: Original on 7-inch tape, master copy on CD

[Grandma Tucker sings a song.] Grandma Tucker tells that she doesn't like heights. Edna asks her to tell what the song was about and Grandma tells it's about marrying somebody [?]. Edna says it's about two women: one is kinda fat and one is thin. Grandma says that she can't sing like she used to. Edna tells that a long time ago the sickness came. Grandma worked and carried water for her sick relatives, out of whom many died. Grandma's hair fell off and she had fever. She tells that finally half of the people were dead and half alive. Everybody was red and it was summertime.

Her brother lost a son and a wife and Grandma Tucker lost her papa. She didn't get sick so she took care of everybody. Edna tells that she carried water, cooked soup and so on. Then her cousin got a little bit better and they went to pick berries. Edna says that Grandma Tucker doesn't even get cold except for once in a blue moon. She never catches flu. When she had her hip broken and went to Anchorage hospital, the doctor said that the prognosis wasn't good because of her age and said that people usually get pneumonia and die afterwards. Edna told him that Grandma doesn't even catch cold. Grandma confirms this.

At 5:43 one of the ladies asks if she knows why she's always in such a good health. Edna says that she now has her faith and she believes in God, but Edna thinks that she has a good diet with lots of protein. Grandma eats mostly fish, meat, eggs, berries and fruit, and tea. [Grandma Tucker says something unclear about her food.] Edna says she was talking about dried fruit and says that maybe high protein is the secret to Eskimo's [good health].

[Grandma Tucker sings another song.] The song is about a woman whose husband died. It's a sad song. [Grandma sings a song.] Grandma says that women used to sing that and cry, but she doesn't cry when she sings. One of the women asks if a group of women made the songs or if just one person who was mourning would make the song. She says each woman made her own songs. [Grandma says something unclear.] She says that some of the songs were for dancing and that there was a hole in the floor of the dance hall.

A woman asks how the dance hall looked like. Grandma explains that it was a big house that had a floor and places to sit. They danced around a hole in the floor. People sit underneath. They made a long tunnel in and they had a round door with a ladder. People were sitting on logs inside.

11:29 Edna says that Grandma Tucker remembers the first piece of lumber she found. It was a 2x4. One of the ladies suggests that she probably didn't know what that was. Edna asks her to talk about the two white man plates she found. Grandma tells that some people had a mine up there in Nome and there were lots of travelers. Two fellows stopped at their camp at Rocky Point. When they started to cool off dishes in the water [unclear] and left them there [?]. Grandma Tucker got those queer dishes. Edna asks if they were china or enamel and she says they were enamel. Grandma says she got a frying pan.

Edna says Grandma Tucker's mother used to make pots with clay and feathers. Grandma says they were lamps and they were made with ptarmigan feathers. She didn't use her blood in making the lamps. Grandma says that she's heard that dog fur is good fur. They burned the pottery in open fire. The clay was from around. Edna says there's different kinds of clay, and that there was red clay in the place where she grew up.

At 14:05 one of the ladies asks if the traders wanted their pots, too, when they came, but she says they didn't. Edna says they took them from grave sites. They also took jade and ivory from the graves. [Unclear talking.] Edna talks about a white man taking a big piece of ivory that was left on a grave. Someone got lots of beads [a white man again?]. The lady asks how they could stand having white men around when they behaved like that.

Edna tells that the white men also helped the Eskimos. She used to be very hungry in the spring time, but the white men helped them and they didn't have to starve. Edna says she has heard that some people don't like white man. Edna says that even where they grew up, the [river] boats came so far apart from each other in the spring that they oftentimes ran out of food staples and had to live off the land. Mailman sometimes bought them something.

At 17:08 the lady asks if Grandma Tucker remembers how old she was when the first missionaries came. She says she doesn't remember. Edna says she doesn't know what denominations were up there, but that one could check to find out. There were Catholics and Lutherans. There was a missionary named Hampton in Shishmaref who was [from] a Covenant [Church].

The lady asks how soon the missionaries came after the traders and if it is something Grandma remembers. Grandma says traders came a long time ago, but missionaries weren't so long ago. People didn't use to like them. The lady says it was no wonder because of all the grave robbing. [Unclear talking.] Grandma thinks they took the items from the graves for souvenirs.

The lady asks if the items on the graves were some of the more valuable possessions of the deceased that they wanted to have with them. Grandma Tucker says with Edna's help that they put everything the dead person owned on the grave. She's never seen children get much stuff, but old people did. Years ago some woman came [unclear]. She put hotcakes on the grave because the deceased used to like hot cakes. Dogs and birds ate the cakes, though. Grandma says they used to give food when somebody died. They'd put some food for the dead before they ate themselves.

Edna tells that when they killed a seal, they used to give it a drink of water. Grandma says they brought it in the house before they cut it. They took the head and put it in the hole in the ice.

At 21:42 she tells that a long time ago people would blow up seal bladders in winter time when they were seal hunting. Before they got guns they sometimes waited for a long time for seals to come to breath from the hole in the ice.

Sometimes they didn't get anything. Someone asks what the spear was made of and Grandma says it was made of rock or ivory or caribou horn. Some people used whale bone and string. Edna explains that they speared the seal and pulled it up with the string. Grandma says it was a seal-skin rope. Whale skin was made into a fishing line. They knotted the rope to make nets. She made a white whale net once but after it was made it was cut into rope. Edna says she has a tapping needle that they use that to tie their knots.

Grandma tells that before guns, they netted ptarmigans. One of the women says that Grandma just showed them how they measured mukluks by stretching her thumb to her forefinger and the mukluk bottom. To measure the net she put her elbow to the table and the net was made from elbow to the knuckle. The net was made of any kind of sinew. Edna clarifies that in sea they sometimes used rawhide for heavy nets but on land they always used sinew.

After the net was made, it was put on sticks that hold it until the hunting time came. [Unclear talking.] They rounded ptarmigan up and put the net "out there." Edna clarifies that they drove the ptarmigan into the net they had made. One net was made from ptarmigan leg sinew.

At 27:15 someone asks how long the net would be. Grandma told already how high it was, and says it was as long as it was made and Edna says it probably depended on the amount of sinew they had. They walk behind the ptarmigan and then rush them so they get tangled in the net. [Grandma Tucker says something unclear.]

A lady addresses Grandma Tucker and says she has seen Eskimos hunting with a bird [unclear, sounds like bullow, possibly a bola or bolo] that is rocks in a string. Edna says that is more in the islands. Edna says they got fish with a spear. Someone asks if they used nets in fishing at all. [Grandma Tucker says something unclear.] The spearheads were made of caribou horn and sometimes from some kind of flint.

29:28 Edna says her relatives had some copper bracelets "from way back" and Grandma Tucker says that some have them even now. They got the copper from

somewhere in Nome. Grandma says that two babies were born and somebody threatened to kill them because they made too much noise. A man and a caribou were born. [Unclear talking.] Somebody found a man kayaking [unclear] nest. [Unclear talking.] "Pretty big bird," one of the women comments. Grandma says that the bird was before white men came and it could carry people. Edna says they had stories of this bird and that on top of Rocky Point, way up high in the mountain, there was a ring of drift wood. They can see it on a bluff of the highest mountain; it's a circle of drift wood. Grandma suggests that maybe somebody made it into a shelter.

At 32:25 a lady says that she heard from someone once that someone thought years ago that Christianity was introduced into the area in the northern part. Sandy Jensen, whom the speaker used to work with, was talking about it, but she never found out where she got that information. It may have been something they found, and the speaker never got the story. Grandma Tucker says she found an elephant horn [possibly a mammoth tusk? Unclear talking].

Edna says that before the white men came, Grandma's father told them to work for 5 or 6 days and then take one day when they don't do any hard work. That was something they did a long time ago. The lady suggests that they took care of themselves. They could work too much sometimes and perhaps this was nature's way of have some leisure. Edna says that getting food, fuel, and clothes was the most important thing and that they kept busy with that. Young people were happy and not mischievous. Another lady says they didn't have the pressures of keeping making a living. Edna says they didn't have time to do much mischief. [Grandma Tucker says something unclear about cutting wood.]

At 35:29 a lady asks if Grandma still has the old Eskimo dishes that she used. She laughs and says she does. Grandma says her father made them [she is showing the dishes?]. [The ladies are looking at the dishes, talking about root that is laced.]

A lady asks if she knew Emma and Ester, but she says she doesn't. They were Grandma's nieces. [More talking about who knew them and who didn't. Looking at the dishes.]

39:30 The lady asks about Grandma's house. [Unclear.] They used to have hay that they put [unclear]. [They put hay on roofs and on perimeters of the house?] Grandma Tucker talks about sky-window and cooking [unclear] on stormy weather. One of the ladies says that she had a way to open the window so the smoke would go out. Grandma says that somebody opened a corner. Edna explains that they dug into the earth, put up all the hay and logs and then they covered [unclear] roof [she is probably showing pictures of houses]. Discussing how the Eskimos used grass for insulation and for insoles and how Grandma Tucker mentioned making a grass rug. Edna mentions baskets.

At 43:10 Grandma Tucker tells the Eskimo name for that grass and Edna explains that it has hollow stems and [unclear] and it grows on the beaches. One of the ladies has a basket that Grandma made. Grandma Tucker tells that she used to make baskets and sold them to white people. One of the ladies asks [jokingly] how many empty coffee cans she got for a basket. [Laughter.] Edna shows a basket that was made of sea grass. Ladies agree it is beautiful. [Unclear talking.]

A lady asks how Grandma starts the bottom of the basket. [She says nothing but is perhaps showing how she did it.] One of the ladies compliments that it's beautifully done and says to Margaret that one can barely see daylight through it. Grandma talks in Inupiaq. [Unclear talking.] Grandma tells that she killed the whale to make sinew for the basket. She shot it. There is another basket that she made after becoming modern [giggle].

At 46:17 a lady asks what Grandma used for a needle and Edna explains that an embroidery needle had a big enough of an eye. Grandma says that they used squirrel bones for needles a long time ago. When somebody went squirrel hunting, there were lots of needles. [Laughter.] Grandma talks about people being happy.

A lady says she heard that Eskimos are such happy people anyway and that they loved their children. [Grandma says something unclear.] A lady clarifies by asking if the only time they were unhappy was when somebody was jealous. Grandma says that when somebody cried, the people said she was jealous.

A lady says it's been fun to visit Grandma. Grandma indicates she enjoyed it too. They talk about maybe doing another interview. Grandma says she has good friends from white people. [Unclear talking.] A lady hopes to talk with Grandma again. [End of the recording.]