

**Diane Langfitt**

**on**

**Teaching in Noorvik, Alaska**

**by Dawnn Catt**

**April 10, 1995**

**Main Elementary**

**Kodiak College**

**Oral History Project**

DC: Today is April 10th. I am in a classroom at Main Elementary school talking with Diane Langfitt who is the kindergarten teacher. Today we will be talking about her teaching experiences in the village of Noorvik which is on the Kobuk River in Alaska and also some of the teaching here in Kodiak.

DC: O.K. Diane lets start by just telling me a little bit about yourself like where you were born, where you grew up, and that type of thing.

DL: O.K. I was born in 1959 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. One of four children and we always had a rather adventurous summer. My dad would always take three or four weeks off during the summer and we'd head out west and we'd go camping and hiking and live in tents for about a month. There were four children in my family so there was a big group of us. I've always really enjoyed getting outside, in the wilderness. I guess that's part of why I came to Alaska. I spent my growing years in suburbia, suburban Minneapolis. Went to college at the University of Wisconsin in Madison and got a degree in Elementary Education in 1981. My future husband, we were engaged at the time, was also in education. So, after graduating we got married and decided we wanted to go on an adventure. We had looked into the Peace Corps a great deal but then a recruiter had come through campus at the University of Wisconsin talking about educators are needed in Alaska. We went to the presentation and thought that sounded exciting and thought lets give it a try. So after graduating we got married 'bout a week later we headed to Fairbanks, Alaska where we took a course on rural Alaska education and were there with hundreds of other educators hoping to get a teaching job.

DC: So you weren't guaranteed a job when you went there.

DL: No. We came up more for the adventure and to see what we could get. The recruiter that had come through campus said that they really need teaching couples. They found that when two people came to Alaska together, they tended to stay longer. They had someone to support them and some familiarity They also liked it because they could put two teachers in one housing unit. Which was very important in alot of places. Housing is really difficult to find And so, we went thinking here we are great recommendations, graduated with honors, two of us married and educators, we'll find a job. We came not being guaranteed a job but felt that we would probably find one. They had educators from all over the state that came to Fairbanks during those three weeks of that course to interview and it was tremendous. I mean hundreds of people waiting in line. They'd get hours behind. You'd have an interview at 5:00 and finally at 7:00 you'd be called in. Our third interview went real well. I mean the interviewers were organized and they asked questions instead of complaining about all the mess that was going on.

DC: So did they interview you together as a couple?

DL: Yes, as a couple and offered us positions. We thought "Oh no! It's Northwest Arctic Borough District located above the Arctic Circle in northwest Alaska." We didn't know and we talked to the counselor there and they said, "Look, neither of you have any teaching experience. You might want to jump in and just see how it works." So we accepted that and had two weeks to play around Fairbanks while we were taking the course but then we didn't continue with more interviews and all of that stress and strain.

DC: What kinds of things did they go over in this course that you had to take before you were allowed to go up there and teach?

DL: It's not a required course but we had heard that it really gave you a good introduction and I'm really glad we took it. There were educators from around the state, Native and non-Native people, talking about life in the village. They told us really down to earth, practical things like alcoholism is difficult. It's a problem that many villages are dealing with. We were told things like if you bring beer in and drink you might want to close your curtains so that nobody knows. If they know that you have alcohol, that may create problems. I mean they got down to the nitty-gritty, little things of what it's like living in a village. They talked about ordering food so that you could have food supplies there rather than depending on the tiny little store that may or may not be in town or open on that particular day. They went through all that as well as education, the native peoples of Alaska, and we got to see a lot of video tape of actual villages so that we at least had kind of a vision of what it might look like. When we stepped off the plane in Noorvik in August of 1981 there were fifteen teachers in that village. It was nearing the end of the big oil money but still we had more teachers than we really needed. There were fifteen there. My husband and I were two of nine new teachers that year.

DC: That came on the plane with you?

DL: No, we were all coming in August. Actually I think there was only one new teacher that was there before us. We wanted to get there right away and get a house set up. And many of the other people who got off the plane, the new teachers when they stepped off, their chins hit the ground. This is where I'll be living for nine months? I don't want to break my contract but I don't know if I'll be able to handle this. Where we went at least knowing a lot about what to do and how to survive and how to get along and what it would look like and the difficulties and the rich experiences too that we would be having. So, I think it was really helpful for us just to get us prepared for what this might be.

DC: That first, initial shock when you stepped off the plane was the village anything like you imagined it to be?

DL: It was a lot like it. Besides having seen a lot of video of villages, we had gotten pictures from the school district, aerial photographs and stuff, so we even knew where the roads were and the houses and all that. So we could see that there were smallish trees. They weren't like the trees around here but many of the trees were actually tall but many of the trees were probably about five feet tall. We had some idea from pictures we had gotten through the school district.

DC: Did this start out as one of those you stay a year and pass through and move on to something else? Was that the initial idea when you went here or had you planned to stay?

DL: We came looking for adventure and with the notion we had to stay two years because we felt the first year it would be difficult just getting to know the community, our kids, our supplies, and trying to get things set up as far as school goes. We also felt the money to move and the warm clothes we needed to purchase and all of that if we didn't hang in there two years we were not doing it. So we came saying we really needed to stay two years and who knows how long beyond that.

DC: How long did you actually stay there?

DL: We stayed in the village for eleven years and would probably still be there today except that as we were nearing our late twenties and talking about a family we originally said we didn't want to have a family in the village. The nearest doctor would be, well the plane ride was a half hour but if there was an emergency by the time you call, you get a pilot to fly on over and get you and bring you there it was well over an hour. We felt with children, healthcare may be difficult. There are village health aides who are actually, many of them are quite knowledgeable. We had one in town that we trusted greatly with our health. There is a lot of turnover and many of them would have very little training. We felt a little bit uncomfortable about healthcare. We were a little concerned about childcare. We had felt that we wouldn't stay there. That we would probably leave before we had children. We had been married seven years and were nearing thirty and thought "Well, it's time to make a decision here. Either we start a family and stay or we leave and start a family." We decided we'd stay longer and we stayed until our oldest son was four years old and then we had a one year old also. We felt at that point and time we really did need to leave. Although village was good and we really enjoyed it, we felt that by continuing to stay there we were making a decision for our kids that they would always be village kids. It's really difficult for children to grow up in a village and make that transition to city life and we

didn't really want to make that decision for our kids. We felt that they needed the exposure and if they choose to return to a village that's fine. We didn't want to make that decision for them. We also wanted to give them a variety of experiences that they don't get in the village.

DC: You mentioned going in and out by plane. Was that pretty much the way you left and got to the village?

DL: The main form of transportation was the airplane. It was about a half hour flight to Kotzebue which was the local hub. We'd take a jet to Kotzebue and then generally a 207, six-seater plane to the village. In the winter, we would sometimes travel by snowmobile and winding along the river it was about a three hour snowmobile ride to get to Kotzebue. In the summer, people would take boats and it was even longer by boat because you could not leave the river where with snowmobile at times there were trails that went overland so you could avoid some of the twists and turns.

DC: So there are no cars or anything up there, right?

DL: There were about three pick-up trucks in town. The village is actually about a half mile from one end to the other and then the airport runway is out about a quarter mile out the other way and then there was dirt road that connected all that up. At times it was muddy and mucky and vehicles would get stuck. But the people who had vehicles generally were ones who had the airline contract. They had a job that they met every airplane and picked up the freight and delivered the freight to the post office or to the local stores. Most everybody else traveled by snowmobile, four wheeler, or on foot.

DC: Tell me about the people who lived in this village, the native people. What were they like?

DL: The village, there were about 500 people when we first moved in and by the time we left it was closer to 550. Probably 99% of the people in the village were Inupiaq Natives. The other people who were non-Natives were there either as school teachers or as missionaries, church people who came there to work with the church. The Inupiaq people are really in a transition. We found a lot of different feelings from different groups of people. The elders were all very accepting of everyone. They'd bring us into their homes. They'd share their food with us. They would want to teach us their ways as well as learn ours. I learned a lot of skin sewing and enjoyed that. They'd help me with language and the elders, when they spoke to each other, would speak Inupiaq. Although, they had good village English skills too. People really don't speak a standard English. They speak what we call village English. They leave out a lot of prepositions. They don't

worry about tense. Everything is worded as a statement but by voice inflection you know if they're asking a question or if they are giving a statement. The young people, especially the males 20-30, had a lot of difficulty with having white people come in. Making money and all. They feel really trapped. They no longer fit in the traditional role of hunting, fishing, being provider for the family, being enough. There's cable TV and electricity.

DC: Your kidding me, really?

DL: They got cable the last few years we were there. But all of that you need money for and the young men were really trapped. There weren't many jobs in town so there was not much opportunity to make money. They felt they needed to for their families and all. So often times, especially after they'd been drinking, you'd walk down the street and there'd be things shouted at you that were less than polite. Because they felt that they were really trapped and what could they do? The young women generally didn't feel that way. They still had that traditional role they could fill of having babies, taking care of the house, and sewing and cooking and all. And so there was less resentment from the young women. They were still comfortable with who they were.

DC: It sounds like they are still very much into masculine roles and feminine roles and the feminine roles are still intact but the masculine roles are breaking up. It doesn't seem like its going in the same direction it used to be.

DL: Yeah, although a lot of it, and they are still quite traditional in their views of male and femaleness. In some ways it's changed. A lot of the leaders or people who hold the important positions in the village often are women now. The postmaster was a woman. The people that work at the city were often women.

DC: Native women?

DL: Yeah. Local women as much so as men.

DC: Tell me about the schools? How was the school set up? How was that arranged?

DL: Actually there were two schools in Noorvik, an elementary school and then a secondary school. The elementary school when we first came, well, I don't remember how many teachers there were, maybe about five. So some of us taught in multiage classrooms, some in single age classrooms. I began as the K-1 teacher in the school.

DC: That probably changed a lot too depending on the year?

DL: Oh, every year it changed depending on how many babies were born that year. Generally we had 15 to 23 kids in our class just depending on how the numbers worked and how the oil money was fairing. As I said, when we first went we had fifteen teachers. When oil money got really tight later in the eighties, we dropped down to, they cut us to nine teachers. And at that point and time it was pretty difficult. We all had around 23 kids and either two or three grades of students with that number of students. So that we felt was less than optimum for those kids. By the time we left in '91 we were back up to about eleven or twelve teachers. So we had more students but also the recognition that that was too severe of a cut-back and that we needed to add a few more teaching positions. So over the course of the years I taught K-1. Some years I taught just first grade. I taught first and second. It just depended on how the numbers worked out. By the end though there was one teacher per grade, kindergarten through sixth grade.

DC: OK, then the rest of the school was what, seven through twelve?

DL: Seven through twelve was in another building downtown, a newer building. The elementary was uptown in the old part of town and was built quite a while ago and had been remodeled and was actually a fairly nice school. However, the sewer and water system was in really bad shape and there was a lot of erosion happening and it's been on the books for a long time. They need a new school and they've been lobbying for it with the state. We just saw this year it's fifth on the list of capitol projects and they are only going to fund four. Again they aren't going to get a new elementary, but they want to build an elementary right next to the secondary school. In the junior high and high school, the teachers are basically generalists. My husband has a social studies degree but he taught social studies, English, PE, health, math, whatever they need a certain year. And they rotated a lot of the courses because there may be six teachers for seven through twelve. The science teacher one year might offer biology for high school and the next year would be earth science or whatever but it would change so that all students would be exposed to those but not everyone say in ninth grade would get a consistent curriculum. Some may get it when they are in eleventh grade.

DC: I see. Now, did they go to school the same way they do here? Nine months of the year and then have the summers off.

DL: It was the same regulations as elsewhere in Alaska. Students had to attend 180 days. We had no spring break. And we had generally a shorter Christmas break so we would start the end of August and end yet in May. Our first year we ended May 21st and woke up to a snow storm.

We thought "Wow! Our last day of school and here we have snow." We had a number of times trying to leave in June in snowstorms that were pretty hairy. In fact you couldn't even get out sometimes when we had planned.

DC: What did you and your husband do in the summertime when you weren't teaching?

DL: We would head back to Wisconsin where I worked on a masters degree in reading education. He took courses alot too. We kind of set up shop in Madison, Wisconsin where the university was but our family all lived in the midwest so we would spend time visiting with our families also.

DC: Was that something that you really looked forward too? Say come March?

DL: Well, yeah. We weren't like alot of people. We would often stay in the village the whole nine months and never leave and be comfortable with that. Some people, once a month, would be like we got to get to Anchorage. Got to go out to a restaurant and go to a shopping mall. Things like that weren't as important to us.

DC: Did you get into the local hunting and fishing?

DL: We're really "outdoorsy" people so we would spend alot of time cross country skiing. We could ski from early in October generally to about mid-May. So pretty much the whole school year. We could head out our back door with our skis and our dog and ski off in the wilderness. That was always wonderful. We'd camp. One summer, in fact, we canoed down the Kobuk River. We went about three hundred miles from the head waters back to Noorvik. In the winter we would also camp. We liked to go ice fishing. And we'd do some fishing before the river froze up. But like I said, we were skiing in October. The river was frozen by then. Didn't get into alot of hunting. That wasn't something my husband or I really enjoyed. He went on some hunting trips but it wasn't something we did alot of.

DC: Let's get back to the school a little bit. Were any of the teachers native?

DL: Yeah, I'm trying to think. In the course of the eleven years we were there, there were at least four native teachers that I worked with.

DC: Originally from Noorvik?

DL: Three were from Noorvik and one was from a neighboring village. A couple of them had gotten their degree through the EXCEED PROGRAM. In that program, they stayed in the village and basically did correspondence work to work on their teaching degree. I believe the last, I'm not sure if it was the last year or the last semester of getting their teaching degree, they traveled to Fairbanks and did some student teaching and some work on campus. And that was how two of our teachers got their teaching degree. Lulu, I think this is her 22nd year teaching and she got her degree through EXCEED. Two of the other teachers were young, in their early twenties and they had graduated from one of the local high schools. Went to college elsewhere and then came back to the village. One of the young women who had returned to her own village to teach, stayed two years and then transferred out. She found that really difficult.

DC: Staying or going?

DL: Staying. Teaching in her own village which she had her nephew in her class and other relatives too. When there'd be a problem and she called the parents, she found it really difficult to deal with the parents. The parents would often be upset with her. "Your his aunt and you shouldn't be picking on him." Things like that, after two years, she felt she could not stay. It was too difficult teaching her relatives. Where the other teachers that were in the village were older and had been around quite a while, I'm not sure if they went through that when they were young and had just overcome that through time or if it wasn't kind of a changing society where teachers were now being questioned where they weren't when those other people started. It was a difficult situation often times.

DC: That's interesting because that's, you know. Even in a small village I guess you have the same problems evolving that you do in any city school.

DC: How about the curriculum? Were there any Native customs or language? Was any of that part of the curriculum that you taught?

DL: As I said earlier, the elders spoke Inupiaq fluently but the people, probably 40 and under, no longer spoke the language. They understood Inupiaq and would use a lot of Inupiaq words. In fact, the kids that I taught, 5 and 6 year olds, constantly threw in Inupiaq words into their English vocabulary as they were speaking. So I learned a lot of Inupiaq, but I can't sit down and listen to a whole conversation and know everything that's happening. I pick up on words and get the gist of it at times. But because the language was disappearing, that was difficult for a lot of people. They wanted to keep their language going but TV had been introduced, there was radio, it wasn't happening in the home so the school board decided they would make a concerted effort at

school to try to preserve the Inupiaq language. So local village people were hired to come to school. Actually their position was an instructional aide. They would come into each classroom for thirty minutes everyday, beginning in kindergarten, and they would do Inupiaq language and instruction. The central office coordinated people to come and develop materials, workbooks, storybooks that were in Inupiaq. And they worked mostly on vocabulary, some on the Inupiaq alphabet, but I really didn't see that it was making any difference. The kids for a half hour would practice "Uva una uglon. This is a pencil. Uva una ilisotri. This is a teacher." But it wouldn't carry on the rest of the school day nor once they left school.

DC: Is Inupiaq a written language?

DL: Inupiaq was written down in the early seventies when missionaries came and the written part was somewhat evolving when we came. Many words ended with "t" and while we were there they changed it to a "q". But they have a different alphabet.

DC: You know, It's funny you said that because I tried to do some research on Noorvik. There's nothing written on it but I did find some things on the Inupiaq Natives and half of it was written with the "t" at the end and half of it was written with the "q" at the end.

DL: Right, they changed that. As time went on.....

DC: I had that down here to ask you. Which one is right and now you've answered it.

DL: They say "We're Inupiaq" with a q. Originally it had been written down with a "t". But, so the elders never wrote it down. It was never a part of their culture but it has been written down. But the language is disappearing quite quickly and it won't be too long before the speakers of the language are passing on and there aren't young ones that speak the language and will continue it.

DC: In addition to language, did you teach some of the cultural things?

DL: We would have Inupiaq Day probably about once a quarter and it would be organized by the Elders Council and the principal and the school board and the teachers. We would all get together and during Inupiaq Day we would do various traditional activities, carving willows into hooking sticks for ice fishing. Women would bring in twine and show how to make fishnet. Sometimes we'd be scraping skins and talking about tanning.

DC: Real skins?

DL: Yeah. They're everywhere. That's no big deal. In the afternoon we'd all go outside if it was March or April, out on the frozen lake and play Eskimo Football. It's similar to soccer using a fur ball. A hunk of fur that's sewn into a ball. You run along and kick it and scream and yell and have fun. So there would be that organized activity. Beyond that we would include a lot of what was around us, native plants and animals, in our studies. I remember my first year, I spent a lot of time outside with the kids and exploring. Like when we were learning about plants we'd actually get out there and we'd be identifying and we'd be tasting and we'd be cooking and figuring out about what was out there. So we tried to include a lot of what was there in what we did.

DC: That kind of sounds like the "hands on" approach that the urban schools are trying to get into.

DL: Sometimes, some of the things that were brought up in school that were traditional, it was difficult to deal with because they have a lot of beliefs that date back to Shamanism. When those things would come up I always felt that I didn't want to impose my western views on say the "injukin". Injukins are what they believe are little people that are out there and are hiding and are rather evil little beings that can grab you and take you and things like that. And they hear about it at home and at church and from friends and family.

DC: Is that like, don't go outside or the injukins will get you? Kind of like a boogy man?

DL: Yeah, something like that except the kids would come to school and say "There's a injukin, under Carter's house. I see 'em." And so sometimes it was difficult trying to not squelch their culture but yet let them deal more with reality. I felt it was difficult to try to--do I step in here and tell them of my belief, do I allow them to continue to hear and believe about Injukins? That's just one example but often times it was difficult. Where do you draw the line?

DC: I was talking to Sarah Babbitt about when she taught in Port Lions and she was telling me some funny stories about how one time, she had to order all of her supplies, she ordered bologna for her kids for lunch. The plane comes in and she gets this six foot long, humongous roll of bologna which they had to cut in half to get it in the plane. Do you have any funny stories like that you probably wouldn't have gotten if you hadn't have gone?

DL: We did used to order all of our food. There was a little store in town that had canned goods and boxed goods like macaroni and cheese dinners. It was really expensive. A box of potato chips back in the early '80s cost \$5.00. So we didn't buy there too often and would order out of grocers in Anchorage. There were and still are a lot of grocers that have catalogs and you sit

down and you go through the catalog and you order how many and what size and what brand. You fill it all out and you send off about \$600 at a shot. You have to always plan about a month in advance because it takes about a week for them to get the mail and a week to pack it and then a couple weeks to get it back to you. When we had babies that was always something that we really had to be aware of. Diapers and...

DC: Formula?

DL: Yeah, I breastfed fir about a year then after that, you know, "What are we going to need?" And you always had to think ahead because if you ran out, tough luck. So that was always something that was rurther a chore and I always forward to being able to go to the store and pick up something if I ran out instead of thinking a whole month in advance.

DC: Especially with children, you never know what you are going to need or what's going to happen. Tell me about the kids that you taught.

DL: My kids were.... Well I still remember that first day of school really well. I had about fifteen little kindergarten and first graders and we were all sitting in a circle. I was trying to introduce myself, a little bit about me. I was new and find out from them.

DC: Had they met you before this first day?

DL: They had seen me around town. Some kids had come to our cabin and so we had met them there but we hadn't met everybody yet. And I remember, for some reason, I was asking Doug this question. I asked him and he sat there. So I asked him again and he sat there. Finally the third time I asked him, someone else in the circle said why do you keep asking him. Well because he's not answering me. They said he answer you, he "itnuq". And itnuq is one of there words for "did this". And they raised their eyebrows. And I said yeah....what do you mean he itnuq. He itnuq! And they all started pointing to their eyebrows and I realized at that point that not only are they using Inupiaq words but that alot of their speech is going to be through body language. And so I learned to pay attention right away to their facial expressions. If they raise their eyebrows, its affirmative. If they put their eyebrows down, it's negative. So right away, the first day, it's like boy this is going to be a challenge trying to understand each other.

DC: How about their writing? Was it different trying to teach them writing?

DL: They wrote the way they talk. So if they wanted to write, we go store, they would write

"We go store." And I was accepting of that. I mean, how could they write anything but how they speak. Writing is your speech written down. That was something that was kind of difficult to deal with when we would have language experience charts that would be in village English. Sometimes I would go back and I would say this is how I would write this or I would model other ways. But they would write the way they spoke in their village English. One challenge was their language and their experiences were different than mine and different than textbooks. When we'd give the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills, I would cringe through the whole thing. I would read them a story about someone who had a goat and the goat replaced the lawnmower and in the end they had to figure out what it was that I was talking about and color the circle next to the lawnmower. They had no idea what that was. The next one was about a boy taking the garbage to the curb. Well, they don't have curbs they just have dirt paths basically. So there were often many things that were difficult because they didn't have the experience that many 5 and 6 year old kids would have had if they lived elsewhere.

DC: All of your materials and text books came from elsewhere, right?

DL: (affirmative gesture)

DC: How did you get your supplies and things?

DL: There generally was quite a bit of money for supplies. My classroom was so well stocked when I walked in and I had lots of money the following Spring to order and we would order by the end of March, we had to have our orders in for the following year. It would take that long. When we showed up in August they'd all be piled up in the hallway and most things would be there and ready to go.

DC: Do you think that was because of the oil money?

DL: Yeah, before we went, they used to take the whole district teaching staff to Anchorage for a week long inservice. By the time we got there, they were no longer doing that. During the time we were there the money was cut back so severely that they made big cuts in teaching staff even. It depended on the oil money, what you had or didn't have.

DC: What was the entertainment in Noorvik for teachers and Natives alike?

DL: A lot of outdoor things. Basketball was really, really big in rural Alaska.

DC: With a fur ball?

DL: No, no. A real basketball because you just need a small space, the gym. You only need five people. City league basketball is really big for community people. The high school teams were a big focal point, in fact, we watched the Noorvik girls win the state championship this year. Third time in four years.

DC: Did you know any of them?

DL: Oh, yeah. They were my old students. "Hey look! There's Lois, there's Brenda, oh she.." and we sat here and cheered them on because they were my old students and my husbands old students. He moved from high school to fourth grade for our last three or four years so he had those girls also. Basketball was really big. Dog mushing, races, were alot of fun. The Kobuk 440 just ended this last week and that ran through Noorvik. We would get people like Susan Butcher and Rick Swenson that would come through and that was always alot of fun as well as sprint racing. We'd have high school dances once a month and that was entertainment for the high school kids. Nobody else would be involved. We'd have all the lights out except for a strobe light pulsing away. We were class sponsors for four years. We started with them as freshman and worked with them until they graduated so we got to chaperone alot of dances. Alcoholism. Alcohol was often an escape for many people and still is. And is a real problem in rural Alaska. Generally people didn't see social drinking. When someone would get a bottle they would take the top off and through it away. You don't put the bottle down until it's empty and whoever is there, I mean its not just one person, everybody drinks until its gone. So alot of people did alot of drinking also. Our second year there, we voted on the local option laws that had just been passed by the legislature where there are five different options for a community as far as alcohol. We voted that alcohol sale or importation into the village was illegal. So it, drinking went underground. People couldn't openly come back with liquor on their sleds behind their snowmobile. We probably saw less people walking around drunk and in fights but it was happening in the home even more so. Which was often upsetting when the little kids would talk about brother throwing the TV through the window. He was drunk and yelling at mom and things like that. And with that the cost of alcohol, bootleggers just make a mint. I mean they make, I think, a bottle of alcohol cost well over \$150 in the village when bought from bootleggers.

DC: One of the times I came into your classroom here at Main, all the kids were walking up to me saying, "Oovlalotuq Mrs. Catt". Can you tell me some of the other things you have brought to your classroom here at Main

DL: I've done alot this year because the Imaginarium in Anchorage brought an Arctic exhibit to Kodiak so the whole month of January that that was here at our school we all studied Arctic ecology. I spent time in all the primary classrooms and in the fourth grade classrooms showing slides of when I lived in the Arctic, sharing language. I brought my fur clothes that I had sewn and that friends had sewn for me. I brought my mukluks, brought some skins in and I taught alot of the language. Well.....not alot of the language. They got a smattering. We learned "Naquaq, Tui,Sitquaq,Puterug " which is "Head,Shoulders,Knees, and Toes" we sung that. Ovlalotug is good morning and Ovlalootug is good afternoon. Ilisotri is teacher so often times the kids still come in and they still say, "Ovlalotug ilisotri" which is good morning teacher. So I did share some of the language with them too. That was alot of fun. I enjoy doing that and I find people have alot of questions and misconceptions and some ways they are right. I'd often get chuckles when I tell them when I first moved to the Arctic that I lived in a cabin that was 12ft by 16ft and we'd walk it off. I told them I had no pipes in my house at all so I'd carry buckets of water home from school so we could cook and clean and have water to drink. And we had a bucket in the corner behind a blanket if we had to go to the bathroom. The kids are just amazed by that. We had no bathtub or anything. We chopped wood. We had an oil stove but oil was really, really expensive and so we suplemented with wood and we spent all weekend out cutting wood to use to supplement the oil heat in our house. We'd have the oil heat on low while we were gone all day and then we would stoke up the wood stove when we got home so it would be warm. We'd wake up some mornings and the dog's water would be frozen sitting in the kitchen. We had a teacher friend in another village who ended up pitching a tent in his living room because the roof was so bad. It would snow into his living room so he'd go in his tent so he wouldn't be snowed on. Housing was really difficult and you had to live in whatever you could. And so when we came we were the first new teachers and we got the best hous we could find and we were still hauling water and going to the bathroom in a bucket.

DC: Was this a government provided house?

DL: No. It was a local community member's house that he had moved out of. He rented it out then. We had no water, no refrigerator, no stove. We cooked on a coleman camp stove until we were able to get an electric hot plate and an electric, convection, countertop oven so we could bake. The refridgerator was, depending on the season the "kanisug", which is the Arctic entry, unheated. We would put our food in the kanisug that we needed cold during the Fall and Spring. In the winter, we'd just move it in and keep it on the floor and it was plenty cold to keep things nice and cold.

DC: For eleven years it was like that?

DL: No, oh no. that was our first year. It was really difficult with being first year teachers and having to order food and everything else to survive and then all of the chopping wood and the hauling water and emptying the "honey bucket" and all of that took alot of time. Then that Spring, some teachers were transferring out. There were two teacher housing units that were run by the school district and many of the new teachers applied for the housing and the way they have their housing policy is first if two married teachers are requesting a unit then they get first priority. Then two non-married teachers, say two single women teachers, they'd have next priority. We had top priority so we were lucky enough to get in. It was a duplex, a two bedroom home where we had running water and a water heater and a washer and dryer, a refrigerator and a small chest freezer so we felt like we were living in a castle. When we'd leave in the summer and go back to the real world and see how most people lived, it was like "Wow, our place is really a dump. The floor is up all over. The paint is peeling. The mold was so thick on the windows. But we felt pretty fortunate that it was warm and that it had running water.

DC: What did the Natives live in?

DL: Very few lived like that. (like the first cabin) The old part of the village was up on the hill and that's where the teachers ended up living because as time went on the federal government mostly through HUD had built homes downtown, its downtown because its down the hill, and they had houses in rows. They had a sewer and water system put in down there and so as those homes were built and people were allowed to move in that left the old, what they called cabins because they were small and had no running water, up on the hill were then left open and that's where teachers generally lived. There weren't any of the newer homes available. They were of course built for the local people. There was always someone ready to move in if somebody moved out. They continue to build more and more HUD housing. When we were leaving in '91, they were building ten new units. Those were all for people who were still living in homes with no running water yet. Some of those were elderly people and some were new young couples with a few kids that had been living in cabins and were ready to move into a place with running water. It was an adventure (living in the cabin) for one year. I don't think we could have stayed very long if we had to continue with that. It just took so much of our time. Hauling water back and forth and heating it to wash up. There was a washer and dryer down at the high school which was a good half mile away. On weekends we'd load up our laundry and we'd go down there and we'd camp out for a few hours but of course all the other teachers who didn't have running water were there on the weekends too. It was often a challenge to try to get everyone's laundry done. You kept thinking, "I got to get out and get some wood or it will be cold come Wednesday." The January when my oldest son was one year old, we had six weeks where the warmest it got was -40. It was -40 to -60 for six weeks straight. Planes couldn't fly because it was too cold. We had

two babies born in the village because the women could not get to Kotzebue where the doctors were because the planes couldn't fly. There was a problem with one of those births and they got the Civil Air Patrol pilot to really work on getting his plane warm enough to get out and get her and the baby back to the hospital. It was pretty touch and go with them. But that was a trying time. Everbody's pipes froze, including the schools pipes, froze up during that six week period. When it started to thaw, when the pipes would thaw, we'd find cracks and the water would be leaking into the school and into the houses. You'd have to turn the water off and punch a hole in the wall and repair the pipe. Then turn the water back on and find where water is leaking out of another place in the wall. And then you'd turn off the water and punch another hole in the wall and repair that section of pipe. That was a real tough time for the village. We didn't get food coming in. We didn't get mail. After about four weeks we did get some relief. A Twin Otter from Barrow that could fly in the 40 below range was sent down to try to help out with some of that for a little bit until it warmed up. Once it got in the -30, the other planes could generally fly.

DC: Was that the coldest you ever remember it being?

DL: Yeah, Dylan had a really high fever. Even with Tylenol it was like 104. I went to the health aide and I was crying and she came over. We had buckets of water there that we had carried from a storage tank at school so we didn't have to go cut river ice. Trying to warm the water enough to get him in it to bring down his fever because it was really cold water. It was tough. There were often times like that where everybody had to ban together.

DC: Tell me about your "knitfest".

DL: This is another thing we did weekly for entertainment. The school secretary would invite, basically it was mostly school employees but there were Native women. Her son was married to a young Native woman and she always came. It was just people from town and we all met at the school secretary's house every Thursday night. We'd bring our sewing or our knitting or whatever and someone would provide a treat each week. We'd get together for a couple of hours and we would just yack and drink tea and make things. That was often when, when I was making my parki, Frances, one of the Native elder woman, who usually came showed me how to cut Arctic fox to make a ruff and to make the trim for my parki. We would work on projects like that. That's when I learned how to sew beaver hats. I'd bring the beaver and they'd show me how to cut it and how to sew it. And so, I learned alot of those. It was a fun time for us all to get together and catch up on the gossip. I've made lots of baby mukluks but I've not made grown up mukluks. Baby mukluks are more for show, not for warmth. Generally grown up mukluks, the upper part

is made out of caribou and the sole is made out of moose. And I tried tanning fox and it was an ok experience with the fox. Then I moved to beaver and I ended up with like a fur frisbee that we would throw around the house. It dried too quickly and it was hard as a board. It was impossible to sew. After that experience, I thought do I want to move up to caribou and moose and I said, "Naw!" I don't want to try tanning those so I left that to my friends and that would be a way for them to earn some money too because they would sew mukluks and I would pay them, I forget how much, maybe \$75 for a pair of mukluks. For them there was absolutely no cost. They would use caribou that someone had shot. They'd use moose that someone had shot. They would dye the sole with willow that they would gather. I guess the only cost was the dental floss that they would use to sew it together with. I've seen sinew and how you use sinew and make it into thread but its a really long and difficult process and they found that waxed dental floss can hold really well. It's cheap. It's easy to use. It slides through the fur pretty well and will help make it water tight. So that's generally what people used. It meant alot of time and effort but it was all process. There were some women in town who were willing to put the time in to get the money. So I never sewed grown up mukluks but I did baby ones for show with little ribbons on them.

DC: Could you buy boots and coats that were warm enough or were the handmade things the best things to have?

DL: You could order these rubberized army bunny boots through the Army-Navy store in Anchorage that were really warm. They were supposed to be the best. But mukluks are warmer but they're not quite as sturdy. If you are going out chopping wood and you're tromping through the forest you tend to get cuts in your mukluks and then the snow gets in. If it's at all wet, mukluks don't work well. People still sew fur coats. Women and men have coats made out of muskrat fur. They probably are warmer but there aren't many people still doing it.

DC: Thank you Diane for talking with me about your village experience. I really enjoyed listening to your stories and I appreciate your time. Thank you.

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