

A NATIVE WOMAN'S JOURNEY:
THE LIFE OF ANNIE SHANGIN

By
Tanja Peterson

On December 3, 1994
at Annie Shangin's home

KODIAK COLLEGE
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

A NATIVE WOMAN'S JOURNEY:
THE LIFE OF ANNIE SHANGIN

TP: Annie when were you born?

AS: December 16, 1947.

TP: Where were you born at?

AS: Perryville, Alaska.

TP: Where is that at?

AS: Perryville is between Chignik and Sandpoint on the Aleutian Chain.

TP: When you lived in the village when you were a little girl what was it like?

AS: When I was a little girl I remember, Do you want me to talk about the alcohol? When I was a little girl I remember everybody drinking in the village and partying all the time. There were no rules so nobody thought it was wrong.

TP: So was it a happy childhood?

AS: When I was about eleven years old missionaries came down and I didn't want to stay with my mom because she remarried and I didn't want to stay with my dad because he remarried. So I talked to the missionaries and I went to a Christian home up in Palmer for two years and then to Wasilla for two years so I went off for four years on my own.

TP: It must have been tough!

AS: When I look back there were lonely times, you know but I

think I was in a better place than being home and being molested or getting pregnant at a young age. And it has helped me. When I did go home and I was about fifteen or sixteen my dad tried to marry me off because the old way was that they picked a husband for you and my dad mentioned it and Ooh! I didn't want to get married! So what I did was I went up to the school and signed up for . We had to go out to high school during those times because we had no high schools in the villages. So I signed up for Chemawa, Ore. and Mt. Edgecumbe. I didn't know what school would pick me but I went to Mt. Edgecumbe. My dad didn't sign the papers but my stepmom did because she knew how bad I wanted to get out of there. Then I went to Mt. Edgecumbe and I never went back. I came to Kodiak and stayed with mom.

TP: Were you taught Native traditions in your village, or not even in your village but when you were growing up?

AS: I think we grow up with native values and traditions and keep them without ever really losing them. You know today I catch myself teaching my kids what I did when I was a little girl. You know certain things like curfew for sure, my dad was really strict with that and I did that with all my kids. You know in at a certain and to bed at a certain time and I think it is just one of those rules that once you grew up with them I think that's what you teach your kids. And I remember church and holidays. We all had to go to church and then I remember people would drink and drink during

those holidays when I was little. So I think I look back and see my time away from home was probably better for me. You know not everybody had that opportunity or the courage to get out of it. I missed my family but I think it was better for me. I still like dried fish and seal, ducks and all the native foods we eat. I still make agooduck.

TP: What's that?

AS: It's black berries mixed with Crisco and sugar.

TP: I tried some of that up at the K.A.N.A. gathering this summer.

AS: Oh! In Perryville we make it with the Crisco, berries, and the sugar. And when I married Nick and moved to Akhiok they made it with, they called it Phahenac and it was made with mashed potatoes and fish eggs and I couldn't eat that!

TP: Yeah, did it kind of taste like carrion?

AS: It was real stink?

TP: Yeah, that's the one.

AS: Yeah, my kids couldn't eat it either.

TP: Yeah, I couldn't eat it at all!

AS: When I moved to Akhiok I made it my way and the people just loved it. But there are people that could eat that Phahenac from morning, lunch, and night time. Three times a day. I couldn't and my kids tried it and vomited.

AS: My grandma and grandpa.

TP: How do you remember your parents?

AS: Ah, I love both my parents but I was real young, I think I

was about four and five when my mom and dad got a divorce. But before that I remember dad always beating mom up. My mom never drank but my dad did but it seems like I remember as men being...always beating their women up. You know, it seems like all the guys beat their women up and I remember hiding with my mom and if dad beat her up and if she got away she would be gone for days. And then when they split up I remember dad staying in the house and mom walking through the door with her suitcase and dad said, "Do you want to go or do you want to stay?" And I just sat in the middle of the floor and cried because I didn't pick no sides. And it wasn't until I was, gosh...

TP: So you stayed with your dad.

AS: I stayed with my dad, well, I stayed with my dad for probably six months and then I would come home to Kodiak with mom for six months. I had one older sister or younger sister than me and we both traveled together. And then there was a baby that was given to my grandma and grandpa to raise so I did a lot of traveling.

TP: Who was your favorite relative while growing up?

AS: Probably a cousin of mine, somebody that sort of took me under their wing. We shared secrets.

TP: How old was she when you were your age?

AS: Probably sixteen, seventeen

TP: And you were sixteen, or seventeen too?

AS: No, she was three years older than I was.

TP: Are you still close today?

AS: Yeah, we are. She still drinks though. But I don't see that as a block you know, it is just ah.. an opportunity...

TP: Something that is always between you, closeness. When was alcohol introduced into your village, was it when whites brought it in or was it...

AS: I think I remember my mom and her girlfriends talking about it in their teens when the P.T. boats when there was a war going on I think? They used to travel up and down the coast.

TP: So it just seemed natural for you to see people drinking, and that you didn't know anything different.

AS: Oh yeah, No one ever said 'Don't drinks, it's bad for you.' 'Don't drink, it will get worse' or 'You're an alcoholic.' There was nothing said like that. Your grandparents did it, my dad drank and my mom didn't until her later years. And I drank with them and in a village you watch your grandparents drink, your parents drink and you watch everybody drink during holidays especially. It's like a... tradition! You know, if they drink you drink it was the thing to do. And being in a Christian home alcohol was never brought up because it wasn't a problem in there so we weren't taught about drugs and alcohol. I got married and then in the village, when we went to another village, everybody drank! And I think I felt like an outsider and in order to fit in I drank with them.

TP: How long were you married to your husband?

AS: For twenty-three years.

TP: And you drank with him?

AS: I drank with him.

TP: How would you classify your drinking?

AS: It was like holidays first, we drank just on holidays, then it got to be to everyone's birthday, then it got to weekends, and then it got to if it rained or shined. I mean my alcoholism was getting so bad to where it didn't, I didn't matter. And I drank and I got to the point where I wouldn't drink one day but for days. And Nick and I...I wouldn't say that my marriage was all bad we've got five beautiful kids. I thought it was normal for a woman to have a black eye because of being beat up and I ended up in the hospital several times for being beat up. So being abused was really bad but I didn't know there was any other way. You know I seen my mom beat up and other women beat up and I thought all women were beat up. I thought that's what guys did to their women.

TP: How many times were you put in the hospital?

AS: Many times, one time I remember was when Nick was on a trip and Fernando was about three years old and Nick's mom my mother-in-law was working in Alitak at the time and she came up to get me on a skiff and I went down to the cannery in Alitak, it takes about twenty to twenty-five minutes by skiff to get from Akhiok to Alitak. I went down and I was drinking with her and I didn't know that Nick came back to

the village so he got on a skiff came down to pick us up, brought us back to the house and as soon as we walked in I remember he flipped the table over and it was one of those strong tables with them metal legs, flipped it over there was food on the table. He picked me up and threw me and one of those metal things[legs] just missed my spine. After that I got really high fever and they brought me into Kodiak to see a doctor and I ended up in the hospital because my fever was just so high and they couldn't find out what was wrong! And I was in the hospital for a week when they shipped me up to Anchorage. When we got to Anchorage they injected Iodine to find out what was going on inside... And my kidney was popped! The doctor said 'You're kidneys are like balloons and this is what happened you got hit so hard it just ruptured and they wanted to take me into surgery but I wouldn't let them.

TP: So it just healed? Scar tissue?

AS: They gave me I don't know how many bottles of ambucillin. To see if it would heal because I didn't want to go into surgery. I've been in the hospital with a broken collarbone, you know, just bruised so bad. There was one time too when I came in I don't remember what was wrong but Lydia Abbott was a counselor at that time. She was new at KANA. She picked me up and I was so scared of Nick, you know of what he would do so she sent me up to Anchorage for treatment. The first three days I was in ANS for detox.

And I was on so much pills that I didn't know what was going on, anyway, when I came to I was in treatment. Woke up one morning, looked out the window and looked around and I didn't know where I was anyway Lydia got me out of Kodiak so Nick wouldn't get a hold of me. I stayed up there for 28 days I didn't stay there for thirty days. When Nick found out where I was he paid my way back and I went back home and stayed sober for six months. Those six or seven months of sobriety were the most terrifying because I didn't drink during that time and Nick did. I made sure my kids shoes...sometimes I let them go to bed with their clothes on and have their shoes ready to run out the door because if Nick was partying and came home we didn't know if he would be mad and start beating on everybody and throwing things around. And we got used to seeing him sleep underneath the table or with his face in the food on the table, you know it just got to be normal. Nick would say 'Have one drink with me' and I would refuse and say 'no'. And after a while it got to the point where he would say 'You think you're too good for me you don't want to drink with me' And it got to the point where I was getting scared because he wanted to pour it down my throat. So what I did was just started drinking again. And I think when I sobered up for that period of time went back to drinking it was worse than before.

TP: You were really depressed then.

AS: Yeah I was. I think I wanted to give up alcohol then but was scared too. And then I didn't know there was help or any other way. And then I ended up we went to Anchorage for two weeks and usually drink beer but I was drinking whiskey you know just on that trip then we went home after two weeks and we quit drinking. They called the Coast Guard to find me and I had, I must have been having seizures because I don't remember nothing. I barely remember them taking me out of my house in the stretcher because I thought I was going to fall so I put my hands out and then I don't remember anything...and Nick was on the helicopter with me and he said that I tapped to doctor on the back like to tell him something and he leaned down and I hauled off and slapped him.

TP: How long was it after that that you decided to leave Nick?

AS: I never decided to leave him. I never thought about leaving him. When Exxon came in is when, we both sobered up for two years then the oil spill happened and he was working a lot of hours and then he went back to drinking and then I just moved into town. I didn't want to go back to that. I don't know how I stayed sober through my divorce. My baby was six months old.

TP: And not only did you have your baby but you raised your daughters' too.

AS: Junior was two years old.

TP: That must have been quite a chore.

AS: I was scared. Akhiok had sixty people moved into town and it was big! We used to come into Kodiak for vacations and shop.

TP: So you had... When you were going through your divorce you experienced depression?

AS: Oh yeah!

TP: How did you climb out of that hole?

AS: Friends from A.A. [Alcoholics Anonymous]. I went into depression so bad I lost.. I went to 170 to a 105 pounds in six months. I couldn't eat I didn't want to be around people. I remember shopping for groceries in here and things would spoil because I got too much. I never lived in a city I had to learn how. I remember buying so many bananas and apples the kids started using them for toys. Because in the villages you shop for lots like a case of apples a case of oranges. In here I was just buying too much.

TP: Your kids probably didn't know that difference.

AS: I remember...I didn't go to the store I sent my kids to the store. I remember Lydia coming in one time and saying 'come on we are going to an A.A. meeting.' and I said 'I don't have a babysitter.' and she said, 'Well, I brought one.' And she would wait there until I got dressed and took me down. And just gradually going out again, just snapped me out of it, but I didn't know then that I was in depression. Today when I am going through that I see it right away.

TP: And then you just call friends.

AS: Yeah.

TP: What were your teenage years like?

AS: I was in the homes and when I would come down to Kodiak to see my mom go to Chignik and see my dad. I remember one summer when I was here, I think I must have been fifteen or sixteen when Lydia and I would get cab drivers to buy us alcohol. I thought it was so neat to drink screwdrivers mixed in a can. We did drink around here and Kodiak was small then and this was before the tidal wave. We spent a lot of time on the base because of the navy being here. And we did our drinking and I never thought of it was bad, we never stole things or broke into buildings or nothing like that. We scrounged up money and get cab drivers to buy us booze and we would charter a cab for an hour and drink our beer. I remember having black outs after I got married.

TP: How many of the kids out of the five saw the abuse of alcohol and of you?

AS: four of them. And there is a role in which one plays. The caregiver, the hero, the clown, and the silent one. My oldest son sluffed off taking care of the kids, then next oldest child cooked and cleaned. Tanya was the one who would run into the room and shut the door and pretend she wasn't there. Fernando would always joke around and still does today. And it pisses me off and he'll dance around like a clown. Nick is an excellent cook. In a way it was

good and in a way it was bad but they had to do it to survive. My oldest daughter learned how to bake and mess around in the kitchen my youngest daughter did the laundry. Still till this day my kids will talk about 'Oh, you remember when mom and dad were so drunk they couldn't come to our Christmas pageant?' It is not as often as today as it was back then but boy that really hurts and hurts today. I looked at it now that God gave me these two other boys to do right. My four older kids have been into alcohol and drugs. I just pray for them. I hope one day they sober up.

TP: You've shown them what to do if they want to.

AS: They know that there is another way of life now.

TP: I think that is the most important thing of all. Not of all the bad that happened, kids see what is happening now.

AS: I see it what ever has happened it has happened as a reason. God didn't put us here to punish us or make us do bad things. I think learning. I want to break the chain of alcoholism for my grandchildren and great grandchildren. All my grandchildren were carried without alcohol in their system before they were born. They know the dangers of it. I cry with my girls they share how they felt. Tanya says she turned 22 last month, mom you know what I remember most and what I really liked? I remember when I was a little girl and I would sleep on the couch and I would smell bread baking and pinesol. She doesn't remember all the bad times. I think all children remember something good in their

childhood and Fernando says 'mom I remember you cooking breakfast and the sun shining in the window and just smelled so good in there. So you know they don't look at all the bad things and maybe they've learned from them. My daughters know today they don't have to go with abusive men.

TP: One of the final questions I wanted to ask was what was one of your drinking days like versus your sober ones.

AS: When I was drinking I didn't get out of bed. I was so sick I would stay in bed for 5 days. I would try to get other people to come cook for my kids but they didn't eat anybody else's cooking. I would be so sick I would just use the bathroom or stay in bed. My hang-overs were that bad. I got to where I had nightmares and then when I did get up I would be shaking for a week. I didn't eat when I drank.

TP: Well, you look healthy, you are not overweight or underweight, when you were drinking were you underweight or more bloated?

AS: Probably bloated from the alcohol and today when I wake up it's no hangovers or nightmares and I can do what I want because I am alert and I don't have the shakes. I feel real good today.

TP: And you are also going to school

AS: Half-time, it is my third year.

TP: What is your goal?

AS: I probably want to be an alcohol counselor or social worker. I like helping people. I think whatever I choose I will be

good at.

TP: I think so too.

AS: I want to help native people. I've been through a lot I know what it's like I know where I came from. I think I can help a lot of people because I've been there.

TP: It's hard being a mom, I mean a good mom. Because nobody is going to help clean your home or cook dinners, you've got to do it all by yourself.

AS: Keeping up with the laundry and doing dishes. It's hard being a single parent.

TP: If there is one thing you could tell the native children and any children of the world, what would it be?

AS: You mean all children.

TP: And native children because you want to help them.

AS: Stay away from drugs and alcohol they don't have to be like their grandparents or parents. They can be anything they want. Whatever you want to be in life you can be. Whatever you put your mind to, just do it. Don't say you are going to do it, just do it. As scary as it may seem. When I was first starting college I remember I was so scared just so terrified and then today it's like what was I afraid of? I think fear stops a lot of us from doing what we want to do and reaching our goals. If we could just overcome that fear and just go for it. Drugs and alcohol, in the villages there is no one to just stress to them that it is not good. I think it is better today than it was 20 to 30 years ago.

And to tell the parents to teach their kids. I do with mine all the time. I tell them drugs and alcohol are bad.

TP: What would you tell the young people of America that have been in abusive relationships?

AS: Gosh, get out of it, don't stay in it! All men aren't abusive, I didn't know this until after I was married for several years and you know after I was first married and being abused there was no help like there is to day. There was no resource center there was no body to call. If there was I never knew about it. I tell my daughters if this guy is going to beat you up physically, emotionally, mentally or whatever way you don't need to stay there. There are nice guys out there. The fear is they don't want to get out or they don't know how. Get out of it for the kids' sake.

TP: Well, thank you for your time.

I am glad that I picked Annie Shangin. People need to know that there should be change and that history doesn't have to repeat itself. I am glad that I ^{had} an elder to talk with me. I think of the world was full of more Annie's there would be more progress than perfection. And happily, history would never have to repeat itself. It's important to let the native culture know that the women don't have to passive but assertive. And everyone gets a chance to speak and be heard. It's important to let children know that you don't have to be miserable and that there is a way out. Annie is like a light in a dim world and the more she shines the more people will see. People will want that light

for themselves and soon there won't be as much darkness as there was.

This file is part of the Kodiak History Project.

For an index of other recordings in this collection see the index:

96-49-01_I01.pdf