

Robin Barker was interviewed on October 2, 2024 by Karen Brewster at her home in Fairbanks, Alaska. Her husband, Jim Barker, is also present and chimes in periodically from nearby. However, the interview is mostly with Robin talking about her time working and living in Bethel, Alaska from 1975 to 1987. Robin grew up in Princeton, New Jersey where her father, Herbert Bailey, was director of the Princeton University Press. After studying Child Development at Tufts University and teaching kindergarten in Vermont, Robin moved to Bethel in 1975. Her first job was working for the community college to establish the first Head Start programs in the villages for teaching children from ages three to five, where she helped Head Start teachers develop material, create an environment for productive play and learning, and adapt the program to the Yup'ik culture. After two years, Robin went on to develop a home visiting program for birth to three-year-olds, and ran the childcare center in Bethel. She then helped found the Tundra Women's Coalition to help victims of rape and domestic violence, where she and other volunteers provided support services and was able to get a permanent shelter building constructed in Bethel. She and Jim met in Bethel in 1975 and were soon married and had one son. After moving to Fairbanks in 1987, Robin obtained her master's degree from the Education Department at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, mentored student teachers, worked for the Head Start Program at Tanana Chiefs Conference, and assisted Jim with his photography book projects. In this interview, Robin talks about all of this as well as her experiences learning about Yup'ik culture, living in a Yup'ik community, and working with Yup'ik people. She mentions particular mentors and people she was close with. She talks about some adventures she and Jim had traveling around the area and in villages.