

ANS 401 CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE OF NATIVE ELDERS
ELDER IN RESIDENCE: MADELINE SOLOMON
SUMMARY OF OCTOBER 23, 1986
BY EFFIE WATER

MAIN TOPICS:

1. Using the stars, moon, and constellations to predict weather and tell time.
2. Names of the months and where they come from.
3. Moving and fishing in fall time.
4. Using your hands to measure for patterns and sewing.
5. Trading with the Eskimos.
6. Some wild plants used for food.

Madeline started today's discussion with some ways to predict the weather and tell the future using the stars, moon and a few constellations.

The big dipper and the morning star are used to tell time. The big dipper slowly turns over during the night and when it is all the way over it means morning is coming. The morning star is used by showing that morning is almost there when it comes over the horizon.

The Northern lights if real red can predict hard times (starvation) coming. People would gather food, put it in a sled and pull it back and forth to ward off this bad luck.

You must never whistle at the Northern lights to make them dance as this could mean you are playing with nature.

Some other natural occurrences used to predict the weather are the following:

Stratus or flowing clouds = windy weather in 2-3 days.

Sun dogs = cold weather coming.

Ring around moon = bad weather (snow) coming.

New moon when really clear = whole month will be cold.

New moon comes up under clouds - bad weather for the month.

There are also some earlier stories about constellations but Madeline Solomon never heard them. An early priest did record some.

Madeline also told a short story about her first eclipse. She was going up this steep mountain to set traps when it started getting dark. It was about 3:00 in the afternoon and she looked between her fingers at the sun. She got scared so she ran all the way down the mountain and when she got to the bottom it was bright again. But she went home anyway.

The next topic that Madeline explained was the months of the year and where they get their names from.

The name of the month is eye. Nogha', metaphorically the month that eyes dog salmon, silver salmon etc. EJ

These months and their names were used before contact with the white man. They are based on each new moon.

Heyts'in' Lookk'a Nogha'	Oct.	'fall fish eye'
Sooga Zo'u'	Nov.	'marten month' the month marten are trapped
Heyh Kk'aatl'o La'onee	Dec.	'last month in the winter or year'
Neeikk'aa Nodzaanh Dilaayee	Jan.	'month that separate the short and long days'
Tilil Zo'ou'	Feb.	'eagle month' month eagles are seen
Kk'olkk'eey Zo'u'	March	'rough legged hawk month' the month rough legged hawks are seen'
Bininh Nok'int'ughee	April	'the month birds return'
Bininh Yitildaghee	May	'the month ice breaks up'
Ggaal Nogha'	June	'king salmon eye'
Noolaagha Nogha'	July	'dog salmon eye'
Saanlaagha Nogha'	Aug	'silver salmon eye'
Noidlaagha Nogha'	sept	'chinook or fall chum eye'

The next topic that Madeline Solomon talked about was moving in fall time to the hunting and fishing areas.

There were a lot of small villages (families) all along the Koyukuk River. In the mid winter several families would meet and move to the caribou hunting areas. The whole family would have to go because there was no food left at camp.

On the way the campers would stop at black fish holes to set small fish traps. The black fish are good for eating (boiled whole) or baked with tallow and for feeding the dogs.

The black fish keep a hole open in the ice (by all swimming in circles) to get fresh air. You can listen and hear the fish moving. When you find the hole a small trap is made to catch the black fish.

Young children are not allowed to eat the black fish as this might make them clumsy when they grow up.

The black fish are also brought home live for bit to catch lush (Burbot). A long line is put under the ice with hooks hanging down from it with the black fish on the hooks.

One of the students asked if dogs could digest fish bones and Eliza told a short story about a dog that swallowed a fish hook. There was nothing wrong with the dog.

There was also a short discussion on how big dog teams were needed. Long ago small teams were used because it was too hard to get dog food (3-4 dogs). In Madeline's time dog teams were larger, 10-12 dogs.

Madeline also talked about how she learned to measure and make a parka by watching a Selawik Eskimo in 1927. She learned how to use her hands to measure for boots.

The last topic Madeline talked about was some wild plants to eat.

The only thing she remembered is wild rubarb and wild carrots. Eliza said that University Hill is called wild carrot hill in Native because this is where the people come a long time ago to pick them.

Another topic discussed briefly was trading with the Eskimos.

Eskimos would come over and bring reindeer and seal skins for sale or trade, also seal oil and blubber. The Indians would give them beaver skins and meat, also beaver tail which is a delicacy for both Eskimos and Indians.

There were three trade routes over to the Eskimos, one by Allakaket, one over the pass by Huslia, and one thru the Katell River.

This was the end of a very informative day.