

ANS 401: Knowledge of Native Elders
Elder-In-Residence: Madeline Solomon

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Notes for October 16, 1986 by: Evelyn Ekada

Main topics of discussion: Sickness; types of medication; food recipes; types of food bought; and hospitals and doctors.

TB (tuberculosis) was the major sickness they had to face. As a matter of fact TB was a serious disease that killed most of the Alaskan Natives. There was not a cure for TB in the older days. The TB patients had to suffer and die or if they were lucky, they'd survive. Madeline said TB patients were separated from other people, so contamination wouldn't overrule the well people. TB patients also had to have their own dishes, utensils, etc. The ill people were very careful of not spreading the disease because there wasn't much doctors or medication to cure them. Long before the hospital and doctors were moved to Tanana there was a hospital in Nulato. Nulato is a community of about 500 people and is located 18 miles below Koyukuk and 50 miles below Galena on the Yukon River. The doctors weren't as good as the ones today.

Another bad sickness that hit the Natives was the Flu (influenza). The flu was hard on the people, especially when they didn't have enough time for breaks. People were always on the move, either moving to different camps or else out hunting subsistence.

Madeline told us a story of her family when they all had the flu at Koyukuk. It was spring time in April when her whole village got the flu, except for 3 boys. These boys did everything for the sick people. They'd cook, feed them, mind their dogs, and kept the fire constantly going. There were many people, who suffered with the flu.

some of these people, who suffered with the flu. Some of these people died and some got better, so they left camp. Madeline's family were the last ones to leave for the spring camp. They couldn't stay any longer, sick or not. Madeline said breathing in the fresh air and eating fresh animal meat really helped them feel better.

Medication was hard to get because people long ago were really poor. The only medicine they had was aspirin. People called it "the headache" medicine. But long ago, people didn't need only prescribed medicine, they had their own kind of medication and ate certain foods to make them feel better. Such as, cooked broth was given to the sick because they couldn't eat hard food. Madeline said, Native people used to cut the tops off of all sorts of trees and boil them. The water used was given to the people to drink. According to Madeline, it worked on helping the people. Another homestyle medicine was to burn spruce needles, so the sick people can breathe in the strong aroma.

When elders were sick, everyone including the young people took care of them. Like always, elders are very important to community people. They hold all the community traditions that were important to the people. Long ago, there wasn't homes to put elders in like there is today, so everyone took special care of them.

Groceries wasn't a problem for people. They always had food for their families and children. As long as Madeline could remember, there was no such thing as starvation. Long ago, they had stores, just like today. When people were ready to leave for camp, they'd buy enough groceries that will last the whole time period spent in camp. Plus

they lived off the land. If someone close by runs out of something needy, a friendly nearby camp would give the needy product to them. Then later on the product is payed back by the camp that borrowed it. Everyone trusted each other.

People bought a variety of food for their stay in camp. The foods that were bought were flour, sugar, tea, coffee, tallow, butter, rice, macaroni, dried onions, dried potatoes, eagle brand milk, and dried fruit. With these food and others, people made many delicious desserts and meals out of them.

They had a few substitutes, such as tallow was used when there was no moose fat. They also had lard, no crisco, and real butter because margarine wasn't being made. Tallow was used in fish ice cream, snow ice cream, and the frying of ptarmigan, rabbits, or any other wild animal. Sourdough bread was mostly consumed before yeast was introduced. After a while everyone started to make bread from yeast.

Before leaving the main camp, people prepared some foods that couldn't be cooked out in camp. For example, biscuits were baked and packed up, so people will bring them to camp. The same goes for beans. Beans were boiled, drained, packed in sugar sacks, and was kept frozen. In camp bacon was fried and some of the beans was heated in the bacon grease. Madeline said "It tasted good!"

Berries was picked far out of town. As a matter of fact, they went miles for them. The whole family would go in gas boats and spend their nights in tents. Kinnikinnik was one type of berries that was picked. Madeline said people mixed these berries with bear grease in

a 8 lb. lard can. Kinnikinnik berries are sorta dry, but very nutritious. Cranberries was also picked. Madeline's family went up Kateel to a lake called "God's lake" to pick cranberries and knick knick berries. The berries there were very abundant. In 1923 or 1924, Madeline had seen her first moose. There was no moose in interior Alaska many years back. They only hunted caribou. It was hard for people to catch beavers or rabbits because there was no snares or traps to use. Nowadays there's everything you need to catch wild animals. The only problem is that moose were hard to find. The moose skins were tanned by women. They were very important for clothes, especially for boot soles.

1928, the year the hospital and doctors were moved to Tanana from Nulato. Doctors weren't as good as they are today. Madeline told us a story of her son that had a eye problem and was taken to the hospital with no progress. So Madeline brought her son back to Koyukuk. There was a good time happening in Koyukuk when a old woman came up from Nulato. Her name was Ggaats and her English name was Olya Brown. She saw Madeline's son and said she could help him. She took a lancet or puncturing blade called "bahocggaada" out of her bag. She punctured the skin around the bad eye on my son. Lots of bad blood came out. My son screamed and scolded the old lady during the process. She wanted all the bad blood to come out. Every since then the boy never had trouble with his eye. It was healed, but the boy hated the old woman for pcking him.

Transportation to and from the hospital was by gas boats. If a family didn't own a boat and they needed to see a doctor, friend with a boat

was always willing to offer his help. Seems like everyone helped each other many years back, which is good.

Kids loved to play games while in summer camps. They played tag, flat game, marbles, or went swimming. They didn't spend all their time on work, they had a few moments to spare.