

ANS 401
Knowledge of Native Elders
Class Summary, September 22, 1987
By Don Molina

Effie Kokrine, a Koyukon Athabascan elder, was born in the village of Tanana in the year 1919. This being the year that WWI ended combined with the fact that she was born on a Sunday, Effie feels blessed and has a sense of having brought peace to the world. She was delivered by a midwife. Because her father was Caucasian and her mother Athabascan, She had a difficult time being accepted by both the white community and native community alike, but this situation has changed. Coming from a family with 14 brothers and sister and being one of the eldest she learned at an early age to help around the house and perform domestic duties. These duties, however, were somewhat interrupted when she left Tanana to attend a government run school in Eklutna. She attended the school from 1931 until 1934. After departing the school she returned home and married her husband Andrew, at 16 years of age and raised 11 children in the midst of the Great Depression.

Effie explained that life was very hard but that she enjoyed the freedom that her lifestyle offered her. Having the whiteman's luxury goods such as the saw and axe made life a little easier, but Effie states "you have to work very hard for what you got". Since there were no local stores near where she grew up virtually everything they had came from the land. These various resources were procured by hunting, gathering, fishing and trapping. Some of the Goods that were purchased took the form of coffee, flour, sugar, and fuel. The containers that these storebought food stuff came in were never thrown away but instead were saved and used for various items. The cloth bags that the flour came in were often used as material from which clothes could be made and the old gasoline cans provided many useful containers. The fuel was used to power their lights as well as their boats. Incidentally Effie's father made his living from his boat by hauling goods up and down the river for mining companies.

Dogs provided a means of transportation and therefore were an important aspect of life. The dogs required daily attention and needed to be cooked for and watered everyday. The old gas cans that were saved served as useful containers from which the dogs ate and drank. In winter, the ice from the river as well as the snow was brought in the house and slowly melted. This melted ice and snow provided water for washing as well as the dogs drinking water. A hole was maintained through the river ice and provided the people with a source of drinking water. Also, blocks of ice could be stored by the door and melted when the need arose.

In 1948 her husband came to Fairbanks in search of work and landed a job as a carpenter. The impetus for the move was that the fishing and trapping resources could no longer provide for his family. Effie packed up her kids, dogs and belongings and headed up the river to Fairbanks in 1949 to be with her husband. When she first arrived she and her family lived in a tent where the present day Market Basket is located. Effie was employed as a seamstress in town for 20 years and sewed for several local stores. Dog racing occupied a lot of her time and she raced for 15 years but was forced to retire the sport due to health reasons. Although Effie is no longer in command of the sled she is still quite active in the sport and participates in passenger races. The tradition of dog racing, however, carries on in her family through both her children and grandchildren.

When her children were grown Effie returned to Tanana in 1974 to enjoy life along the Yukon River once again. She then returned to Fairbanks where she presently resides. Although life was hard for Effie as a young woman, being without all the modern conveniences of today, she feels that her background has made her a better person and provides her with a sense of appreciation for what she has today.