

490-06-167

**ANS 401 Culural Knowledge of Native Elders**

**Elder: Effie Kokrine**

**Class Outline for Thursday, September 24, 1987**

b-1 Dawn Stevens

Today's class consisted of a question and answer session with questions provided by the students from the previous period, and answers from Effie.

**I. Did you have a Native ceremony when you got married?**

No. Things were done by "common law". People went to the commissioner to get a certificate of marriage and when the priest came through the village, the marriage was blessed.

In the old days, some marriages were arranged, when there was an agreement made by parents or couples.

When a man proved he could provide well for a wife and family, he was given permission to marry a woman. He usually provided the girl's parents with some sort of "gift", showing he was a good worker and provider.

Divorce was not common, but some men had more than one wife, especially if one could not bear a child.

**II. What was the Eklutna school like? What religion was it? How did they treat you?**

Eklutna was a year-round, early BIA school for the poorer families with a mixture of children of Indian, Aleut, Eskimo and colored blood, excluding white kids. There was no religion. The treatment was good, if you behaved yourself, mind your manners and did your chores.

Girls took care of household chores and the boys worked outside. School was split into two shifts, working in the morning and attending school in the afternoon.

The kid's were not allowed to leave the school unless they had permission to go to the clinic or the Post Office.

The student's participated in basketball, 4-H and they had "modern" dances.

When Effie came back to her village after school, her stepfather tried to marry her off. In those days, women married young and since there were no forms of birth control, parents were very strict with girls for fear of pregnancy and too many mouths to feed. During this time, in the depression, many children were given away to foster parents. The girls were hard to place because of the high risk of pregnancies.

Back to Eklutna: Most of the kid's talked their Native Indian language in the village, but when they went to school, English was the language spoken and now, English is spoken in most of the villages as well.

### **III. Can you talk about story telling - stories that teach values for women?**

#### **IV. I want to know more about some of the things you did to prepare a girl to be a woman.**

Effie says there are a lot of stories to tell, and that **everything** is valuable for a women. They need to know how to preserve food, cook, sew, take care of their bodies as well as their family.

There were a lot of stories and practical skills that taught values to women, but no one talked of SEX. The only way you learned about it was through experience, just as you did about coming into womanhood. No one talked about "periods", you just learned though experience.

Now many elders don't teach the young about the "practical" things like sewing, cooking, etc., for fear of losing their own talent. Effie thinks this idea is silly, that everyone needs someone.

#### **V. Information on sewing contests to see who could make the best parka, etc.. during a potlatch. Did they do this in Kokrines?**

Most women made parkas for gifts, etc. If you were good, your reputation would follow you. However, a lot of work was judged by other people.

There is a story about a chief that sent his runner out to get a wife, by choosing a woman who did the best work. The chief picked the best one, well, what he didn't know, was that the runner was taking the number two choice and in the end, there was a double wedding.

It is important for the women to have good materials in order to make a good parka. You have to have good skins, good equipment and good advice from the elders.

The only potlatch that Effie remebers in Kokrine was when she was eight years old. People waited on the bank for those arriving, they shot their guns to greet them and sang. She said it was beautiful.

## **VI. Could you explain more about peter bars?**

The peter bar is a large canoe, which can hold two people and even a moose. In the Interior, the boat was made from straight grain spruce for the ribs, a hollowed out stump for the point and it was covered with canvas.

In the old days, the boat was made with sticks and birch and pitch, from the spruce tree, was used to seal the seams.

## **VII. Food gathering and preservation in the earlier days. How does it differ today?**

In the earlier days, the only ways to preserve food was to freeze it or dry it. You dried fish and meats and buried your berries in a hole. When the meat was dried, it was usually smoked as well.

Sour fish was eaten fairly soon after being caught. The fish head was left to soak in water for a week or so, until it was slightly sour, then it is eaten raw. The oils from the fish and moose were also utilized.

Effie says that nowadays, everything is different. People have refrigerators, freezers, canning, sugar for jams and salt.

## **VIII. What were the different kinds of boats on the river when you were growing up?**

Effie said her dad had a motor boat which he used to haul people back and forth on the river. She and her sister used a small rowboat, and there were many peterbars to be found.

The boats were used for transportation, to get from one place to another, just as we use our cars today.

Spruce boughs were used a lot in those days for bedding when people stayed in tents. The boughs were weaved together and a caribou skin was layed over that for a mattress.

When Effie was 16 or so, she remembers the caribou crossing through Tanana every year after the water would freeze. She said, ten years later, the caribou just stopped coming, but moose populated the area. Nature provides a way for the people to get by.