

ANS 401  
Knowledge Of Native Elders  
Effie Kokrine  
October 1, 1987

Tape Summary By: Richard Horodyski

1. Were ther medicine women? Or were the women not permitted to practice it?

There were medicine women, but they were not as strong as the men. There was one downriver who was as strong as the men, but in Tanana we did not hear too much about her. The power that they possessed was the power to sense things, they knew when there was danger and when things we not right. They had this power and they knew how to use it; it took a great deal of concentration, so much concentration is needed that during the use, they needed 2 or 3 other people with the power backing them up. These other people gave them energy and protected their spirit. The power today is lost because of alcohol and religion. Alcohol makes people mean, causing them to wish bad luck on others.

2. Is there a rule concerning women on their period and weapons of war? Bad luck?

When women have their period there are a lot of things they shouldn't do. You don't go out in the woods, different animals like bull-moose and bears have keen sense of smell and can be very dangerous. For the same reason they don't hang all over their man if he's going hunting, he could be attacked. Eliza added to this when she mentioned that long ago when girls had their first period they were sent to live by themselves for up to a year. They didn't show their face or expose their skin to the sun and you don't look at boys. They did not eat anything fresh, because it offends the spirit of the animals and causes bad luck for the hunter. Also, along these lines women should not step over men's clothing or weapons.

3. Did anyone ever make masks for special events and what did they do with them?

The Indians never used masks, Eskimos did. The men did paint their face. Effie remembered her grandmother had holes in her nose for feathers, and some women had lines on their chins. These were tattoos made by running charcoal covered sinew just under the skin. Reasons for this are not remembered.

4. When did the first organized schools become established? Were there any in the area where you grew up? And what were they like?

The first schools were organized when Whitemen showed up. In Tanana a army post was set up, this was built three miles away from the village and is now the town of Tanana. A government school was built there, it only went up to the third grade. A mission school run by the Episcopal church was later built in the village. Natives lived in the village and mostly whites lived in Tanana. This mission school is now a historical building, but graves are all around it where they should not be. Catholics also came in, but were in town.

5. How was the whiteman accepted or not accepted by your people when you were young?

The Whitemen were accepted by the Natives, and many took Native women for their wives, the families were glad to get the girls married off. The whiteman needed them to survive, they made clothes, prepared food, etc. Whitemen could have been there in the Interior way before that time, some believed they were because of the wildman stories. This wildman could have been a lost prospector or someone gone insane, he may have come from Canada. The whitemen did help the Indians, they brought conveniences like medicine, food, pots and pans, bedding, tools, etc. The tools were very helpful, axes, knives, guns all helped. Before this bones and stones were used, life was tough then.

6. Do your children practice much of the traditional culture? Grandchildren?

Effie's children do not practice traditional ways, they were brought up in Fairbanks where they did not have the opportunity or the exposure to traditional ways. They do hunt and run dogs.

7. While you have been on the Yukon River in the past few years...are the people friendly? Do they stop and visit, even if they dont know you already? I've heard there are dangerous people staying up there. Have you had any encounters with potentially dangerous people?

People are friendly on the Yukon River and if you stop by the Kokrine camp there is always coffee, a place to sleep and food if you need it. There are also a lot of old

friendly hippies along the river. The only dangerous people are drunk people.

8. Did you practice the Stick Dance in Tanana, if not how did you honor the dead and what were your burial practices?

They do not have the Stick Dance in Tanana, that is further down river. In Tanana, you go to the family of the deceased and sit with them and drink tea. They have church service and burial, later on potlatch. Native dancing takes places, and bolts of material are given away along with other gifts.

9. Was there any superstition to determine the weather? Did you hear of the year Summer never came?

Weather is predicted by watching the clouds. Streaked clouds in a day or two means it will be windy, heavy rolling clouds are snow clouds, spots of sun or balls of light here and there (sun-dog), means cold weather. By watching the dogs and children you can also predict the cold weather.

10. Back in the days when you were young and in your parents and grandparents days, was it okay for the women and girls to cut their hair? Or was there some sort of restrictions on cutting your hair? Or was there some sort of restriction on cutting your hair? How about the men, did they have their hair long or short?

In the old days women cut their hair when they were in mourning or they would burn it off. In Effie's days women wore their hair in buns. Old men had shoulder length hair, compared to now-a-days the men have short hair.