

Knowledge of Native Elders 401
 Effie Kokrine
 October 8, 1987

Summarized by Barbara Frenichs

Effie brought a burlap bag to class today. She used it to demonstrate how to unravel the bag and use the strands to braid a rope of any thickness. To make a thick rope you can put 4 or 6 thread together per strand to make a three ply rope.

She also brought a sewing bag [biyeets'aadaakkoja] to class, one she made in 1947 from left over scraps from two dresses she had made for her daughter. The sewing bags were like purses are to women today. They never went anywhere without them. She said you never know when you are going to need it.

Then she went on to answer written questions.

Have you ever been in a sod house or any traditional housing?

She thinks the sod houses were used mainly along the coast. People in the interior used lean-tos which were more appropriate because of the availability of trees and willows. She saw and used many of them herself. The lean-tos were build on the riverbanks or wherever they were needed. They put a pole between two trees and leaned spruce or willows against it. Spruce boughs are put down for flooring. She never a saw traditional dwelling made of skins.

Could you talk about Kokrine Village?

The village of Kokrine was started in the late 1800's by Effie's late husband's grandfather [Gregory Hakara, also known as Kokrine, Kokorain, Cochrane from Kuopio Finland]. He started a trading post on a hill on the north bank of the Yukon River where it doesn't flood. The Native people from the nearby villages eventually moved there.

What was the population of Kokrines?

She didn't know what it was. She said the population fluxuated. During the summer the people stayed in fish camps and they stayed in their winter camps in the winter. It was a big community at one time. The population became depleted and the few remaining families moved to other villages so their children could go to school. She has some fond memories of the only time she went there as a little girl. She was about eight years old then. They went there by boat from Tanana. She remembered a lot of people went there in boats. Before they got to Kokrines they waited for

each other. Then they tied all their boats together. Then they shot some guns to announce their arrival. The people in the village in turn shot their guns to let them know that they knew they are coming. Effie met a little girl from Stevens Village after they tied their boats together. As they were coming to the village all the people were standing on the river bank singing Indian songs and dancing. She remembered the songs and sight were so beautiful it sent tingles up and down her back. They landed and the people in the boat went dancing up the bank. She remembered that she and the little girl from Stevens Village started playing. That was all she remembered about that trip.

Do you make your own design when you do bead work?

Effie answered that she does a lot of her own designs. She showed us some patterns that were in a wooden box that was given to her by Irene Noyes. They used to belong to Irene's mother Mrs. Maria Coulombe. Effie said she uses some of the patterns. She also let other people copy them. She treasure these patterns as part of her heritage. She thinks some the patterns are as much as 80 or 90 yrs. old.

Could you draw a flower or something on the board?

Effie had done this earlier by drawing a picture of an eagle design she had used to bead on the back of a vest she had made for her son.

How do you feel being the elder of this class?

Effie said she felt honored. She is pleased and very happy with the students' interest. She is happy to share her life experiences with college students. Teaching the class has lifted her spirit and given her an inner strength.

What did you hope to accomplish in this class?

She hopes the student learn to value what they have. The abundance of food and material goods, and the homes with running water and heat. Learn to make the most of what you have. Don't waste things. She hoped we learned something.

Effie brought some dried salmon strips, dried scored fish that she cut and dried in her own back yard here in town. She also brought some pickled king salmon bellies. Below is her recipe for pickled salmon bellies.

Pickled Salmon

Pick the bellies of firm fresh salmon that are fat. Wash the bellies and soak in salt water overnight if possible to get the slime off. Wash the bellies and squeeze the blood from the veins. Then dice them up into a 1" x 2" strips.

Boil 1 part water to 2 parts vinegar. Cool and add the strips, two spoons of brown sugar, sliced onions and pickling spice to flavor. Put all the ingredients in a jar and seal. Refrigerate for 3 days.