

Ans 401
Knowledge of Native Elders
Paul and Agnes Tony
Nov 3, 1987

Summarized by Maureen Pederson

Today Paul and Agnes Tony was introduced to us in class. Paul was born in 1926 at Marshall, Alaska, which is located on the Yukon River and Agnes was born at Alakanuk, Alaska located at the mouth of the Yukon River in the year 1930. They were married in 1947 and are currently living at Alakanuk, Alaska which is their home.

Paul remembers back in 1933 when he was young, the old people were very poor. There was no coffee, tea, flour, sugar, etc. Food was scarce in the early days, since the only way they had gotten their food was either by hunting or fishing. Sometimes to ration the food they did have was to eat only two times a day. There wasn't a store available back in those days. Paul explained that life was hard them days.

Paul explained how the men would go out hunting for food everyday. they'd stay out hunting for two or three days at a time. Sometimes they'd walk when hunting with very little food. A few times they would go without food. In order to feed their families the men had to hunt everyday, which was their means of survival. Everything they had came from the land.

They'd hunt for mink, rabbits, beaver and fox. The hunting period would take place during the winter months for these certain animals. Also they'd hunt for caribou before they became extinct. Paul mentioned that right now there is no more caribou around. He did say there is moose available right now. During the spring months they would go out in their kayaks and hunt for seal and white beluga whales. They would set their nets in the summer for catching fish. During winter months after the ice froze over the rivers they would set fish traps underneath the ice. The ice was cut about sixteen feet long and three or four feet wide just enough space for the traps to fit through the hole. Traps would vary in size. The types of fish they caught were shee fish, white fish, and ~~lake~~ ^{coche} fish. Black fish would be caught in the near by lakes. Smaller fish traps were used for black fish. The traps were made ~~out~~ of spruce trees during the fall months. When setting them, between five and ten fish traps were set at the same time and would be checked every two or three days. It would take about five to ten men to set these traps. Paul mentioned they would share the food they got with the less fortunate who was sick or to old. Sharing what they did have back then was their costum within

their culture. This is still being practiced today in rural areas in Alaska.

Between 1935 and 1945 was the first time that Paul and Agnes had seen an airplane at Marshall, Alaska. This also was the first time they had contact with the white men. The plane would fly into the village at least once a month to deliver mail to the few white men who ~~were~~ exploring and mining for gold. Before the airplanes came around they would use dog teams to deliver things from village to village. This was the only means of transportation they had before the white man started bringing in things like snowmachines, outboard motors, cars, etc. When Agnes had seen the first plane she was just a young girl at the time but remembers it was a suprise for the people. They were really excited, and the plane even had scared the people there. One lady got ~~really~~ scared that she even hurt herself. *so excited &*

When the plans had started to come into the village the white man would bring in alcohol. This was the first time that they were introduced to alcohol. Agnes had mentioned that one man had given alcohol to one native and he was acting in a manner very unusual. His actions had even scared the natives of the village. At the time they did not know he was intoxicated from alcohol.

When Agnes was a little girl she had never seen anything like ~~popcorn~~ *seeds*, popcorn, lardcans, etc. They had never used pants, coats, dresses, etc - what the white man used them days until they were introduced to them. What they used was parkas and mukluks that they would make by hand from the animal furs they would catch. The furs mainly used for clothing was rabbit skin, fox skin and squirrel skins.

During summer months the steam boat would bring in flour, sugar, coffee, etc, to the store at Alanakuk which was owned by white folks. The Eskimos would sell the fur they had in order to get what they needed from the store. Back then Paul said the mink pelts were worth seven dollars a piece and fox pelts were worth five dollars. Things were cheap back then, a fifty pound bag of flour costed three dollars and sugar for a ten pound bag was one dollar and seventy five cents.

In 1939 the white men started to build the fish cannery in Alakanuk, Alaska. People came from near by villages to help build the cannery. After the cannery was built Alakanuk grew bigger and bigger. In 1942 Paul started to work in the Cannery for fifty cents an hour. Working over time they would get paid time and a half which was seventy five cents back then. Agnes went to work also for the same amount of pay as the men. Both men and women were permitted to work in the cannery if they wanted to. Getting a pay check worth

forty dollars back then was a lot of money to the people. I guess you could saythey felt rich having forty dollars.

Back then they had log cabins ^{to} live in, and they also had burned wood for heat. There was no such things as radios, television, snowmachines, gas lamps or cars. Agnes mentioned when the men would come home after hunting with game (animals) and it was the women's job to take care of the meat. They would dry most of the meat and store the rest of the meat underground.

People would gather in the ^{kasiguk} and tell stories, have eskimo dances and do other entertaining events. This was the main place where people got together and did things together. Mainly most of these events would take place during the winter months most every night. Every year they'd make up new songs and everyone would join in and learn the new songs in the Kasiguk. Also when a child had learned to dance of the first time, the people of the village would have a big celebration for the child. The men, when not out hunting they would all gather in the kasiguk during the day and make things like fish traps, sleds, snowshoes, bows and arrows, and tools - just what ever was needed for hunting and at home. When the men were working in the kasiguk the women would cook food at home and bring the food to the men in the kasiguk. The Kasiguk was also used as a steam house. The men would take steam bathes there alot during the winter months. They would use wood and heat up the kasgi really hot and take a steambath from the dry heat. The kasiguk was made out of logs, with dirt and moss surrounding the built structure.

Back in the old days they did not have electricty. They used seal oil for light. The oil was put into a wooden bowl with a piece of cloth. The cloth would burn slowly giving off light. In 1941 or 1942 gas lamps were brought into the village. Paul said the lamps made a big difference in light.

After the cannery was built there was a few changes in the village. The people had stopped going to the kasgi and the men started staying at home doing their work there. The men started to commercial fish on their own with their own boats and gear. The men started buying outboard motors and snowmanachines. The outboard motors back then were five and six horse power. Snowmachines came around in 1955. A ski-doo had costed five hundred dollars and a bigger one had costed six hundred dollars. Before the outboard motors came around they would travel by rowing the boats.

They would mainly stay in one place except in the spring and summer months. They would go to their fish camp and stack up on fish for the winter. Agnes said they would pick

berries and store the berries in sixty pound barrels for the winter months. Agnes's mother would pick a green plant and put on top of the berries when storing them.

Agnes's mother would make her boots out of salmon skins. The boots were water proof and used to keep their feet dry. If they didn't take care of the boots right it was easy for the boots to get ruined and not useable anymore. If not taken care of right the boots can get ruined in one day. They would hang the boots out side of the house before entering in order to keep them useable. Grass was put in the boots of lining and padding.

Reindeer was a big thing back then. The reindeer was introduced to them by laplanders. The herd was to difficult for the people to take care of back then so I guess new owners had taken over the herd around the Nome, Alaska area. The last time they had seen herds of reindeer was between 1947 and 1949. Agnes mentioned the wolves were killing them off before they were moved up around the Nome area.