

## Knowledge of Native Elders

Paul and Agnes Tony

Nov. 10, 1987

Summarized by Max David Todhunter

Qasp<sup>e</sup>qs are of Eskimo origin. Agnes' mother made them for her when she was very young, and Agnes continues to make them nowadays. Qasp<sup>e</sup>qs used to be longer but these days they have been shortened a bit. The material used is store bought.

Metal has been used for a long time. It was introduced by the white man. Some of the things used before that, for tools, were slate, shale, or flint. Some hills of slate can be found out around Marshall. Also, some walrus ivory was used for some things. The handles were made of bone, ivory, or reindeer horn. The medicine men used to sharpen the tools. The scraper and uluraaq that Paul and Agn<sup>e</sup>s showed us were made of wood and metal.

When Alakanuk and Emmonak had a potlatch, an old man gave the Uluraaq to Agnes.

Before there were any type of prescription glasses, people had to do without. In 1954, Agnes went to Seattle for treatment for tuberculosis, at that time she also got her first pair of prescription glasses. People did wear snow-goggles in the old days. They were made of wood, and they had slits, or eye holes to see through. Now a days they don't use them.

Both Paul and Agnes are Roman Catholic. The church was there before they were born. This doesn't mean that they don't follow certain Eskimo beliefs though. When a seal is caught, the head is cut off and left in the water for a while. After they are brought home, dogs can't chew on the bones . This would cause the hunter to have bad luck, and maybe not catch seals for a while. Also, don't let the blood run onto the floor, or clean it up with water and ashes if it does. And, seal parts were thrown back into the sea, if they weren't used for something. Lastly, when a seal was caught, before it was brought in, it was left out in the water for a while. The medicine man told them these things. They used to save the bladders for festivals and ceremonies, but not anymore.

In the old days they used to take the oil and meat from the seal and give some to everyone. They would cook it first. Now they don't do it that way, everyone has houses. They used to take it to the qasgiq. They used to give some food to everyone. Noone gets any special part of the meat. Now they just call people up on the C.B. and tell them if they want some meat to come on over.

Alakanuk is on the river and has some small trees. The housing is slowly turning to HUD housing units. There are no side walks in the village. The road is hard most of the time. The permafrost melts in the summer time and some of the houses sink a little. There is no harbor in Alakanuk.

Cailluk, worm wood, is the traditional medicine used. It is boiled in water. Then they let it sit and cool for a while never letting the steam out. Drink one teaspoon in the morning and one in the evening. It is also used in the maqiivik (steam bath). Good for a cough. Still used. Alder, cuqvarua, can be used the same as cailluk. Alder is also used for boats. When they make boats. For coloring boats.

Storyknives. Little girls told stories in the mud with storyknives. They told stories to the other little girls. Agnis said she repeated stories that her grandparents used to tell her, or stories she heard in the gasgiq told by men. Agnis used to have little dolls, her mother made gaspak for them out of bird head skins. Hunters used to travel for several days, 45 miles sometimes, sometimes farther. Across the Yukon past Sheldons Point; some go past Emonnak.

There are fewer fur bearing animals these days; white fox, red fox, beaver, otter, muskrat, lynx. They catch black fish, shee fish, white fish, ptarmigans, rabbits and lush, in the winter time, for food. They eat the pike and lush livers. These days they also hunt moose and beaver which weren't there before.

In the old days they used snares made of reindeer sinew, or beluga whale sinew. The beluga sinew was stronger. When men brought home beluga sinews, they were taken out and dried before being used.

They hunt beluga, in the summer time, on the coast. They'd travel thirty-nine to forty-five miles off the coast from Alakanuk. The hunters sometimes could get five or six belugas in one day. A long time ago they used to use three qayaqs to bring the beluga home. They preserved the meat by putting it in seal skin bags, with seal oil. The blubber was cooked and stored the same way. They used a storage cellar.

They also used to preserve eggs in the seal oil. They would last all summer without spoiling. Any kind of birds were hunted before Fish and Game made it illegal; seagulls also. Right now you can't get the seagull eggs. But some men will go at night and get eggs.

Used to hunt those belugas with spears and harpoons, in qayaqs. It was dangerous, but they knew how because they grew up doing it. They start going on hunts when they are young.

They hunt those seals in open water. When the wind would change it would open the ice, they would hunt there. Blue sky out over the ice means that the ice is open down the coast. Out on the ice they carried a pole to check the ice. They also wore snowshoes.

People used to use dog teams before snow machines. Six to nine dogs was considered a big team for a family. The teams were limited in size because of food. They fed the dogs white fish, black fish, and sometimes meat. They preserved the fish for the dogs in the summer time. They would bury the fish in a five by five or four foot pit. They

covered the fish with willows, grass and, then mud. The mud was kept off the fish by the grass. The cooked fish are food for the dogs.

Paul and Agn<sup>u</sup>s have six children of their own and they adopted two. Four of them are married. The oldest boy hunts a lot. The youngest doesn't hunt to much. The women and the men know how to trap. This is the way it has always been. When the hunter is gone the ladies run the trap line. Everyone knows how to hunt. Agn<sup>u</sup>s used to hunt, but she doesn't now.

The kids now are different. They watch T.V.. They don't always listen.

They commercial fish down in Alakanuk. They drift net and set net fish. There are limited times that they can commercial fish. This is limited by Fish and Game. Lots of people have licenses and boats. They can fish something like two days and one night. You can't fish every day. There is a heavy run for about one month. Other villages come down the Yukon to fish. The fish are taken to processing ships right there in the area. All the canneries are gone on the Yukon. They don't do canning for themselves.

They have a large smoke house. They use alder to smoke the fish. Sometime they cut fish from morning and all night.

They used to tan seal skin with a wooden scraper.

They used the scraper that they had there, in class, for reindeer, caribou, lynx. The scraper is made of file and the handle is made of wood.

They used a black fish trap for black fish. They used a larger fish trap on the river for the lush, white fish, pike. The trap they use for pike, on the Yukon river, has a square funnel on the opening.

Paul brought a model black fish trap to class. He made the trap of drift spruce wood. He explained that he starts at the top (entry) end of the trap. He makes a hoop and starts the lashing by putting a vertical slat against the hoop. This is lashed down by wrapping a twine around it, first one way, then the other. The next slat is put in place about an inch from the first one. The twine is carried over and the second slat lashed down with it. When all the vertical slats have thus been put in place, a long strip of slat is taken and lashed down by the hoop, then spiraled down towards the ends of the slats such that the loops of the spiral are less than an inch apart. Paul explained that long ago they used spruce root instead of twine to lash the slats down. They split the roots to make them uniform in size. His father taught him how to do this.

Tha... 'tsit.