

Knowledge of Native Elders
ANS 401
Paul and Agnes Tony
November 12, 1987

Summarized by Janice Westlake

Q. When hunting seal, did the men go by themselves or in groups?

A. They always go in a group. They would have a meeting and decide when to go out. We hunt seal in July and in the spring before break-up we hunt on the coast, that would be in February and March. We watch for signs of open lead in the sky. The sky is blue at sunset and sunrise when there is an open lead.

Q. What about hunting for beluga whale, did they go in a group?

A. Yes, the same thing. The belugas are hunted in July and August. The men talk to each other and decide when to go. Belugas were also hunted in the river, but they hardly do that anymore. Five to ten seals are caught per family each season.

Q. Do you use one big boat?

A. Three to six boats are used with three to four hunters in each boat.

Q. How big are the boats?

A. The average boat is twenty foot long and four wide and two feet high. A four foot wide plywood is cut down the middle to make the sides. They started making the plywoods five feet wide about ten years ago. So we started making the boats five feet wide. The one that I made last year is five feet wide. Now people also use aluminum boats.

Q. When you hunted beluga, Did you circle it? How did you go about killing one?

A. When a beluga is spotted we surround it and force it to go towards the shallow water then it would be killed with 30-30 rifle.

Q. Do you have ceremony before you go hunting or fishing for good luck?

A. Not anymore. They used to years ago. People are too busy now working for wages and things. People just run to their boats when they have a little time.

Q. Do you still go trapping?

A. Yes, we snare beaver in the winter and trap other small fur bearing animals such as mink, otter, and fox.

Q. How were fishnets made in the old days?

A. Fishnets were made of dried beluga whale sinew. They dried the sinew and the women twisted the sinew and made a long string. Then the men made the fishnets. The fishnets used to last 3 or 4 years when they are taken care of properly i.e., washing and hanging to dry as soon as it is taken out of the water. The floats are made from driftwood. Notches are made in the floats to secure the floats onto the fishnet with a string. Floats were also made from reindeer antlers. In the old days fishnet sinkers were made of reindeer or beaver skin sacks filled with rocks. The top and lead lines were made of reindeer, beluga whale or seal skin rope. People in Alakanuk still make fishnets, only they use nylon twine now instead of beluga sinew.

Q. Are there caribou around Alakanuk now?

A. No, there are no caribou now, but there are lots of moose which we didn't see long ago. Moose has become an important source of food.

Q. How did you get your last name?

A. (Answered by Agnes) When Paul's father was baptized by Russian Orthodox Church they give him the name the last name "Tony".

Q. What kind of beadwork do you do?

A. Long ago there were big beads. The designs were sewn on leather. Designs of flowers, rabbits, eagles and other animals were used. Agnes' grandmother gave her beadwork patterns made of skin. Agnes then transformed those designs onto paper and still uses them.

Q. How were people punished for wrong doing when you were young?

A. Paul's father told Paul that he will punish him for what he did wrong. He punished him by not giving him any food all day. He also had to stay in the house all day. He was not allowed to hunt when he was being punished. Paul said he cried when he couldn't go hunting. He also said he cried before falling asleep; he was so hungry. All he was given before going to bed was a little piece of dried fish. Agnes' experience with punishment was about the same. She was not allowed to eat all day. She had to sit one place in

the house all day. She was not allowed to play with her toys. When she asked if she could play out the next day, her parents told her, "Remember what you did wrong. Don't do it again". Agnes said she punished her children by keeping them in the house all day, but they were allowed to eat. She also said her own children spank their children when they do wrong. Children were not spanked long ago when they did something wrong.

Q. How were adults dealt with when they did something wrong?

A. The men would get together in the qasgiq and talk about how to punish the wrong doer. The person would be there also and they would sometime talk to him for hours. Long time ago it is said they used to tie them to a pole in the qasyiq.

Q. What did you teach your daughters while they were growing up?

A. Agnes taught her daughters what she had been taught by her mother. She told them to make miniature mittens and boots, etc.. The reason for making the little things first is because it is important to finish a project within a reasonable amount of time so they can develop a good sewing habit. Paul taught his sons the skills a man should know i.e., boat making.

Q. Could you tell us some stories?

A. Agnes told us some stories that her grandmother had told her when she was a child. When her grandmother was a child they used to eat only twice a day. There were lots of times when people used to go hungry. Her grandmother stressed the importance of not wasting food or anything. To this day Agnes waste as little as possible of fish and game that they get. They usually feed what they don't eat to the dogs. She also said when there was a famine people would leave the settlement in search of food going in different directions.

She also told some war stories that her grandmother had told her. Her grandmother said it was pretty scary. When they went berry picking they always have to go in groups and they always had to be on the alert for enemy war parties. Women were sometimes abducted by the enemies and became the wives of the abductors. During wartime one man would stand guard at night in the village. During actual attacks children in the sod houses would be given dried fish roes to chew on. The reason for that is because when a dried fish roe is chewed it gums up around the teeth. The children would be preoccupied with cleaning their teeth and they would be quite.

She also told how shamans had more than one wife. Agnes' great grandfather was a shaman and he had three wives. He abducted one wife from the Bethel area and another wife he abducted from the north in addition to the one he had married at home. Each woman and her children had their own house. When their husband brought home a game such as seal, all three worked together to dress out the game and take care of the hides. They worked co-operatively and didn't usually fight.

Paul told us that sickness was the cause of wars. Whenever there was too much sickness in the village, the people in the village made war against other groups.

Seal oil and muktuk were stored in beluga whale stomach. Food was also stored in seal oil. Seal intestines were used to make rain gear i.e., rain jacket. Arrow heads were made of reindeer antlers and stones.

A sod house: Sod houses were made of willows, mud, and moss. A smoke hole was made at the top of the house right above the fire place. The smoke hole was covered up at night with a skin before bedtime.