

Dana Cherry

summary of class on October 4, 1988:

Edward and Margaret talked at first about whether they would like to see people return to King Island. They would like to see people return, but things are not the same anymore. It would be difficult for people who weren't raised with that lifestyle to live successfully there; they do not have the hunting skills. A whole year of groceries would need to be purchased in advance, since there is no longer a store. They would like to go back, but do not think they are strong enough to run up and down the cliffs anymore.

They talked about the ships that visited the island. The coast guard came regularly, and there was a dentist on board, and sometimes (but not often enough) a doctor. A private trader from Nome named Ira Ramp used to visit King Island. The men would trade their carvings for things like flour, ammunition, rifles and rawhide lines. He came in June when there was no ice.

They said that long ago hostile people had come to their village, but it was long before their time.

They said their are oogruk, crab, bullhead fish and polar bears (when the north wind blows) on their island. When an oogruk was caught it was shared among the community.

Edward's 80-year -old cousin is the only elder left who remembers the stories of their people. He lives in Nome.

The school was closed because of avalanche danger, but the Eskimo people who lived there had no say in the matter. Don Anderson wanted to put the school on top of the island. But Edward told us that no one would go if the north wind was blowing. When Anderson suggested that, Edward said to him, "You're going to put in an elevator?!" There was an avalanche which damaged someone's house, but luckily the people who lived there were in Nome at the time.

Marriages were arranged in the old days. But nowadays, the children would not listen if their parents told them who to marry. It was Margaret and Edward's 42nd anniversary on October 7.

They have no taboo against women handling men's hunting tools. There is a belief among their people that it is bad luck to kill the raven.

Eliza told us a funny story about when some ^{Alaskan} Eskimo people were first given popcorn by white people. They did not close the lid of the pan and when the popcorn started to fly all over the room they ran out! I guess that's the lighter side of the meeting of two cultures.

Edward told us about the hunt in which he got his first polar bear. The men always take the same trail. He spotted the bear and someone else shot it. They hunt as a team that way. Since Edward spotted the bear, it was his bear. That night Edward's family gave away everything they had, in the Eskimo custom. He danced for many hours until the other people had finished singing all the polar bear songs they wanted to sing.

They were allowed to speak their own language at school. But not too much. One day Margaret was kicked out of school for talking too much with her friend. Teachers came for a year or two to King Island. They got along pretty well with the community, according to Margaret and Edward. Sometimes they participated in the dances and other events at the clubhouse. Margaret liked school, especially arithmetic. But unfortunately her mother was sick all the time and Margaret had to stay at home and take care of her.

At the end of class, we looked at a harpoon head that someone had left at the A.N.S. department. Edward verified that it looked realistic.