

Knowledge of Native Elders, 401
Larry and Martha Matfay
Summary by Jonathan Andrews, February 9, 1989

Living on an Island such as Kodiak; it is expected that the waters, weather and land are of great importance to its' residents. In class, Larry and Martha Matfay shared their knowledge on these subjects, as well as the experiences they had in school, and in a humorous tone, described their marriage and the events leading up to it.

The weather to someone who resides and works on the water is of utmost importance. It can dictate returns on a days catch, as well as the safety of those on board. Larry described how they would predict the weather before transmitted reports were available. The stars were the instrument used for predicting the next days weather. When he or others were in a barabara, waiting for the next day to come, he would observe whether or not it would be suitable to hunt or fish by the way in which the stars twinkled, especially the Northstar. He acknowledged that the Northstar here looks so close as to its' appearance in Kodiak.

Certain occurrences happened regularly as his boat would leave the harbor of Old Harbor. When the tide moved into the harbor, it would create a fog. This however, did not last a long time, and would "lift". When the wind blew from the southwest, it too would create problems by making large waves that could move straight into the harbor where the villagers moved their boats.

Once at sea, if the weather were to turn sour, they were able to determine their location by either looking for land, or by using soundings to find out how far from land they were situated. They achieved this by using cod or halibut hooks dropped to the oceans bottom, or by the use of Bull kelp, an indigenous idea, tied together as a substitute for rope. The Bull kelp was stored in the bow of the kayak which kept the kelp from becoming dry and cracking apart.

Larry talked about the weather of past and present. The wind blows hard on Kodiak, and the lack of trees and the hills, create downdrafts which make the temperatures severe. He mentioned in the past two years however, that the actual tempertures have dropped, and the winds are gusting more. Snowfall on the island is not evenly distributed and the winds create drifts everywhere.

The water and weather create many hazards to Kodiak residents lives. Before the time of outboards and citizen band radio. Larry and the others would always be sure to "check in and out" whenever they went out on the water or

out of town. If someone were overdue, then a search party would be formed. Clocks also were not a common item, so mariners used the tides to determine what time it was. This could be calculated by knowing that an incoming tide took six hours and an outgoing took 6 hours as well.

The conversation then shifted to the schooling Larry and Martha received. When Larry first went to school he did not speak English. He spoke Aleut, his language, that's what his parents spoke. He did learn English at the canneries where he worked in the machine shop. Larry attended a B.I.A school, but attendance was not mandatory. He reflected on some of his experiences, such as how the shortage of paper required them to write them to on slate found in the mountains. He had interest in geography, because of its applicability to his life and lifestyle.

Martha stated that she was required to learn English before attending school. Her teacher in Karluk was a Native women, but classes were conducted in English. After her mother died when she was 12 years of age, she went to Eklutna, a Federally-run boarding school. Here she studied and lived until she was finished, not even going home in the summer because of the distance. The schooling they received was different from that of today. Larry said that much could be learned from observing and asking questions - this is how he gained the knowledge and experience of kayak building, which he would have never learned in school.

Both Larry and Martha then discussed marriage and the traditions of that. The class laughed constinuesly. On the serious side, they talked about the rituals, after being married they were had to eat from the same bowl at their reception. Larry said that he had but \$100.00 so the two rings he bought at 25 cents a piece meant a great deal to them. Unfortunately they went out to sea with their home in a tsunani in 1964. They both stated that divorce was an uncommon event or even unheard of long ago. Martha said in the old days that fixed marriages were arranged, but not extremely common. In Larry's own way, when asked if there were anymore quesitons concernig marriage, he said, "Make it short."