

Knowledge of Native Elders  
February 21, 1989  
Larry & Martha Matfay  
Summary by Julie Jones

The class began with a question about whether there is more or less game in the Kodiak area than in the past. Larry said there is more game animals now since there is a season on the animals. For example, long ago they would take the female bear with her cubs. Now, there are federal regulations against taking a bear with cubs.

There is also more sea mammals. Long ago, as many whales as possible were taken. This almost wiped out the whale population but they are starting to repopulate. Whales are usually sited between Kodiak and Old Harbor in the narrow cape, feeding. The whales they have in the Kodiak area are the blue whales, beluga whales, and hump back whales.

The next question asked was how do you keep food piginaq, fish ice cream, keep from spoiling? The fish is flaked, then mixed with berries, some kind of oil such as seal oil, and it is then sealed in a barrel. The best fish dish Larry ever tasted was with wild rice. The wild rice is picked on the island. It is cookd in salt water, drained and then cooked with something else.

Do they ferment fish or fish eggs in Kodiak? Larry said they only ferment eggs.

The next major topic discussed was village chiefs. How were village chiefs elected? The power was passed down from father to son. His grandfather was a chief. Later on, they appointed church leaders as chiefs. Young men were sometimes appointed assistant chiefs, they filled in if the chief was gone or sick. Back then, people gathered together to discuss their problems. They talked until a solution was found.

They don't have chiefs anymore. They have village council members. A person asked Larry if he thought the village council or the chief worked better. Larry said he thought the village council worked better since it involved all people young and old. The disadvantage of the village council is it doesn't stick together.

The next major topic was Martha and Larry's experience during the 1964 earthquake and tidal wave.

#### LARRY'S EXPERIENCE

It was good Friday, a beautiful day according to Larry. Larry was building a dooray, he was just about finished. It was about 4:40 p.m. when the earthquake hit.

Martha was in the kitchen cooking. Larry went to the house and got on the radio. The coastguard informed him that Akiak wasn't hit yet. The village of Oghuyiak was right in the face of the tidal wave. They lost two lives while trying to rescue people.

The earthquake shook so hard that it knocked the hot water tank down in Larry's house. Martha took as much as she could up to the hillside.

Larry and his friend Mike went out on his skipper to try to save it from tidal wave. They had to cut his anchor off since they didn't have enough time to pull it up. They anchored the boat in front of the village. He had the engine running so they wouldn't drift away. During all this Larry was on the radio with other boats in the area. It was very dangerous for them because there were houses and other debris in the area that might sink his boat. Finally, they had to abandon the boat because it tipped over when they washed up on the bank during one of the waves.

Larry and Mike had to make a mad dash up to the hillside. They could hear the water coming, it sounded like a loud thunder.

That night they stayed up on the hillside. The younger men brought sleeping bags and other gear up to the hillside between tides before the houses drifted away. Some of the families didn't have blankets. These families had a rough time since there was still snow on the ground. The families with small babies didn't have any milk to feed them.

The next day they couldn't recognize the village because all the houses drifted away. The newer houses with piling drifted away first. The older houses that were built into the ground drifted away last. Larry's house was one of the last to go. Larry said it looked like it was going to stay but a smaller house came up and bumped it over the bank. It still had a kerosine lamp lit in the window as it floated away.

Larry thought a mystical power protected the church during the earthquake and the tidal wave. Not a single candle fell over during the earthquake, nothing was damaged in the church. During the tidal wave, the water came up close to the church but receded again. The school wasn't damaged during the tidal wave either. The school was used for people to warm up in since it had power.

Larry had to find someone willing to risk their life to go rescue his boat. After he got his boat he helped other people rescue their boats.

The coastguard came during the day to bring families to Kodiak. It was a 10 hour trip from Old Harbor to Kodiak. Martha said they were lucky that it was calm weather. When they arrived in Kodiak, some people left their belongings on the dock while looking for help. Another high tide took their last belongings away.

The families were transported to Anchorage for a month. The men stayed behind to rebuild the village. They built their houses in the same location that the houses stood before the tidal wave. There was talk about moving the village to a different location in case of another tidal wave but it never happened. The village is now located on a gravel bar which would slide right out if there was another

tidal wave. But Larry said it's a good location to live, with a harbor for his fishing boat.

#### MARTHA'S EXPERIENCE

Martha was mopping the floor that day, cooking at the same time. She was roasting sea lion for dinner. She was standing in the kitchen when the earthquake hit. She said all the spices in her cupboard fell out along with all the dishes.

She said the road was just like a wave during the earthquake. After the earthquake ended she felt really dizzy because of all the shaking. Some people went to watch for the water to rise after the earthquake ended. They didn't wait long because they could hear the water approaching through the narrows. It came from both sides of the island in front of Old Harbor like a flood instead of a tidal wave.

That night they stayed on the hillside. She said they would feel a tremor once in a while and get scared all over again.

#### EXPERIENCE IN ANCHORAGE

Martha said they had a 10 hour trip to Kodiak. They saw chairs, cupboards, tables, trees and other debris on the way to Kodiak.

When they got to Anchorage it was cold in the quonset huts at Fort Richardson. The people were kind of mean to them when they were supposed to help them. They had to stand in line to get blankets and mattresses. There was also no cooking facilities when they first got there. Martha and her family stayed in Anchorage for one month. Larry went back after one week. He didn't like it in Anchorage.

This concluded Larry and Martha's experience during the earthquake. Martha discussed another time after the earthquake when she was afraid there was going to be another tidal wave. It was when the army was doing some kind of atomic bomb testing. Some people remembered the tidal wave and brought gear up to the hillside. The atomic bomb left a huge hole in the ground.

After that they talked about slavic. The question "Do people travel between villages during slavic? Slavic is a Christmas holiday. Larry said they hold service at 4 p.m. and then people go home and rest till 6:30 p.m. Then the people go from house to house singing Christmas carols. But the people don't travel between villages during Christmas time.

The final topic discussed was Larry's first fox catch. Larry was 14 or 15 years old when he caught his first fox. He went to Karluk with his Uncle Pashia to trap for fox. Larry and his uncle had a competition to see who would catch a fox first. Larry was the first to catch a fox. When he

took the fox out of the trap he twisted its neck and placed it in a gunny sack. Then he brought the sack home. He was sitting around telling his aunt about his fox when the fox stood up in the gunny sack, he guessed that it was just unconscious during his trip home. He said it was a funny experience for him.

After they got back to Old Harbor his parents had a tea party for him. They served tea, donuts and other foods. Hunters sat around telling their stories. Then at the end of the tea party his parents gave Larry's fox to an older man. After the party Larry asked why they gave his fox away. His parent's said they always give away the first catch for any animal to an elder for good luck.

This concluded the summary for the February 21, 1989 tape.