

Larry and Martha Matfay

March 7, 1989

By Renee Singh

Martha demonstrated basket making for us, she described the beach grass on Kodiak Island and told us how to pick and dry it.

When asked what time of the year was best to pick grass, Martha said usually in July. "Or even later part of June, before the grass gets to tall. It's not so course, we cut it about eighteen inches long, or something. I cut it close to the ground, as close as you can get. Because that's where the strongest part of the grass is. It's almost white, close to the roots, you wrap it up in a cold dry place for a couple of weeks. Or you could just spread it out, let the sun and rain bleach it."

A student asked "What was he (Larry) saying about throwing your grass away." Martha laughed and told us once when Larry was getting his gear ready for fishing, she came down to the beach and he had covered her drying grass with "anchors and lines and everything! All over, it was ruined."

Martha went back to her basket "This grass is wide, but I've got these split."

Another student asked if Martha had learned this as a girl. Martha replied no, "I picked this up in my thirty's

or something. Where I was growing up they weren't doing any basket weaving."

She continued describing her basket. "The narrower you split it the finer your weave is, you have to keep it damp in order to work with it or else it will just break."

Eliza asked how long you could keep grass, Martha said as long as you keep it dry. "You can keep it quiet awhile. One of my weavers got to short, so I'm adding another piece to it."

Eliza said "It's so fine!" Martha replied "This isn't fine, you should see some of the ones, some people weave, it's like weaving thread- so fine! I used to do a little finer weaving than this" she said with a giggle "but now I want to get done with what I'm working on. Make smaller baskets!" (she laughed and the class joined in).

Eliza asked if a lot of women weaved baskets in Old Harbor, Martha said "There's a few, who teach the young girls in school." Eliza asked if they learn how to cut the grass, and Martha said yes.

Martha then demonstrated for a student how she put the short end into the weave. She mentioned she likes it when she doesn't have to add anymore between, "It goes faster."

Martha then explained how she got the bottom "that way." When we were curious how she got the shape. "Just stop adding between them, and it starts turning up."

A student asked how do you know when to add, "Do you do a row, then go around adding every other one? The hard part

is like when you add." Martha said she looks at the back,
"Here I can see the ends sticking out."

Eliza asked how long did it take to learn? Martha
replied it doesn't take long. "You watch and try, but you
still don't know how."

Eliza "But you keep trying, and eventually learn. I
wouldn't mind learning how to do that!"

Martha said one of her nine year old grandchildren
learned. She said she was weaving, and the kids just came
around her. "Some of them learn real fast, but some of them
don't."

Eliza said that while Martha was weaving we could all
get a snack, since we were running out of time. A student
perked up and said "Well your going to let her stop weaving,
long enough to eat aren't you?" We all laughed then ate and
took pictures. All in all it was a fun class, we ate almost
all the food, and when we were packing up to leave, Eliza
found the salmon dip she thought she left at home, so we ate
again!