

Elder-in-Residence
Tatiana Saunders/ Nulato 10/5/89
Summary by Zelma Dick, ? 10/16/89

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Tatiana talked about the first western influences with the introduction of such things as tea, coffee, and sugar introduced by the Russians and the effect it had on peoples lives. These items still have Russian names in our native language. Before the introduction of mosquito repellent such as Off and Buhach people used fish oil and grass smudge for mosquito repellent.

She remember as a child, she had her tonsils removed on the hospital boat that went up and down the river, this hospital was owned by the U.S. Govt.

When Tassiana was a child Nulato was the biggest settlement for miles around. There was no Galena and Koyukuk was just a small village then, which it is today. Nulato was so big it had two pool halls, three saloons, one hospital and, one church (Catholic).

People lived mostly in camps, winter and summer camps. Coming to town only for the holidays, such as Thanksgivings and Christmas and 17th of March. Natives from miles around use to come for these holidays. Sometimes traveling 300 miles or more, because Nulato was a major settlement in that area. The holidays was a good excuse to gather and celebrate. There were dog races, snowshoe races, and various fun activities. The dog races would be 24 miles long, and snowshoe races would be 12 miles long. There were two outstanding women who use to race with the men, and one of them use to come in way ahead of the men. The women's races were 10 miles long and the women would drive 12 dogs at a time, yea! The women would be dressed in the long fur parkas with their dress flying behind them. Tassie talked about how they had to wear long parkas so that their dresses wouldn't be blowing up and show their howemade bloomers. She mentioned how they had to deal with their new elastic waist bands on these new garments.

There was all night dances. There was violin and guitar music played by the Athabaskan men of the community. The late Andrew Johnson played the violin for many years. Berchman Esmailka and some others took over and is still continuing today.

There was around the clock gambling. The men used to play for highstakes of gold nuggets and thousands of dollars on the table. She told of one young man ate his extra card in his sandwich, because he had used up all his money on the table and didn't want to leave without it, so he ate his card which he snuck into a sandwich. She states he won too! People also played other more casual card games. One is called tson' kk'aateyet 'Outhouse'.

When she was young alcohol had very little effect on the native population, because they had very little money to spend on it. If they did buy a bottle they would have to pool their money together, to buy a pint of whiskey which

cost 75 cents, or go for even a larger pot and pay \$1.50 for a quart. People used to drink only during the holidays.

She talked about the midnight Masses was a major event. Everyone dressed in their very best. Women in silk dresses while men dressed up in their black suits. Over these fancy clothes would be the very best parkas, ones made with the best short hair furs.

Tatiana told us about how two of the snowshoe racers died after racing in below zero weather during the New Years celebration. After these men came back from running 12 miles in the cold weather, one collapsed at the finish line and the other died after he got in his house. The people stopped having snowshoe race in really cold weather.