

90-06-347

Elders in Residence Collection. Elder Grace Slwooko is interviewed in Fairbanks, Alaska.

Keywords: Siberian Yup'ik Eskimos, St. Lawrence Island, preparing walrus and seal meat and skin, skin rope making, building materials, processing racks, carcass uses, sea ice, skin boats, skin clothing, blubber, seal oil lamps, moss, muktuk, technology, fire and heat.

Date of recording: 10.01.1993

Summarized by Cecilie R. Ebsen

Summary date: 10.19.14.

Length of recording: 00.50.30

Students

00:00:06.37

A student asks if Grace can draw how a seal or walrus is cut up.

Grace Slwooko

00:00:28.08

[Grace draws this on the board, while she makes comments]

She explains how today they use guns to shoot seals.

Grace Slwooko

00:05:07.53

They peel the skin of first, cut it up and then start on the meat.

Grace Slwooko

00:06:53.39

People will go blind if they boil the seal's eyes. Children might eat them raw, but they must not be boiled.

Grace Slwooko

00:10:19.47

[Continue to draw and explain - difficult to follow without illustration]

Grace Slwooko

00:12:30.59

People catch tomcod and take them home. They have freezers today, so they don't dry the fish as often as earlier.

Grace Slwooko

00:13:09.55

They have Yup'ik names for the months of the year [Grace lists those names]. In March is when they go and get all those tomcods. February is when the seals are really thick-skinned. This is the kind of skin they use for boots and rope. March is also whale season and when new seals are born. April is bird and duck hunting

season on the open water. May is called the Woman of the summer. Hunters go out on the open water, the ice disappears and don't come back until November. They hunt for seals. June is when the rivers open up. It is dangerous to travel on the land before the rivers are open - they often use dogsleds. July is when Murr [sp?] eggs are out. The men go out in the light nights and collect eggs. August is when they gather green things. They also make coats from sealskins. September's name means that the ground is going to be frozen. October's name mean "when the lakes are going to be frozen". November is when ceremonies with masks are done. However after the missionaries came they stopped doing these. November is also known as the month where the ice is slippery. December is identified with frost, and with pretty things that sound good in one's ears.

Students

00:21:55.39

Asks how they divide meat up?

Grace Slwooko

00:22:04.46

There is a special way to divide it [Grace draws on board again]. She explains how they cut the walrus up.

Teacher (Theresa John)

00:31:08.17

Explains further how seal is dried

Teacher (Theresa John)

00:37:16.47

Talks about the kind of knives they used to cut up the seals. They were similar to the traditional ulu, but not quite the same. It was a very difficult process.

Grace Slwooko

00:39:25.65

When they clean the skins to make leather they use soapy water and wash the skin over and over.

Teacher (Theresa John)

00:42:02.30

When they are soaked in aged urine, they take the smell out of the skin and it brightens them. People had a pot of urine under their bed and in the morning they stuck a finger in it, or would clean their eyes or wash their hair in it, because it helped on eye infections and removed smell. When someone was really sick they would be advised to drink little kids' urine. Also when someone was stuck on the wilderness, then they were advised to drink their urine to keep their bodies warm.

Grace Slwooko

00:47:17.28

They used to eat the outside of the intestines too.

Teacher (Theresa John)

00:47:33.10

They did this too in Theresa's village. They would then blow up the intestines to hang them up to dry and they got all dizzy from all the blowing.