

## 90-06-349

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

Keywords: Siberian Yup'ik Eskimos, St. Lawrence Island, school, old ways, marriage, bridal service, walrus house, family history, new houses, reindeer, gathering food, whale meat, hauling water, recipes, Eskimo ice cream, women's work, women's roles, mukluk

Date of recording: 10.08,1993

Release agreement: Yes, no Internet

Summarized by Cecilie R. Ebsen

Summary date: 10.23.14.

Length of recording: 00.45.30

### Grace Slwooko

00:00:20.21

Grace will turn 72 this year. Her father's generation was the first to go to school.

### Grace Slwooko

00:02:13.59

Grace's father died at sea. Her father trapped fox on the other end of the island.

### Grace Slwooko

00:04:34.13

They always have some kind of walrus meat to eat.

### Grace Slwooko

00:07:12.74

Grace talks about the berries they pick and eat around Gambell.

### Grace Slwooko

00:09:58.29

Grace talks about reindeer and how to cook the meat.

### Grace Slwooko

00:11:10.33

When the first snow comes in October and November people make a mixture of reindeer fat and snow. Later sugar is added.

### Teacher (Theresa John)

00:19:11.54

Asks how old girls are when they are expected to get married today?

### Grace Slwooko

00:19:24.88

The girls today are grown up and not considered old enough before they are 18

years old. In earlier times they didn't keep track of how old they were, they just remembered the events that happened around the time someone was born, like a particular whale hunt.

### **Teacher (Theresa John)**

00:22:04.65

Girls are expected to be good at sowing, cooking and taking care of a household. The girls were given dolls to play with as an early form of practice for the chores they were later expected to perform.

### **Grace Slwooko**

00:23:08.97

Grace confirms this.

### **Students**

00:24:20.74

Do young girls still learn to sow today?

### **Grace Slwooko**

00:24:27.85

Not as much. They want to go to school too. Elders didn't use to like the girls going to school because they wanted them to learn how to sow etc. instead. Later on the elders started liking the girls going to school and high school because when they come home they get jobs and share their income with the elders.

### **Unknown**

00:26:24.42

[Recording shuts off audio]

### **Unknown**

00:26:31.54

[Recording comes back]

### **Teacher (Theresa John)**

00:27:00.64

Anyone who did not know how to take care of an animal was considered to be careless. In general people were measured by the practical skills they had.

### **Unknown**

00:31:36.36

[Several people talk about Alaska Native languages and semiotics]

### **Teacher (Theresa John)**

00:32:36.88

The Yup'ik language system has developed so finely because of traditional oral history. They have built a large vocabulary, which is why there are 20 different names for snow for example.

### **Students**

00:33:02.34

Asks how handicapped or mentally impaired people fit into the community?

### **Grace Slwooko**

00:33:52.03

Relatives help them. There are also good people who take care of the handicapped. They will bring them to their house and take care of them. These good people are trusted. Foolish people are not trusted. The ones that have poor clothing because they are lazy. These are not wise people.

### **Teacher (Theresa John)**

00:35:13.15

A social law demands to love and take care of everyone in Yup'ik communities. If social laws are not followed by someone they will become outcasts. These are unwritten laws and can therefore be difficult to follow.

### **Students**

00:36:48.81

Asks if a handicapped person is looked down upon?

### **Teacher (Theresa John)**

00:37:00.15

They are not. If someone is blind, they are probably making up for it by being very good with their hands and ears. Once there was a blind man who played around with snow machines and learned how to take them apart and put them back together. One day he was working and the lights went out. The blind man kept working because that didn't matter to him. Other people are trained to listen and recite what they have heard from start to finish.

### **Teacher (Theresa John)**

00:40:23.37

She has never heard of anyone who were not taken care of. If someone are mentally off they are still taken care of and loved. One man always started screaming during dance events but no one sent him away. They talked to him, calmed him down and accepted him as he was.

### **Students**

00:41:58.98

Asks what happens if someone is lazy? It seems like one can't afford to be lazy if they want to survive. Do people give lazy people more work to try to overcome

laziness?

**Teacher (Theresa John)**

00:43:34.80

In her experience they would send a lazy person to the elders who would try to work out what was wrong.

**Grace Siwooko**

00:43:56.31

Grace agrees. Elders like to pass on important knowledge to the next generation. They try to find ways to make them understand. Grace enjoys writing legends because they show how to be wise.