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Elders in Residence Collection. Elders Jimmie Toolie and Mabel Toolie from St. Lawrence Island are interviewed by students of the Alaska Native studies 401 class at University of Alaska Fairbanks, spring semester 1984.

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[Smalltalk]

A student asks if there are polar bears on the island in the summer.

There is, but Jimmie is not sure how many. His father would know. One time they saw a polar bear on the ice

The teacher asks Mabel to share her knowledge about how to work with polar bear hides and other things she does.

Mabel talks about working with intestines and skins, how to treat them, dye them: She washes them for two days in fresh water, and then she puts them on her clothesline. Sealskin is quite versatile. The hair comes out by itself. Then it is washed repeatedly [Demonstrates in classroom with actual skin]

The teacher asks how they make the dye that gives the skin a pink color?

Mabel got some dye from someone up the creek.

She made the mukluks she is wearing.

Jimmie talks about how next week the Elders' conference is in Nome where everyone gathers. He has to fly to get there and he does not like flying.

00:08:34

The teacher comments on a hand stitched piece of clothing that is passed around the classroom. Her [Mabel's] eyes are getting weaker and it is getting harder for her to do those kinds of things.

Someone asks if Jimmie saw the reindeer outside that morning. He did. They

look pretty much the same as the reindeer Jimmie used to herd. He continues to talk about his days of reindeer herding.

00.12.04

Someone asks if Jimmie saw the reindeer outside that morning. He did. They look pretty much the same as the reindeer Jimmie used to herd.

In the spring lots of reindeer starved because they were out of food. They had 400-500 reindeer. He always watched them. Their skin keeps them warm.

Earlier, Mabel was always sowing, especially mukluks. They are called kamuks [sp?] in Yup'ik. Every boot is called kamuk. Except the deerskin boots are called [Yup'ik name].

The teacher asks Jimmie to talk about the weather.

An old man told him that when the southeast clouds come out, then do not go hunting. The man's name was Suluk [sp?]. One time they went hunting. At one point Jimmie wanted to return to Savoonga, but the old man Suluk told him he should not do that. It seemed like good weather but Suluk said no. In the afternoon the weather got really bad and a storm came suddenly. The next day Suluk told Jimmie he could now go back to Savoonga. There was no wind and very good weather when they crossed the mountain between Gambell and Savoonga.

[Jimmie shows on map, which ways they go at different times of the year]

00.19.15

One time, he made it to Gambell in four hours, which was pretty fast. He only had one reindeer for the trip. He knows that some herders ride on the back of the reindeer but he does not do that. He has a sled. They use a rope that is over 25 feet long for the sled. Some of the reindeer go, some panic [Correct interpretation?]. When the reindeer look ahead and walk they might pull a little closer with the sled, but if the reindeer looks back they stop.

The sled is big. Seven or nine inch wide. They sit down on the sled. They get snow in their faces when they ride.

The old people know weather. When they go out hunting they watch the cracks in the ice and they know when to return to open waters. When a crack comes in the ice, it is a sign that the ice will open. If the wind comes from the south the ice will open sooner than if the wind comes from the north. So a northern wind is good for being out.

00.24.15

[Mabel is asked to show where they used to herd reindeer on the map, they discuss the location] It is southeast of Savoonga.

There is a camp that they used to stay at. When Mabel was just six, her mother died. Her grandmother raised her. She spent time in this camp with her too.

They talk about the reindeer and how the mothers would leave the babies. They would keep moving and force the baby reindeers to follow them, to get on their little legs and follow them. In that way the mothers taught their babies how to walk.

If a reindeer ran away the dogs would get them and teach them to stay, just like collie [sp?] dogs.

30.40

The teacher asks Jimmie to talk about Ernest Gruening and ATG [Alaska Territorial Guard].

In 1942 Gruening and Muktuk Marston came to Savoonga. Gruening asked the Yup'ik to look out for the Japanese army and shoot them if they came. They also showed them how to use guns.

Every day they would have drills for three or four hours. Jimmie demonstrates some of the military commands he learned how to use and the idea of using them to boss around the other villagers make the class laugh.

If they saw any low flying airplanes they would report it. He quit hunting because he was on watch all the time.

Planes landed on the lake in the wintertime.

Sometimes the military would call him when he was in Gambell.

The teacher asks what ATG is. Jimmie explains it stands for Alaska Territorial Guard. They were not fighting but they were guarding. They did have army guns that they got to keep.

Sometimes they did target shooting. He can still do it.

00.38.46

Mabel talks about being adopted.

She learned how to sow on her own. She watched other women do it and learned it herself.

00.43.45

The teacher explains a couple of photos going around. They show how people from St. Lawrence Island went to Juneau and made a skin boat for their museum in 1968-69.

Jimmie talks about the process of using walrus hides for boats.

00.52.15

[Various conversations break out]

They talk about houses and the use of walrus hide for these.

00.58.30

[Teacher talks about plans for the next classes]

They talk some more about reindeer herding, corralling and how reindeer are separated deliberately sometimes.