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Elders in Residence Collection. Jimmie and Mabel Toolie are interviewed by students of the Alaska Native Studies 401 class at the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

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Summarized by: Cecilie R. Ebsen

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Jimmie Toolie

00:00:06.17

Jimmie talks about his father going out to hunt. He would always return with meat no matter the weather. His father and uncle gave meat to others when they did not have any during hard times. In the fall seaweed would cover the ice snow and they would dig through it to make holes in the ice. They would eat the seaweed; boil it and salt it. The elders would get thin and sleep a lot. They only got three bites of meat and then wait 20 minutes and give them a little more. If they ate too much they would die. Their parents made them eat walrus and deerskin so that they would be used to eating it if hard times came and nothing else would be available.

Jimmie Toolie

00:07:38.07

When he was seven or eight they had to eat seaweed and bird for a while. When he was 12 they still used seal oil lamps.

Teacher

00:08:41.68

How did people store food for winter?

Jimmie Toolie

00:08:49.72

They had meat cellars. They would dig them out of the ground. They were about 7 feet deep.

Teacher

00:09:51.60

When the people starved did they not have any meat in their cellars?

Jimmie Toolie

00:10:07.01

No they were out. And it was difficult to go out to hunt walrus when the wind was blowing strong because it was hard to walk on the ice.

Jimmie Toolie

00:13:12.11

They have to be careful on the ice when the wind is blowing. They were told to watch the ice carefully when it pushed away because they could get squished between the ice blocks.

Jimmie Toolie

00:13:50.18

Jimmie starved too. They had meat but not enough. They made him eat walrus hide and sealskin.

Students

00:14:43.66

Did the walrus act differently after a storm?

Jimmie Toolie

00:14:53.87

No.

Jimmie Toolie

00:15:51.56

[Show on map where they went to hunt walrus when they were starving] It was west of Gambell on the open water from the North. Three to four miles out. When the ice pushed hard the walrus jumped and they hunted them. It was probably in January.

Students

00:17:58.30

How did they get seaweed in the winter when there was ice on the water?

Jimmie Toolie

00:18:22.38

Jimmie explains how near the shore there wasn't that much snow. It would rain and the snow would drift, so that is how they had access to dig seaweed.

Jimmie Toolie

00:19:38.77

They could not get any fish at that time. The west side had open waters but it was too windy to go there. The starvation lasted for almost a month.

Students

00:20:25.04

How did they divide the food once they got it?

Jimmie Toolie

00:20:32.68

The hunters who got meat gave a little to everyone.

Students

00:23:29.92

Did they ever have hard times like that in the camp where Mabel grew up?

Mabel Toolie

00:23:43.65

She is not sure, because it was a long time ago. When she was young she was in the reindeer camp.

Jimmie Toolie

00:24:31.75

She was born on the south side of Savoonga in a deer camp. Her mother died early on.

Teacher

00:25:00.78

They always had reindeer when Mabel was growing up?

Jimmie Toolie

00:25:12.41

In the springtime they came from Gambell to corral.

Teacher

00:25:42.98

But they never go hungry because they could always have reindeer?

Jimmie Toolie

00:25:45.76

Yes never hungry.

Teacher

00:25:52.50

And so when Jimmie started herding he always had that option too?

Jimmie Toolie

00:26:06.13

Yes.

Jimmie Toolie

00:27:38.71

One time he was out during a storm for three days but he stayed with the reindeer and he was okay.

Teacher

00:28:14.81

Asks the students if they see the historical pattern of how after they started herding reindeer they always had access to food on St. Lawrence Island.

Jimmie Toolie

00:30:50.78

Talks about how the weather has changed and it is a lot more windy now that it used to be

Jimmie Toolie

00:31:48.37

The plywood boats are better than aluminum boats in the summertime. It is easier to jump to the shore from the wooden boat. The aluminum boat stops all the way while the wooden boats slide onto the beach shore. Aluminum boats are good when there is lots of ice, while the wooden boats break easily when hitting ice.

Students

00:35:05.91

Are there still reindeer on the island?

Jimmie Toolie

00:35:13.25

Yes. He is not sure how many because they have been starving. At the last corral they counted 10,000 reindeer, which was too many reindeer for such small island and so they let them starve. Maybe there are 500 left today. They don't corral them anymore. They have new herders but they don't herd much.

Jimmie Toolie

00:36:48.92

Jimmie herded from 1914 until around 1950. They were a team of four boys who would go out and herd while another team of four boys stayed back in camp and take care of day-to-day chores such as chopping wood.

Teacher

00:38:52.57

The cost of subsistence living has increased dramatically with the technological improvements that have been brought to villages in Alaska. A consequence of

this on St. Lawrence Island is that reindeer herding is no longer viable. Because of economic crunches it just didn't make sense to do it anymore. However they are starting to herd again. Something similar happened with salmon in the 1940s-1970s when their roe, caviar, was very valuable.

Students

00:44:32.13

What year did Jimmie live in Anchorage and what was it like?

Jimmie Toolie

00:45:08.77

In 1961 when he worked in the Air Force. Afterwards he went back to live in Savoonga. It was okay but Mabel was homesick.

Unknown

00:46:16.66

[Recorder is muffled]

Unknown

00:46:41.55

[Recorder comes back on]

Jimmie Toolie

00:46:51.36

He didn't travel around Anchorage while he lived there. There wasn't anyone they knew in Anchorage which is why Mabel got homesick.

Mabel Toolie

00:50:53.26

They used to bring food or have food sent to them from home when they lived in Anchorage.

Teacher

00:50:56.43

[Teacher closes the class]