

Katherine Anderson tells her life story

By AGNES PETE GRIFFITH
Editor of River Times

A very interesting lady full of stories was one whom I set out to interview on a Thursday afternoon, right when the weather was warm and beautiful.

Katherine Anderson, an Athapaskan, born in a village near Rampart, is 72 years old, but still has a lot of life in her.

Sitting with her 18-month-old granddaughter in her lap, Katherine told me some of her life story, she said, "because there isn't any money in it."

Katherine plans to publish a book in the future and is working on her notes when she has time.

It all began in April of this year when she was in the hospital and a nurse said, "Why don't you write your life story?" Katherine thought seriously about it, and began writing during her stay in the hospital.

A very religious woman, and one who totally and wholeheartedly believes in God, Katherine's good vibrations and enthusiasm reach out to you, and soon you feel as if you've known her all your life. That's the way I felt when I left and for once, I smiled very happily to have communicated so graciously and deeply with someone I had just met.

Her children are Freda Hunt, Clara Johnson and "Teddy" Anderson.

Her grandchildren are Emil,

14, and Nancy, 13 by Teddy; Kathy, 21, Stanley, 17, Christine, 13, and John, 3, by Freda; and Maxine, 18 months, by Clara, for a total of seven grandchildren.

Babysitting for Clara's daughter Maxine is no problem she says. "I love children. I babysat all my life. They tried to tell me I'm too old to babysit, but I don't listen to nobody."

Maxine seemed very comfortable with her grandmother, as her diaper was changed and she was given a bottle soon after she had awoken from her nap. Grandmother talked to her grandchild, and Maxine listened, and said a few words in return, although she seemed a little surprised at my presence.

Camera shy Maxine reluctantly posed for a few pictures. "It (the camera) won't hurt you," Katherine said. Thus I proceeded to take their pictures as Maxine curiously looked at the pieces of the camera cover and tried to take away my notebook.

Before Maxine woke up, Katherine had been working on a quilt made from scraps from velveteen and corduroy parkas she had made for her children and other scraps she had saved.

She said that she has sewn parkas, mukluks, fur caps, mittens, quilts, knitted and crocheted.

In fur sewing, she worked with marten, red fox and rabbit, but "mostly marten."

She still does some beadwork in addition to her sewing and babysitting.

Married to Einar Anderson, 88, a Swedish man, in 1931, they came to Fairbanks from Rampart in 1943 and have been here since.

Katherine was born in a mining camp where there was no law, and no church, but her mother was religious, she says. "Uncle was a lay reader. I listened to that while I was growing up."

A very religious woman, Katherine said "Jesus came to me when I was a teenager." Now she attends the Episcopal church and thrives among Christian people.

She felt the time was coming when something will happen. "There is such a change in the weather."

My tribe predicted this when they began to fool around with the moon—everything will be destroyed."

She said that the Indians have kept their predictions to themselves and don't tell white



Athabascan matriarch Katherine Anderson 72, visits with year and half old granddaughter Maxine, the daughter of Fairbanks Native Center counselor Clara Johnson.
—Agnes Griffith Photo

people. "We keep it to ourselves."

The Athapascans predicted that the people, not necessarily white people, but some strange peoples "would come and destroy us" under the water (meaning by submarines), on top of the water (by airplanes), and on top of the water (by steamboat). At the time, she says, they knew they would come in these ways, although they had not yet seen the means—that is airplanes and steamboats.

"My mother was two years old when they came. With them came T.B. (tuberculosis), colds, and toothaches. Before they came we died with all our teeth in our mouths. We ate good-roots, berries, and ate off the country. This was God's country."

Katherine went on that the people had predicted that men would go to the moon. "They said, 'when they begin to disturb what is holding the earth, and going to something away from the earth, they will destroy us with themselves... punching holes through the atmosphere,'" she explained.

In the summertime we fished with a fishnet—we used the fishwheel and fishnet. Dipnet, too, for whitefish. We cut, dried and smoked them. We worked awfully hard. Then we got \$.25 a pound, but that \$.25 bought us a lot of stuff."

Women hunted and trapped in those days too. In 1926, she said she made \$1,000 trapping. The men went far away with their dogteams and stayed over a month at a time.

She trapped marten with a trap, mink, fox, weasel and lynx with snares.

Katherine quit trapping in 1929 when the wolves came to town.

One time wolves came around my camp. I was with my nephew. I broke a willow off and swished the willow around and got home that way. I never knew the Indians did that before my time. It was about the time it just snowed. I never said I was afraid (to my nephew). I was too scared.

"Around the same time Jesse Evans was out trapping all alone. Wolves began circling around him. He was lucky his gun

hadn't froze. The dog team wouldn't budge. The leader of the wolf pack whistled through her nose. Jesse shot a few and eventually got the leader. After that the wolves left him. It was then I quit trapping after I found out about Jesse."

They also picked berries in the summer—salmonberries in late June, red currants and blueberries in July, high bush cranberries in August, and low bush cranberries and rose hips in September.

Her husband Einar mined for gold and prospected. "He made a good living. Everything had to be paid for—it was only \$18 an ounce when we left Rampart."

Einar and Katherine met "when we had a dance. All of my family was musical except me. One sister played piano and my mother played accordion. We had dances—violin, piano and instruments. I met my husband at dances. He used to come from Eureka to Rampart just to go to dances."

At their wedding ceremony in 1931, they were married by the commissioner. "I just wore a little dress. We were civilized people."

When asked what others thought of her marrying a white man, she said "Most of the big families—the Mayos, Woods and Evans came from white men. They were marrying Indians (women) before I was born."

Katherine said there were all races coming inland on the Yukon. "There was only one Russian I know of. He is 87 years old and living in Rampart. They were attracted by the gold—had gold fever. I hated it."

"There was a man who used to come to town. He'd give us a quarter. He came once—he was shot. Some people put him in a sled and took him to Tanana. The other man wanted his claim. Shot him four times."

The people trapped very heavy-Indians from the Yukon

(Continued on Page 6)

Matriarch . . .

(Continued from Page 5)

and Koyukon. "Dad was of two tribes, Mom, one. The three tribes banded together against the South side. The Kobuk people never crossed, never migrated around. They had wars and banned tribes (from their lands).

"On New Years they migrated to Nome-traded stuff for ivory, copper-white people came to them with copper pots and traded them for furs. They traded with the Eskimos."

While staying in Fairbanks, Katherine took care of her children. When they grew older, she did housework in addition to sewing. "I made a lot of parkas-velveteen and corduroy-with a wolf ruff."

Most recently, Katherine had been ill. In April she was in intensive care at the hospital for six days for heart trouble. She knew people and asked them to pray for her. They said, "We'll pray for you." Then she said one night she felt and heard something come over her. "I know it was an angel because I could hear its wings flutter." Then she felt well, and called her friend to tell them what happened.

She believes she was healed. Later she went back to see the doctor and nothing was wrong. "They took five or six X-rays of me and nothing was there-they checked my heart-nothing. I believed in the Lord and it

just healed."

Katherine told of other events which happened, but are too numerous to mention. "For someone who has this strong power," she said her uncle told her long ago that "there can be good and evil."

She says she learned to wish nothing but good and not to wish bad upon anyone. She can feel things so deeply that it often makes her very sad. All she says that one can do is pray, and not tell anyone else. "For the good Lord has meant it to be that way. There is nothing you can do about it."

For those who have that power-"As you get older, it gets worse. You are able to predict better, but you must use it wisely."

Then there are the healers, whom she believes in. These people, she says, can touch the person and pray for them, and whatever is wrong will go away. Or they can pray for the person. For this to happen, one must really believe in it.

This writer came away happy, for she was able to communicate so well, that it was as if she had read your mind, and know exactly what to say next.

"I have so much energy-it just comes off me. That's why I am so healthy," she says. And Katherine's stories will be written some day, and both you and I can delve into the further mysteries of her life.