



# Remembering fish camp, thoughts of good food

by Enid J. Brown

*Editor's Note: This is part two of Ms. Brown's two-part series.*

Then we would return to the camp, where the real work began — the cutting and hanging of the fish. Everyone pitched in. There were the fish cutters; that's all they did. There were the fish hangers. The children watched the babies. It was truly a family affair. Our survival and that of our dogs depended on this, our main staple.

Hardly anything was thrown out. Two of the backbones were tied together and hung up to dry for dog food. The heads were put in with some bones, eggs and scraps in a 55-gallon drum that had been cut into a third for a big cooking pot. The mixture was then cooked by the young boys who constantly stirred it. Later, after it was cool, the thick soup was fed to the howling dogs. In later years, we learned to put the eggs

in sugar sacks and hang them to cure for one of our mouth-watering delicacies.

Sometimes the bellies were cut off the salmon, the heads split in two and salted. This in turn was prepared in several different ways. Desalted and eaten as is, desalted and pickled, or desalted and boiled. All were delicious. When all the work was done, an older person might get started on smoking some of the fish. The fish were cut, cleaned and put in brine. After soaking the required amount of time, they were hung to dry for a day or two. Alders were gathered, as this was used for the smoke flavor. When the fish were dried out enough, they were then cut into strips, separated, and hung in the smoke house. The fire was built far enough away that the fish were cold smoked.

Some summers I can remember getting the worst craving for meat, ANY kind of meat. We lived

on fish, twice a day, seven days a week. Visions of brant, geese, reindeer meat, seal meat used to go floating in and out of my imagination towards the middle of the fish drying season. Then Mom, bless her heart, used to surprise us with a soup made from canned brant that we had all helped to clean and can that previous spring. That was awesome!

As the ducks and the geese return, and the snow on the mountains melts away, it is nice to look back on the summers of my childhood. It is nice to be able to remember and renew inner strength from the knowledge that, yes, it was hard work. But it kept us fed through the winter which will now soon be behind us. And it brought us together as a family.

*Note: Enid J. Brown is an Inupiaq originally from White Mountain, Alaska, who is currently residing in Anchorage.*