

Elder from Togiak recalls her early life

By Myron Blue

Annie Blue, a 73-year-old elder, is my grandmother. She is a Yup'ik Eskimo who lives in Togiak today.

She was born on Feb. 21, 1914, at Kisayak, which is located along the Togiak River.

She was born in a mud covered house with wood frame for support. It was kept warm by a stove made of stones with seal oil burning in it. They cooked food in the porch because this was the traditional way.

Today she lives in a bigger house and cooks food on a gas stove or an electric stove. She can watch cable television, get food out of her refrigerator, and she has an inside bathroom equipped with a toilet, tub and washing machine.

In the old days, according to Annie, when men went hunting, they used harpoons to catch fish.

After they caught enough fish they went home. The women took care of the fish. They cut them and hung them on a rack. They smoked them to make them taste good.

It took about a month for the fish to be ready to eat. Then they would store them for the future use or eat



Annie Blue

them right away. They also shared with each other, people in their village.

When they hunted for land animals, the women would also take care of them. They cut the skin off and made clothing.

The meat would be frozen for the future or eaten fresh. People also

shared their catch with the other families in the village. When the other families had some food, they would share it with them.

Also, nearly every part of the animals were used in the old days. She said that wastefulness was considered to be not right, because the animals needed to be respected.

When people got sick they would give them *Naunerluk* or *Ayunek* gathered from the wilderness. They cured all sorts of sickness, like fever, sore muscles and small epidemics.

Annie said that these medicines are still used today because they are still effective and don't cost any money.

She also said they used to take *ayunek* and put them over the steam-bath and slap it over their bodies. This always made them feel good and healthy. It made their houses smell like medicine by keeping the leaves of *ayunek* over the steam. The whole house would be affected and cured of any sickness.

When people got seriously ill, they would go to the medicine man (shaman). The medicine man would use all sorts of herbs and mix them up to make the right cure for the sick.

When she delivered babies she said

that they would wrap them up in cloth and wash them the next day. She said that the missionaries would come and baptize the newborn.

When they would grow up, they would marry in their teens between the years of 12 and 15. Often they would never have seen the man they would marry until the wedding ceremony.

When she was growing up on the Togiak River, she said that there used to be a lot of people passing up and down the river all day long. She didn't know most of the people because they only knew the people they shared food and materials with.

The people sometimes visited their camp and traded things like furs, food and weapons for hunting.

When she got bored she played with basketballs made of grass. She also told stories with string using her fingers. Other times she enjoyed jump rope and story knives.

The boys played games of their own like hide and seek, tag and wrestling. They also liked to race their kayaks.

Annie has a lot of wisdom and knowledge. She is concerned about the young ones of the village and she hopes they don't lose their culture because it is a part of them.