

Carl Topkok.mp3

Speaker 1 [00:00:00] Okay. I think it's going. So what I'm doing.

Speaker 2 [00:00:05] Is I'm grading my Ph.D. and kind of trying to learn more about Inupiaq dance. And my Ph.D. is in education. So what I'm really interested in is how people learn and teach Inupiaq songs and dances. And then kind of the other piece of it is what are what are the dances and the songs themselves teach?

Speaker 1 [00:00:25] Okay.

Speaker 2 [00:00:26] So could you just for the recording, introduce yourself and then maybe just tell me how you started learning and how you started dancing.

Speaker 1 [00:00:33] Okay. Yep. My name is Karl Dwight Topkok and I am from Teller Alaska. My. I started Eskimo dancing. Maybe when I was six, six years old, maybe. I started doing the invitation dances first when the King Island, Long Island dancers would come, and also the Diamede Dancers would come to Teller and dance for us and. But as I got a little bit older, we had that in school. We had bilingual and bicultural classes.

Speaker 2 [00:01:29] And in color.

Speaker 1 [00:01:31] And similar in Omak. He's my elder. He's still around. He still lives in Teller. He taught me how to do the motion dances. And at first we started out just for looking, which is the invitation common Dance. We had a recording, a little tape recorder, and he play that for us. And then as we started to move, move right ways, you know, good ways you started to teach us motion dances, uh, with the V just T and the first song I learned to that was The Cameraman Views Uncle Sam what we call Uncle Sam and then or people it our fishing song. But the songs and dances that we learned when I was a kid were a lot of them were from Little Diomedes and from also from Mulan, Siberia. Hmm. And maybe a few King Island songs. But we were as we got a little bit older, we started to do some of those songs. But In His Family is from Diomedes and James of Bialik was one of our teachers. He's passed on. PAUL Yeah. He's passed on two days to live in Teller. And sometimes even when I would be playing outside, Paul would take me aside and show me how to do the motions that I still remember him, you know? He'd say, Hey, young man, do it like this. And then it's like, okay. He's like, No, you got to show me. So he would sing the song and he was telling me, said, Do it like that. Okay. All right. And you know, our elders, they were very strict when it comes down to a Eskimo dance, you know, we we didn't do it right before lazy with our motions and say, hey, go sit down if you want to dance like that. You know, this is if you're just doing the motions, you know, without the drum as the drum moves your body, you know. And that's what they taught us, is the reason why you move is because of the drum. And we need to beat the drum. And that's how I got started.

Speaker 2 [00:04:34] And that's how you got started, you know? So you're you were kind of talk.

Speaker 1 [00:04:38] About your elders. What was that little bit in school? It would be in school and then we would have practices do we practice every Sunday? And the queen that told me, you know, it's almost like our church. Oh. And.

Speaker 2 [00:05:05] And so some of the people that I've talked to that, you know, almost everyone says the elders and the family teachers, they learn from these. But some of the

people also said that they feel like they learned from from animals and from land. Did you have any of that experience?

Speaker 1 [00:05:23] Well, when I got older, I learned how to do like the walrus dance from King Island. And I went to a wall or something, maybe four or five times. And I can almost, you know, I can hear them, you know, when they I guess when they bellow. Mm hmm. I started to kind of mimic, you know, their movements with their heads and their bodies and their silence. Because at first, you know, I could just make any kind of walrus sound. And when I actually saw them, you know, I learned how to do that. The real bellow. Yeah, the real bellow of the walrus.

Speaker 2 [00:06:13] So pieces of that.

Speaker 1 [00:06:14] Yep. And I don't know. Yeah.

Speaker 2 [00:06:21] So what do you. How do you what do you think that the the songs teach your show people?

Speaker 1 [00:06:28] Well, it's a celebration because, you know, when we when someone our loved ones pass on, you know, it's it's customary that we don't that we don't dance or sing because, you know, to honor our loved ones. And it it's almost I mean, to me, it's like almost like therapy, you know, like, you know, mental like therapy, you know, because you feel good after you get done singing and dancing. Especially like you're hearing from my audience, you know, like you feed off their energy and they feed off of your energy and that's how I feel anyways. Hmm. And, you know, once you when you when you dancing and you make somebody especially, you know, an Elder smile, you know, when they're enjoying, you know, dancing our singing. And then when we see them smile, it's, you know, that really does touch my heart when I you know, when I can make people smile or when they enjoy our show and people tell, you know, they'll come up to you like hey good job. And it's, yep, that's how I feel about it anyways. And I'm pretty sure other people do because it's a celebration, you know, we, we, that's during Christmastime Thanksgiving. I know North they do a thing called up to leave and that's almost like a you. The meeting really starts with a dress up and then during Halloween and they do a Hollywood contest.

Speaker 2 [00:08:40] Where's that about.

Speaker 1 [00:08:42] At Norton Wainwright. I went to one, flew during 4th of July. And that was that was kind of fun. I won 300 bucks. Oh, yeah. Because they they have the games there, the 4th of July games. We're not for jamboree, but. Uh huh. And, um. And there, like, certain songs and dances, you know, they belong to all their families, like. And we borrow some from other people. And I only know of one, one or two teller songs, but most of the songs that I sing are from the Diamede or I Need You in King Island. Yeah. Yeah.

Speaker 2 [00:09:39] Do you find that you feel more connected to your community when you're when you're dancing?

Speaker 1 [00:09:44] Oh, yeah, definitely. Definitely. Especially, you know, if I was at home because, you know, Segolene, you know, he had passed towards to me, like, how many? Like maybe four or five years ago, he started to get a little bit old, you know, couldn't get around too much. He couldn't travel. And then his home, you know, I, I went to his house one day and I thought that he was going to follow me to the dance festival. in Wales, we call it Cbfc the King Dance Festival. And I was like, going is like, you could go.

And I got kind of mad at him. And then he was like, Well, you got to calm down. You have to be the father now. Like, I have to be. The father is like, Yeah, you have to be the father. You got to lead them. All right. So he he doesn't speak English that well. And so he was telling me, you have to lead them.

Speaker 2 [00:10:37] And so that's when you kind of took over?

Speaker 1 [00:10:39] Yup.

Speaker 2 [00:10:40] So do you now teach this?

Speaker 1 [00:10:42] Oh, yeah, I teach. I used to teach at the school. Teach? Like it's good to start them when they're younger, you know, they're, you know, they're not, like, cool, I guess, you know? Yeah. But to be, you know, to be invested. But that's the other cool in the world. Yeah. I mean.

Speaker 2 [00:11:02] So how did that, how did. So can you just kind of tell me a little bit more or the specifics of how you teach?

Speaker 1 [00:11:09] How I teach? Yeah, we teach them the dances first. And, you know, like some groups, you know, they say go ahead and go grab a drum. But, you know, our elders there are very strict on that. When I was a kid and I tried to go reach for a drum, I got slapped on my hands and stick said, Nope, you got to get out there and dance, huh? And that's is then when you get older, you can grab the drum and I didn't grab a drum until. I was maybe teenager like even like 17, 18 years old. Wow. But, you know, now nowadays you see little kids with, you know, they're cute with their little drums and stuff. And that's not how I was. Know it was. You didn't learn the dances first. And like I say, all up and learn the motion dances and once you learn the motion dances. The. The songs.

Unidentified [00:12:11] Maybe that's it. Hmm. And so when you're teaching them the motion dances. Yeah. When I teach the motion dances, that's.

Speaker 1 [00:12:24] What I like to do, is I like to do, like, in numbers. Okay. So when you do not tango. One, two, three. One, two, three. Yeah. Mm hmm. And one, two, one, two, one, two. And then one, two, three. One, two, three. And if they. If they know the song here, come on, a and most kids, when they start out, they'll see, like, their older brother, their uncle or their father or their mother dancing. No, no. copy them. Mm hmm. Especially if they're like little babies, though I'm sure it'll come natural in it. Not everybody is an Eskimo dancer, you know, some of my cousins would stop, and we don't force our children's its mixed, you know? I mean, I've seen people actually do that, you know, and it's I want to be honest, you know, I was, like, discussing it, you know, it's like it has to because it has to come in here. It has to be come from your heart. You have to want to do it. Otherwise you only have a very sure. And that's how I feel. You know, it has to come from your heart and you have to want to do it. Otherwise you don't deserve there. You know, like people dance and some people don't dance.

Speaker 2 [00:14:00] Yeah.

Speaker 1 [00:14:02] There are also.

Speaker 2 [00:14:04] So you teach them kind of hitting the dance first with steps? Yep. Yep. And then once they have the dance, do they also learn the song or.

Speaker 1 [00:14:11] Oh, yeah. I encourage I encourage kids to learn the songs. You know, I was. and when they get older, they'll start to learn the songs. But as tell the girls, the girls, you got to help us think because it. It's customary for the men to sing. Yeah, but, you know, like art. And of course, the woman you will see is the men that do all the drums and singing and dancing. It's quite simple. So you have a little over there and it sounds nice when the ladies, you know, join you.

Speaker 2 [00:14:55] It's a bigger.

Speaker 1 [00:14:56] And bigger sound. And I enjoy watching like the North Slope that's just like swing right and barrow and pulling up. I could hear those ladies, even heartbeats. And the ladies voices are beautiful, you know? Yeah. Yeah. And it just. It's a more full sound.

Speaker 2 [00:15:15] Right.

Speaker 1 [00:15:15] Right.

Speaker 2 [00:15:16] A longer.

Speaker 1 [00:15:17] Issue.

Speaker 2 [00:15:18] So what about the drumming? How do you end up teaching that?

Speaker 1 [00:15:22] Well, the drumming is when the boys get older. They maybe when they're teenagers. I guess that's because it's almost like the kids, the elders need help, you know? t. And if they know the song, then the drumming will come to them. And it, it takes, it takes a lot, you know, even just to make one drum. And if you make your own, if you make your own drum, then you'll learn to appreciate more. And you'll learn to take it. Take care of it. Warrant it. You and I myself. I had maybe up to six drums at one time.

Speaker 2 [00:16:17] Wow. Do you make them at home?

Speaker 1 [00:16:19] I mean, my buddy Brian Montoya introduced Teach Me How to make I do the strips. But we recently spent I think we made about maybe five or six drums before we came here to school. And we all started with the drum, with the regular beat to a song. And then if you noticed that there's clicks in between those tweets and what I learned in of every village, you know, they have their own style of drumming. Yeah. And what I learned from my elders and, you know, the Diamede elders is they have a few clicks to. Oh, and that's like your timer, which is an almost, just about almost before it would be your nervous to clicks which is what I noticed in. Yep.

Speaker 2 [00:17:28] So and that's also the drums, especially then it's not something that you really is taught to, it's just something you hear and then you.

Speaker 1 [00:17:34] Learn the update. It comes natural, you know, like it's. Once you've seen these dances that you dance all your life, and then when you become older and you know, your legs are not had, you know, start to get a little bit more rubbery, then you'll pick up on drumming you'll sing for other generations.

Speaker 2 [00:18:00] So really it's a part of it is for that. When you get older, you kind of make that transition.

Speaker 1 [00:18:06] Yep, yep, yep. And you're still you know, I still like to be, like, certain that like, certain dances. Then if I have enough drummers, I'll go and then from there can't. But when you have like a nice strong drum line, any song to dance to. Everybody has their favorites. My favorite dances to do is the song that we did earlier that's called Herbie and When We Were Kids, the reason why they gave them English names so we could remember the songs. Really? Yeah. And so they named the songs after people who danced them. And so that's why there's, like, Uncle Sam and Herbie. Huh? And because our parents, you know, they were forbidden to speak the language, and so they write English. And so that's all we spoke was English. And so they gave us they gave us certain sounds, English names, so we could remember these songs.

Speaker 2 [00:19:14] Do you speak Inupiaq as well?

Speaker 1 [00:19:15] I, I know like certain phrases and I can and I learned a phrase today in my Uncle Victor, McDonald's in own right. And I always tell them they hope I still remember some of those early baroque words, you know, like evoked vocal being. Have you had breakfast yet? And then told me, never now do this. Are you said not clean. You cannot do a move for you to eat. And it's like certain like little phrases like that, you know. And I was when I used to teach at the Head Start until years of professional teaching. And I would teach the kids, you know, like gong routines, like, are you hungry? Or Open the door, come sit by me. And so little phrases like that and the kids will catch on because I had one student say to their mother, say, never again. It's a phrase. And she was like, doing that from your papa. And, you know, my teacher, Carl, taught me that I was I was really proud when he when he had spoke.

Speaker 2 [00:20:35] That's great.

Speaker 1 [00:20:37] And it's more what I learned at the headstart is when you're teaching kids, like sometimes I've read the books and if I recognize the phrase of the book, I would say that phrase and in Inupiaq and then I would say it again in English. And so the kids and hear a little a little bit in there and you see and one of the things I'll give back, it's doing that again because I just recently moved to Anchorage. Okay. And so, I mean, work at the beginning at Head Start.

Speaker 2 [00:21:10] Oh, cool. I grew up in Eagle River.

Speaker 1 [00:21:14] And Eagle River. So I just yeah, that's where I grew up, too, was part partially in Anchorage from an early teenager with the village. My father. I went to Clark's middle school in Bartlett. Okay.

Speaker 2 [00:21:27] I went to Western Chugiak.

Speaker 1 [00:21:29] I went to West for one semester.

Speaker 2 [00:21:31] Yeah, I went to ask for one.

Speaker 1 [00:21:33] Oh, that's so was it. And then I was like, Yeah, yeah, yeah. When I was going to school there, they, they had the cove. I was in the cove and that's where all the natives went to class. Huh. And I had I had taught classes do and it was I think that's

what they did when I was in high school that they started doing that in high school as people come from the villages, you know. And when I came from the village, it was a big transition. Yeah. You know, like culture shock.

Speaker 2 [00:22:05] Yeah, I can imagine.

Speaker 1 [00:22:07] You know, coming from a class of like seven, eight kids, you're going to a school with maybe like three or 400 other people that are your age. You know, as it was, it was quite a bit of a shock for me. Then I got used to it. But it, I, you know, I used to be really shy, not talk to anybody for that whole year, but then towards the end of the year, I started to open up a little bit more on parties, but then that's when they started those. They keep the natives, you know, all in like in the same class, we learn to see the city. You know, they feel comfortable here. But it is yet. And I think we saw you in a class right now. I think we're out of contract. We got like four or five more days to go teach, uh, our songs and dances to the heritage center. Oh, I got to tell you, the teachers are to see how to do the dance. Of your songs, your efforts at school. I worked at the hair center almost eight years. Okay. And it was like during high school and after high school I was part of the dance group. And I had a after school high school program where we go there, there's art. That's technology. I don't know if they still have that grant yet, but I know they have got the the Heritage Center dancers and everything here.

Speaker 2 [00:23:47] So how did they how did they teach it at the Heritage Center?

Speaker 1 [00:23:50] Well, they have different instructors come from. My first instructor was John Chase, and then it was Ossie via Vioxx and then Steven Blanchett. And those guys are Ossie and Steve. They're part of the NEA. Yeah. And they came and taught us some of their new songs. And I told them I was like, Hey, man, I got songs of my own, my people. And so I started teaching them, Inupiaq. Nice. And so. And then they started bringing other instructors. You know, we had Ernie Franson, bless his soul. You pass his one hope. She taught us a couple of songs and Ethan Petticrew from the Aleutians.

Speaker 2 [00:24:38] Crew and really got from.

Speaker 1 [00:24:39] Everywhere. Yep. And then we were taught from and there's this guy from Mexico. What did the box lead to? His wife. That man is blankets from there like that himself. And he taught us some shit and songs and so he made us masks and it was, it was a cool that. Yeah. And it's about the four clans, the eagle, the wolf killer. Well and the raven. And we had all four masks. We had the Wolf Eagle raven the top and the killer whale masks. We had all four of those masks. And the way that we dress is those people with the masks. They they do their dance and the other people do more singing. And then there's people at the masks. They take them out. We hold the blankets up in the air, cover them in a circle, and they take the mask off and they hide it. And then when the when they go see that we go to the next version, then they'll burst out. And so nobody knows who is wearing the mask. And it was kind of cool. We had a lot of fun at the heritage center and that's awesome.

Speaker 2 [00:25:59] So we had all these the different teachers who came in, they all kind of do it the same way or two.

Speaker 1 [00:26:06] Oh, they're no, they're they're all from different parts of the last year we had you known you pick. And so that was from AC. And also we had a guy from the

interior. I get his name again I just like he was he taught us down across I believe he was from old Minto or from ten across. I can't remember where he was from.

Speaker 2 [00:26:31] So that's the way that they were teaching. Was it similar or kind of. It was. Did everyone from a different place teach differently?

Speaker 1 [00:26:40] They all taught differently, yeah. And it's like we had to adjust, you know, to like sometimes they're like, we're doing the same shows we're trying to do like our, our style of dance. And then David is like, Hey, hey, I know you guys styles that way, but the way we do it is it's smooth. It's not what the kids are going to be slow and we're just going to be like, no, it's like this time around, if everybody has their own certain style of teaching. And one of the things that were similar to all of them is they we learned the songs and dances as through repetition, do it over and over. Over and over and over until you get to take the song out, you know.

Speaker 2 [00:27:34] It just keeps going.

Speaker 1 [00:27:36] Keep going and going until we get it right. And that's what we try to teach to, like a teacher. It gets when you're older, when you're teaching a song like because Isaiah McKenzie, he makes a lot of our songs. And I guess, if he comes up with the tune and then we will learn it and then he'll say make motions to it. I mean, I made some motions to his songs that we did. We did sit in a saw. So we call Isaiah McKenzie called up. He made that song actually when we're going to Wales. So the the right here. Yeah. As they're crying they're trying to know who came up with the tune and then would make little to no money if need to Wales because sit stock is known and Dean is in as well. You sit in a straw man. If they draw me and that's that's the plane going down, and then you see us putting the wheels down on the floor.

Speaker 2 [00:28:52] How cool.

Speaker 1 [00:28:53] And then we do this added motion. And so if this is true, go well. Yeah, they're going to have to go through a mark. Nope, I can't see the top down, but go ahead and we'll see that motion they're investing in, cause there's a big mountain there and we're going there to Eskimo Dance. And they came up to Stu and he's saying, Queer remark. Thank you. We're thankful. And at the end at well you have Gene called the hand it's like a big wooden I just landmark in the series at the end you the Hand must have.

Speaker 2 [00:29:43] Made the whole the whole plane ride.

Speaker 1 [00:29:45] Yep yep yep. That's really cool. Yeah. I myself, you know, I, I made maybe one or two songs. The other song I forgot about and there's, there's one I don't sing it. But those guys, certain people, they can. You're almost like Mozart, you know, they come up to a song that and ask you, is one of those guys do you hi z and one of our elders that made our songs too who made a lot. I mean, he probably made close to about 500 songs, as I'm thinking. Maybe not that much, but I might be exaggerating a little bit. But he did. John Senior It was one of the dances. He made a couple of those songs that we sang, but he made lots. Yeah. Same with Alton. Yep. He made he made some songs too in the I don't see how people could actually do that because if I try to come up with this, I'll start singing in someone else's other songs and it'll just come natural, like, hey, that's. That's someone else's sound. Okay, well, okay. Different song. Yeah, yep, yep.

Speaker 2 [00:30:59] So does anyone ever teach how to how to make the songs?

Speaker 1 [00:31:03] No. No. I mean, if the someone has an idea, it's like you should make this certain type of song, you know? And if somebody can make it, I'd say the easiest way to make a song, you come up with a tune and then come up with a dance. And there's songs that we have that have no needs. They're called Sirens. It's just a song, emotion that's of the that's that's no specific. Maybe someone just came up with that tune and someone came up with those motions and that's there and that's it.

Speaker 2 [00:31:41] So those ones that have words that have significance or.

Speaker 1 [00:31:45] There are certain songs that have, you know, different words, it's all depends on the composer, but most of the most of them are music by chants. Yeah, I get tired and I have.

Unidentified [00:32:08] And so is there.

Speaker 2 [00:32:10] Anything else that you think I should know as I'm kind of looking and thinking about.

Speaker 1 [00:32:15] You know.

Speaker 2 [00:32:15] Education and Inupiaq dance.

Speaker 1 [00:32:17] Mm hmm. Um, there's certain, like, certain protocols to know. It used to be, like, really strict, you know, back, you know, back way back then. People your age gets their own songs, even from the village together. Sure. Like, for instance. And then they come together, like during the Christmas time, as in such or during certain celebration. Then you could sing the song. No. But, you know, times are changed. You know, this world that's going by so quick. Yeah. And they're reaching. People are a little bit more lenient. Yes. About singing other people. Some. But some people, you know, they're kind of they're they're.

Unidentified [00:33:22] I guess it can.

Speaker 1 [00:33:22] Be a little anal about, you know, Mozart and song, but it's, you know, if I come up with the songs anyway, that's, you know, this pretty soon, you know, you never know what might be lost.

Speaker 2 [00:33:36] Yeah. You know, a lot were lost.

Speaker 1 [00:33:38] Yeah, a lot of them there.

Speaker 2 [00:33:41] Roy was telling me yesterday that there are some people here who get very upset at, I think, the leader of your group. I guess he's someone who was saying that someone may get very upset because he would sometimes sing other people's songs.

Speaker 1 [00:33:53] Yeah. Yep. And it's, you know, it's understandable, you know, because they like certain things. They have every right. Well, yeah, but it's like the copyright. But, you know.

Speaker 2 [00:34:11] A decision that makes sense.

Speaker 1 [00:34:13] And actually, when we look at the when we have our celebrations, you know, I have one elder told me, it's like, hey, oh, he's only seeing certain songs so they don't take our songs away from us, you know? And it's almost, like, prideful, you know?

Speaker 2 [00:34:32] Yeah, that makes sense. Well, this is at the basket, right? Yup. And it's a very different feel. Oh, wonderful. Thanks so much for sharing that stuff.