

Interviewer: Where were you born?

Interviewee: I was born here in Stebbins. My grandfather's house right next door, but they had torn it down, the part of it. But I haven't seen my grandfather though, my grandmother and she lived to be probably in her 80s. When I was just a little girl I've seen her and I didn't quite approach her all that much because I was told not to bother her. So I just pretty much kept away from her and give her her space because she was older and I had to listen to my mother because she was always busy most of the time and my dad was always out, every early morning.

He was always out hunting. And in the evening, he'd come home and my mother would greet him. That was so awesome. Yeah. He was always out there. Come home with a catch or nothing. It was just – he was always happy being out there and providing for the family, which was from the ocean, the land, and air. It was always constantly getting ready all the time and going out.

Interviewee 2: Yeah, in spring time, everybody's getting ready for filling their freezers. All the guys don't want to stay home, go out hunting.

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Interviewee: It's always been that way, growing up, getting every – cooperating and they get up early in the mornings and head off already. Before there's daylight they go. Yeah.

When I was young, my dad would bring home like maybe five seals and my mother would be busy after making breakfast, doing little chores. And then our dad would leave and then she would start on the food that our dad caught, take care of them right away, no matter how tired they were, they were always busy, busy.

Interviewer: And so you grew up here in Stebbins?

Interviewee: Yeah. I grew up – most of the time too, after taking care of herrings, they dry up, then we would get ready to go camping to the campsite and we'd be there till like September, till school starts or before it froze, we'd come back, although we don't want to. Yeah.

Interviewer: Yep.

Interviewee: yeah, it was always work, work, work all the time. Everyday.

Interviewer: Lots to do.

Interviewee: A lot of hard work. See what they do most of the time. But the sad thing nowadays, we're losing some of the arts that we have learned like making boots, but they're bringing that back. The art of making boots. Now we have these ready-made shoes. Yeah, but my coworker, she's bringing back that making of boots. And it's good to see that again. So students are just learning, not only boots,

but other crafts too. So that way, if they don't have any work, they'll be able to do something with their hands and bringing in the income. In the past, I used to see my dad and mom do a lot of crafts with their hands and they traded whatever was needed for at home, mainly nets and a little bit of grub like flour, sugar, items that are needed.

Interviewee 2: Is Gene Fairish an elder?

Interviewee: Huh?

Interviewee 2: Gene Fairish?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewee 2: She's an elder too?

Interviewee: Much older than I am.

Interviewee 2: That's another house we can go to.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee 2: I've been asking the elders you guys are interviewing if this person is an elder.

Interviewer: That's perfect. That's perfect. And what's your first language? Is it —

Interviewee: My first language I learned was Yupik, but I didn't pretty much speak it much because I was always home all the time with my mom, Yeah, not going anywhere, but just go to the church and just come home and yeah. And then I first went to school, I couldn't speak my language. I had to be quiet. Had to learn English. And it was pretty hard for me to not speak my Yupik language. But my mother, she knew how to speak English pretty well. She read..

Interviewer: Are you currently single, married?

Interviewee: I'm separated now and I have seven kids.

Interviewer: Seven kids?

Interviewee: I have four boys and three girls. They're all adults and they have their own family now. Yeah.

Interviewer: Grandkids?

Interviewee: Pardon?

Interviewer: Grandkids?

Interviewee: I have too many, I miscount. I think I have like four great-grandchildren now.

Interviewer: Oh, even great grandchildren. Wow.

Interviewee: Four now.

Interviewer: Holy cow.

How far did you go in school?

Interviewee: Eleventh grade.

Interviewer: Eleventh grade?

Interviewee: Yeah. And then I went to training through the UAF.

Interviewer: What for?

Interviewee: Courses, English, English one and I also attempted a training that they offer so I tried to be there as much as I can and learn whatever.

Interviewer: How many people including you live with you?

Interviewee: I have like maybe six or seven total now in here. Yeah.

Interviewer: And where do you want to live your remaining years?

Interviewee: Here.

Interviewer: Okay. Trick question. What's your box number?

Interviewee: PO Box 71094.

Interviewer: Okay.

So how did you become an elder? I know you're kind of – said you're like right on the edge.

Interviewee: The age that we step into ____.

Interviewer: Is there a particular age you think that that happens?

Interviewee: Maybe like when I was reaching my 50s.

Interviewer: You started becoming seen more that way?

Interviewee: Yeah, seen more and the children that I teach, say, "She's my grandma. No, she's my grandma." Okay, you all can call me grandma so you won't have to fight over me. And it's a good feeling to be called grandma, wherever I go or they see me. And it's a good feeling to have children call me grandma.

Interviewer: To be seen as an elder or a grandma. Yeah, it feels good. What do you think it means to age well?

Interviewee: To work, keep busy and making sure the family members are okay, they're taking care of them well and providing for what needs to be gathered for the winter. That way, they get to see what we do in our culture daily living, although there's English. The more the children see us, what we are doing or what we are teaching them through our actions or work, they're able to see what we do and the more I do things, it's like how should I put it, the aging well.

Interviewer: Yeah, so by sharing what you know and passing on your culture to the younger generations, that for you is aging well.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: That's what it means?

Interviewee: Um hmm. But you know, just being outside too is more healthier than just staying in a home. I'd rather be out there than inside the house because you have more like experience or something.

Interviewer: There's more connection.

Interviewee: More connection out there.

Interviewer: Out in the land.

Interviewee: In the wintertime for me at home is the time for getting more closer to the family members. Wintertime is the time to spend time with the family. That's how I see it when I was growing up. There were gatherings in the house, community because I didn't know the whole village of Stebbins were related. Yeah. I didn't know, but my mother had passed it on to me that the relatives here. I say, "oh." And we were always going to **St. Michael**, my mother had – and living there, she was someone that raised my mother up and she learned a whole lot from her. Then she met my dad or more likely my dad met her because she's always going, went over there and then they both got married and they lived here. Could have been more of us children, but my mother had miscarriages. And we were only five of us. I have three older brothers. My younger sister passed away.

Interviewer: I'm sorry.

Interviewee: Just last year.

Interviewer: Tough.

Interviewee: And she was only 53 years old. Yeah. It was pretty hard, but I learned to accept it because I have other grandchildren to look after too. Make sure they're okay and –

Interviewer: You have to keep going for them.

Interviewee: Yeah, you have to. You can't just stop right there. You have to keep going continually.

Interviewer: How did you learn how to age well?

Interviewee: By observing my parents, you know, since I was a little girl. Seeing what they do and when we're out there, people would come from different places and they come by kayak. They would stop at our camping site and my father would be the one to greet them and when they want directions to where to go and where to stop, he would let them know where to go. Yeah. That was watching my parents, how they greeted people and every way that they know how.

Interviewer: What's your day to day life like?

Interviewee: My day to day life is keeping busy. I'm a bilingual aid and I teach language from K through high school. And I started in 2001 and that was unexpected. I thought I was only going to sub for like three days, but three days got longer and longer.

Interviewer: And 16 years later, you still do the subbing, huh?

Interviewee: Yeah. And I'm still there. Yeah. And it's fun. It's fun to teach the children what we know, basically our language, our traditional language. Yeah. And it's really good to have a opportunity that they are learning because it's not only for me, it's for them.

Interviewer: So it helps you and it helps them when you teach.

Interviewee: It's more like I'm knowing that I am helping them. And so maybe if they get a little older, they'll say, "Oh, I remember that."

Interviewer: That's a good feeling.

Interviewee: And it will be a good feeling for all of them.

Interviewer: Um hmm.

Interviewee: It will keep them happy. That's what we're hoping for. So they may be the next ones to pass it on. I never knew songs, but my mother was a head start teacher. She would teach Mother Goose rhymes and she would go home and she would sing to – more likely I heard her singing Mother Goose rhymes and when I get older, I translated into Yupik. It's a good feeling. Keeps me happy. Yeah. And I like to see kids being happy too.

Interviewer: Yep. Do you think that your relationships have changed as you've gotten older?

Interviewee: Yeah. I think it's pretty much that way. Sometimes I want to be more like by myself to think, to think more clearly, but I like to associate with people. I like to communicate. I don't like to be quiet. Keep them happy. Yeah. Because it's the only way that you can get to know people, even from other places. Yeah. Sometimes I want to be close to relatives that I've seen when I was a young girl because I recognize them too. And they're always on the go.

Interviewer: Yep. A lot of busy people.

Interviewee: Yeah, always busy, busy. But they have time to talk and tell stories. Yeah. Good.

Interviewer: What do you think helps you age well?

Interviewee: Sowing my traditional values, my language and subsistence _____ from right now, in spring. Passing on the knowledge. You know, I tell student, the more you're with the elders, the more you gain the knowledge from them and the wisdom that they have, so we do encourage kids to go see your elders or go visit them or they can tell you stories. That way, you learn because they still have the knowledge and wisdom that they would like to pass on.

Interviewer: How can you tell when an elder is aging well?

Interviewee: Their way of life that they have or have had, and they still have it too, because they still have the stories and that's what makes them age well, and traditional food that they gather that keeps them healthy too.

Interviewer: How can you tell if an elder isn't aging well?

Interviewee: I really wouldn't know how to put that into words. Do a lot of our elders here, they've done it and now that they're aging, they're mostly at home. Yeah. Some can't go out anymore. Maybe they can just walk, take a walk or take a ride or something.

Interviewee 2: A whole bunch of elders, you know, there's – in the school, in the hallway right outside her class, on both sides of the hallway, at the top there's pictures of elders. There's so much of them already left.

Interviewee: Yeah, most of them are gone. And they're dearly missed, but we keep them in our hearts. Yeah, because they've taught so much and they've passed on so much. Yeah. And there are women here that still sew our grass baskets and I see young men do carving which is good.

Interviewer: Do you think that in general the elders in your community are aging well?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Yeah? Do you think it's different now than it was 20 years ago?

Interviewee: For me, it is. The way I see it, like I said earlier, they're staying home, the elders, but still, our young people, they can go to them, like I said earlier. They can always go visit them. Maybe they want to know something, they can always ask questions and not be afraid. If they don't say anything or ask anything, you're not going to learn. You're going to have to ask questions. Don't be afraid.

Interviewer: Why do you think some elders move away?

Interviewee: Because of the hardships that they may be facing and their health and they need to be a little more closer to the hospital. I know it affects them because they'd rather be here than being close to the hospital. And it's more like a lot of our elders are – some are having poor heart failure, cancer. In the past, we haven't seen that much poor heart failure and cancer. It's now just – anybody has it.

Interviewer: It's everywhere.

Interviewer: Yeah, even younger ones too.

Interviewee: Even infants too. That hurts. In the past, it was TB. You know, in my time, it was TB and – but they have medicines for it and they got better.

Interviewer: Yeah. Hope that happens with cancer too, huh?

Interviewee: Um hmm. Yeah, but now we have cancer and it hurts to see a loved one going away and grandchildren. You just don't know how to explain to them.

Interviewee 2: I just feel sorry when I hear of somebody having cancer 'cause my dad passed away from cancer about ten years ago.

Interviewer: It's hard to lose someone.

Interviewee: My dad died of cancer too, lung cancer. That was the hardest to take because I thought my parents would be living all the time, but I didn't know. My mother died of poor heart failure.

Interviewer: Oh wow.

Interviewee: I thought that they would live on, but no.

Interviewer: Took you by surprise.

Interviewee: Um hmm. But I learned to – I'm always happy that I learned something from them.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: And that way our grandkids will know what to do and just accept people as they are and no matter where they come from, try to help them, just greet them. That's my oldest son.

Interviewer: Just a few more questions.

Interviewee: That's my son over there. [introduces family]. And that's Eddie.

[Crosstalk]

Interviewer: Oh, okay. We'll hurry up.

Interviewee: And that's one of my – maybe my great niece or something. Her mom is my niece, so she may be my great niece.

Interviewer: Do you think it's different to age here than it is in like Anchorage or somewhere bigger?

Interviewee: I think it's better to age here than in the city. The city has too much of that on the go movement. It's always move, move, move, move, move. Yeah. Busy, busy, busy, busy. Gotta do this, and gotta do that.

Interviewer: Um hmm.

Interviewee: And there's too many people, although Anchorage may not be – I mean it's too big of a city for me, maybe. Then it isn't a _____.
_____.

Interviewer: You like knowing everybody.

Interviewee: Yeah, or you can help people, especially our elders. Still have to show them a lot of respect for them, although we all have our hardships. We all go through it. It's not only in Stebbins, it's all over. It's a fast pace for me. Fast pace when you go to the big city.

Interviewer: Do you have any advice for people in your community who want to age well?

Interviewee: Stay healthy, be happy and gather more _____ be out there and gather. The greens, the berries, whatever.

Interviewer: Is that the most important thing to share with them then?

Interviewee: Yeah. Uh huh. And just be with family and just be happy no matter what comes our way.

Interviewer: Is there – last question – is there anything about aging or being an elder that you want to share with us that we haven't asked about?

Interviewee: To have – to continue to teach the little ones to continue to respect themselves and respect others, their parents, honor their parents and honor their grandparents and to be more helpful to them. The more you give of yourself, the more you get. And share your knowledge and wisdom as you get older.

Interviewer: Do you have any questions for us?

Interviewee: Oh no. I don't have any questions. Maybe that'll come later on.

Interviewer: All right. Well, thank you.

Interviewee: Yeah. Oh, I'd like to show you my – [shows us pictures of her mother and aunt in parkas, and other family members]

[End of Audio]