

# From the Elders



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## Introduction

The series From the Elders presents the stories and thoughts of three highly regarded Alaska Native elders on film. Each elder speaks in a different traditional narrative genre, and reveals ways in which knowledge has traditionally been passed down through generations. These films provide a window of understanding into the Eskimo experience. Historical photographs (some taken by the earliest photographers to visit the elder's regions) and village scenes are interwoven with footage of the elders talking to provide visual context for each story.

From the Elders is an outgrowth of earlier films produced by the Alaska Native Heritage Film Project. Much of the footage in the series was shot while Sarah Elder and Leonard Kamerling, co-directors of ANHFP, were making *At the Time of Whaling* and *On the Spring Ice in Gambell* in 1974, and *From the First People in Shungnak* in 1975. All films produced by the ANHFP have

been made using a “community-determined” method of filmmaking in which the community being filmed is actively involved in determining the direction and content of the film. The filmmakers at ANHFP believe that this method not only gives those filmed more control over how they are represented in media, but also produces more accurate films.

## From The Elders

In 1974 Sarah Elder and Leonard Kamerling, Co-Directors of the ANHFP, began a film production with the community of Gambell on St. Lawrence Island as part of a continuing series of films on Alaska Native culture. When the community was asked who should represent Gambell in the film the filmmakers were directed to Lincoln Blassi and Samuel Irigoo, two highly respected elders of the village. Similarly, while producing a film two years later with the Kobuk River village of Shungnak, Joe Sun was chosen by the community to represent

them on film.

Small segments of the filmed “interviews” with these elders were used in *At the Time of Whaling*, *On the Spring Ice*, and *From the First People*, the original films produced with the communities of Gambell and Shungnak.

Due to the value of these interviews as historical

documents and examples of the Siberian Yupik and Inupiaq oral traditions, the main bodies of the interviews were kept intact and unedited to

be presented in their entirety at a later time. Today, many Native people are looking to elders as a source of inspiration, direction, and cultural validation. Many non-Native people as well are interested in learning about the historical and cultural perspective of Native elders. This has generated new interest in the oral traditions.

The purpose of this guide is twofold. The first is to provide supporting contextual information for the film series - about traditional and modern life in Gambell and Shungnak, who the elders are, how they were filmed and in what traditional narrative genres the elders speak. Secondly, the aim is to explain the filmmaking methodology developed by the Alaska Native Heritage Project and employed in the planning, production and editing of the elders films. Overall this guide is com-



posed with the intent of generating further discussion about Native oral traditions and methods used to document them.

## Oral Traditions

Traditionally, neither the Siberian Yupik nor the Inupiaq had a written language. Knowledge and values were handed down largely through the oral tradition of the elders. In both Gambell and Shungnak one of the first and strongest directives from the communities was to film the most respected elders. In Siberian Yupik an elder is called Siivanlleq, and in Inupiaq, Unipchaaqti. In both languages the meaning is similar. An elder is someone who has earned his or her place in life. Elder status is not determined by age, but by the wisdom that comes with age. As a part of their status they have the unspoken right to speak on behalf of their communities.

What the elders say is perhaps best evaluated according to the traditional notions of quality set by their own cultures. In both Siberian Yupik and Inupiaq culture the highest form of expression was not associated with a particular subject, style or form, but

“Those stories, the teachings of everything good.”

could be found in any genre. Some judgment of quality was based on the depth of content: the richness of vocabulary and the allegories contained within a story. More emphasis was placed on the wit and timing of delivery. However the most important criteria used to assess quality were neither content nor delivery but rather who was talking and their place within the community.

“I have heard many things when my parents told stories in the old way to their friends. Even though I was young and crazy then, I still remember when they spoke. Those stories, the teachings of everything good.” (Sophie Lee, Emmonak)

Ron and Suzanne Scollon note that among the Athapaskans of Fort Chipewyan,

“It is said that it is a wise and fortunate child who has grandparents ‘in his ear’. A child who has overheard his grandparents and their peers speak of the world is best equipped for his own life”.

## Synopses of Films

### In Iirgu’s Time

As his two grandchildren listen, Iirgu an elder from the Siberian Yupik Eskimo village of Gambell on St. Lawrence Island, recounts events in Gambell from the time the first missionaries arrived. His story is known as an unqipamsuk, or true historical narrative. Traditionally, a storyteller’s integrity was based on the accuracy of his unqipamsuk; exaggeration was considered a sign of weakness.

Speaking in Siberian Yupik, Iirgu begins by describing how the missionaries succeeded in converting the people, and what trouble, visiting Natives from Siberia caused for the missionaries. He remembers humorously how the missionaries’ pig escaped and made all the villagers laugh so hard that no one could catch it. With ambivalent feelings he describes more recent changes - how whaling practices have changed, how life has become easier, but also how younger genera-

“...Everything that Maniilaq said has come true.”

tions are losing touch with the old ways.

### Joe Sun

Immaluuraq (Joe Sun in English) grew up moving among seasonal camps Kobuk River region of Alaska. He now resides in Shungnak. On film he tells of the legendary Inupiaq prophet, Maniilaq, who was his great uncle. He goes on to describe with irony the changing world along the Kobuk. Immaluuraq’s talk is known as an uqaaqtuaq. Elders gave such talks to young people who came seeking information or advice. Immaluuraq tells us, “Maniilaq predicted that some day in the future people would come with a different language and live among them [the Inupiaq], and everything would change.” “When a woman had babies, she would have them right inside the house,” and “later on, people would even start traveling through the air...Everything that Maniilaq said has come true.”

### The Reindeer Thief

Pelaasi, also an elder from Gambell, tells a mythical story about a man who goes out in search of a reindeer thief. The ensuing encounter becomes a test of supernatural powers and deceit. Pelaasi’s story is called an unqipaghaq, a tale that has been passed down unchanged through generations and is believed to be based in truth. Like many St. Lawrence Island legends, this story is set in Siberia where the Chukchi, the Reindeer People, live. Pelaasi speaks in Siberian Yupik.

## Filming Process

### Community Determined Filmmaking

The Alaska Native Heritage Film Project believes that films most effectively and accurately document and reveal the deeper truths of human situations when they are produced in an atmosphere of collective collaboration between the communities being filmed and the filmmakers. This is a central tenet of the Community Determined Approach. The Film Project also believes that communities and individuals have the ethical right to control how they are presented in media. Many traditionally produced documentary films about culture are made from a pre-determined point of view, often reflecting more of the filmmaker's attitudes and concerns than those of the people who are being filmed. Cultural bias inevitably influences the way in which the film is written, shot and edited. Elder and Kamerling developed the Community Determined Approach to filmmaking to address the problem of cultural bias in documentary filmmaking, and to produce films that represent the real values and concerns of the people filmed.

Films cannot be made with a fixed equation. Because filmmaking involves so many variables the Community Determined approach was designed as an adaptable process that can be changed to fit the dynamics of different communities.

Presented below are the specific methods of the Community Determined Approach, as employed in the production of the films in Gambell and Shungnak. They are presented in the order in which they occur during production.

## Approach to Filming

Preliminary presentation to Community:

When selecting a community to film the filmmakers travel to several communities to personally present the idea of a collaborative film production to the Village Councils. The presentations include discussions of how the film will be made, and the role and rights of the community. A previous ANHFP film is presented in order to show how other villages have been represented. The filmmakers request that the Village Councils inform them by mail or phone if they are interested in making the film, to insure that a positive response will not be given because of a sense of pressure or obligation due to the filmmaker's presence in the community.

Content Development:

Film treatments and scripts written before filming pre-determine what the filmmakers will be looking at and makes them less sensitive to cues being offered by the community. No film treatment or script is written before or during production. Rather, an outline formulated from community input serves as a structural guide for filming.

Production Crew Size:

Though a small crew limits filming capabilities in some ways (a camera-person has to interrupt filming to re-load film) the filmmakers are allowed much greater mobility in, and access to, the community. In Gambell and Shungnak, the filmmakers limited the production crew to themselves. Elder functioned as sound recordist and co-director and Kamerling as cinematographer, producer and co-director. An assistant was hired in each community and trained to do a variety of jobs including sound recordist and camera assistant.

### Extended Stay in Community:

An extended stay in the community is a basic requirement of the collaborative filmmaking process. The long period of time in the village frees the filmmakers from inflexible shooting schedules and allows them time to settle into the pace of the communities. This stay in the community is an important time in which the filmmakers become more sensitive to the ways in which their own cultural conditioning affects how they see and how they interpret what they see. The time also gives community members the opportunity to become familiar with the filmmakers and their equipment, and helps to de-mystify the filmmaking process. Elder and Kamerling lived in Gambell for two months and in Shungnak for three months while shooting the films.

### Participation in Daily Life:

An extended stay in a community can achieve little without participation in the daily life of the people. Participation in subsistence and social activities becomes a symbol of the filmmakers' openness, willingness to learn, and respect for the community. As the filmmakers become functioning members of the community (although temporary ones) some social and cultural barriers are relaxed creating the opportunity to develop the friendships that are at the core of Community Determined filmmaking.

### Alignment Within the Community:

The way in which decisions are made in determining content and direction of the film must mirror the ways in which decisions are made in the community. Alignment with churches, schools or other resident agencies in the village is avoided when they are considered outside of the local decision-making

process and power structure. Upon entering the communities the filmmakers seek to gain the active participation of both the modern and the traditional decision making bodies, which in Gambell and Shungnak included the Village Council, elders, community leaders and certain powerful families or clans.

### Direction Through Community Consensus:

The filmmakers rely on non-Western forms of consensus gathering in formulating the content and direction of the filming. While the Village Councils monitor the projects and provide final approval, they do not solely determine what and who should be filmed. Topics for filming are collected during informal daily visits with individuals and families in the community. Suggestions are continually collected and reintroduced during these visits. For example, a suggestion from one family of a filming topic is mentioned to the next family who may concur or suggest another. After several weeks certain topics repeatedly occur. When a list of topics has been achieved it is then presented to the Village Councils for review and approval. The same process is used in determining who should appear in the film, who should speak for the community in interviews, who should take the film crew in their boat, etc.

### Respect for Individual and Community Rights:

During filming the highest priority is placed on allowing people to present themselves in the manner they choose, for example, speaking in the language of their choice, and selecting the time and location of filming sessions. It is made clear to the entire community that anyone can tell the filmmakers to stop filming at any time and their request will be honored without question. Requests to omit segments already filmed are honored

in the same fashion. This “rule” contributes to the community’s sense of direct control over the production and strengthens the collaboration.

#### Role of Filmmakers During Filming:

When filmmakers direct specific actions or ask for them to be repeated for the camera, the subjects begin to look to the filmmakers for direction and approval, which compromises the spontaneity of the event and the objectivity of the camera. During the filming process the filmmakers do not intervene or participate in filmed activities. Activities and events are filmed as they occur, with nothing being artificially staged or enacted solely for the camera. Actions are never asked to be repeated for the convenience of the camera. The extent of the filmmakers’ intervention is an occasional request for subjects to wait while film is loaded or a lens is changed.

#### On-Location Community Review:

The filmmakers make available the sound recordings and rushes (processed, unedited film without sound) for community review. Tape recordings of interviews and actualities are played back and rushes are projected for small groups of people. These playback sessions show community members how the filmmakers are “seeing them”. It also gives community members a deeper understanding of the filming process. A certain amount of community direction comes from these review playback sessions, but because facilities are not available to show picture with sound, the review is not as detailed as in the editing phase.

#### Cash Reimbursement to the Community:

The filmmakers compensate individuals and families in cash for electricity (used for

lighting and battery recharging), gas used in transportation and other commodities where a direct cash outlay is involved. People are not paid for appearing in the films because they are community projects. The only individuals paid are production assistants and individuals hired directly to perform technical roles or provide other services. In Gambell, elders filmed were compensated for their time with in-kind commodities, such as a drum of heating oil or gas, because of their special status in the community. An effort is always made to support the local economy by buying food and supplies at the local stores instead of bringing them in from outside the village.

### **Approach to Editing**

Films are most powerful when they are designed to be experiential - when they involve the audience on a feeling as well as an informational level. ANHFP films are edited to involve the audience as participants rather than as passive observers. To achieve this participatory experiential quality in a film, ANHFP employs several techniques: 1) Minimal voice-over narration or commentary is added. Film material is allowed to speak for itself without interpretation by the filmmakers. 2) Scenes are edited to convey the real-time of events filmed; footage is not manipulated through juxtaposition or other editing techniques to create new meanings imposed by the editor. 3) Using camera takes beyond conventional documentary standards, some up to 10 minutes in length, creates for the audience a sense of the rhythm and movement within the real event. The camera “looks around” as an observer might, heightening the sense of participation.

**Accuracy:**

Accurate presentation of events is a priority in editing. It is achieved largely through the continuous involvement of translators and advisors from the region filmed. Subtitle and voiceover translations of Native language dialogue are kept as close to the literal translation as possible while still conveying the full meaning of what has been said. All aspects of the film, from the basic structuring of events to the detail of sound effects must be accurate from the perspective of the community.

**Subtitles:**

Where possible, English translations are provided by subtitles rather than through voiceover narration. Subtitles allow the speaker's manner of expression and emotions to come through to the audience directly, however, subtitles have the disadvantage often of not being able to keep up word for word with the dialogue. Some compression is sometimes necessary.

**Accessibility to Audience:**

The content of ANHFP films on Alaska Native culture is designed to be accessible to a wide range of audiences. During the editing process the work-in progress is "test screened" for a variety of audiences. Students, scholars, representatives from the community filmed, media producers and the general public are all invited to view the film and give critical responses. These test screenings help to insure that the film is being made with the needs of a diverse audience in mind.

**Final Community Review:**

At the end of the editing process the film is returned to the community for final review and approval. It is shown to both the Village

Council and to the community as a whole. The community is also provided with a copy of the finished film.

**Problems Encountered:**

While Community-Determined Filmmaking has proven itself a successful method, there are aspects of the process that are inherently problematic. The method is time consuming and therefore costly. Without a script or treatment to structure the filming, it is not uncommon to have gaps in continuity that only become apparent during the editing phase. The film should ideally be edited on-location to provide maximum input from the community. This is difficult because of the expense of shipping 16mm editing equipment to village locations. Since 1/2" videotape-editing equipment is much more available and portable than 16mm equipment a possible solution may be to have picture and sound transferred to video cassette and sent to the filmmakers on-location for rough editing and community review.

## **Application of Community-Determined Method**

The principles of the Community Determined Approach collaborative decision making, and providing individuals with control over how they are presented, are readily applied to the work of anthropologists, linguists, oral historians, folklorists and media producers. The Community Determined Approach has application in any situation where an individual or group of people is being documented or is the source of material or information being collected. These methods will require modification for use in other disciplines, but the basic philosophy remains the same:

Contact appropriate authorities to secure

permission before arrival in the community.

Identify the proper spokespeople in the community.

Inform the participants exactly what the goals of the project are, what is required to achieve those goals and how the information collected will be used.

Encourage participants to speak in their preferred language and use translators if necessary.

Give control of the recording session to the subject, i.e. when and where to record, when to start and stop, and what to include.

Record whole segments, from the time a person starts to the time they stop, without making editorial decisions about “what is important.”

Use advisors from the region in the editing phase of the project.

Hold final community review and obtain approval before release to the public.

Provide copies of the completed work to participants or the community along with any additional material they may request, such as recordings, photographs, etc.

Professional organizations such as the Oral History Association have established their own guidelines for the ethical and accurate collecting of material which should be considered as well.

### **Note on Recording Quality**

High quality recording should be the concern of all who document cultural material, not only media producers. The elders are the source of information and knowledge unavailable from other sources. Tape recordings of their knowledge constitutes a cultural trust and great care must be taken to make them of the highest technical quality to ensure their value to future generations.

## **Guide to In Iirgu's Time**

Iirgu Samuel Irrigoo:

Samuel Irrigoo was born July 10, 1891 in Gambell. He grew up in the traditional way as a hunter, but he also was among the first generation to attend the missionary school and learn English. In his youth Samuel gained a reputation in wrestling, an indigenous sport of great importance in Gambell. Later he distinguished himself as a whale harpoonist, and in time, he became a boat captain. Samuel earned income through the



means available at in that time: fox trapping, ivory carving and construction of government projects on the island. He served on the Village Council, but he was more active in the Presbyterian Church, which he joined in 1940. In the spring of 1985, just before turning 94, Samuel died in Gambell.

His parents were Waamseggaan and Ame-naanga. His oldest brother, Awergen (Ira Iworrigan) was a very powerful man in Gambell, and another brother, Aghtuqaayak (Richard Okhtokiyuk) became a medicine man. Iirgu's sisters were Suunaaghruk (Edna Soonharook), Amaghelek and Aghnalqwaaq.

His family belonged to the Pugughileq Clan. Samuel married Sunqaanga (English name) and they raised two children, Clarence and Ora Gologergen.

### Context of Filming

Samuel was 83 years old in 1974, when the filming took place. Elder and Kamerling came to know Samuel through younger members of the Irrigoo family. Several of these relatives were present when the filming began and remained to listen. Samuel's granddaughter is seen sitting with him at the table.

On film Samuel Irrigoo gave an historical account, in Siberian Yupik, of the village of Gambell from the time he was very young, when the first missionary arrived. Woodrow Malewotkuk, who was working for the film production as sound-recorder and production assistant, translated for the filmmakers. The filming session was undirected by the filmmakers with the exception of the final few minutes in which Samuel was asked to talk about how whaling was done in the old days (included in *At the Time of Whaling*).

### Narrative Genre

Note: Information about genre and style has been provided by translator Linda Badten (who grew up in Gambell and later taught school in Fairbanks) and reviewed by other people from the island.

Samuel speaks in the genre of ungipamsuk or historical narrative. Ungipamsuk are accounts of true events that happened to the speaker, to a person he knows, or possibly to someone long ago. Often there were lessons to be learned from these stories, but they were clearly different than apeghtughi, instructional "how to" talks.

Ungipamsuk were told as informal enter-

tainment, often when an event triggered a recollection. Occasionally ungipamsuk were told during story telling sessions in the evening, and elders would tell them to young people who came to visit.

Traditionally, it was expected that ungipamsuk be told accurately as they were heard. Truthful rendition was a sign of one's honesty and dependability. On film Samuel frequently refers to how he acquired his knowledge, how old he was or how much he was able to remember at the time an event occurred. In the traditional manner, he gives this information out of courtesy to his listeners, so that they may judge his knowledge on the subject.

In style and form, Samuel talks on film as he might to a younger person on the island, however parts of his narrative are common knowledge in Gambell, and would not normally be included.

### Transcript of English Subtitles

NOTE: In some instances, the subtitles represent condensed translations of the elder's spoken words.

This story is from as far back as I can remember, when I was a little boy.

In those times, the men were: Aghtuqaayak, Mangtaquli, Ataayaghhaq, Kemkelqangen,

and others I have forgotten,

because it was so long ago.

When I was old enough not to forget,

the first missionary came here. His name was V.C. Gambell

That is how the village of Sivuaq got its name in English.

He was a school teacher also.

He arrived here around the year 1891, that long ago.

He came to tell us about God. We had never discussed spiritual things openly before.

The captains of the whaling boats would go down to the beach and pray.

They worshipped hard, so that in springtime they would catch plenty of food, plenty of whale.

V. C. Gambell used to tell a lot of stories. He rang a bell,

and people gathered to listen, even the old men.

He did not seemingly try to convert us.

He was just telling stories.

As time went on, story after story,

people began to convert themselves. They became believers.

The Siberian people came here, to Sivuaq, when they had hard times over that way.

They were the ones who made trouble for the

white people.

During their stay they made a better life for themselves, and then they sailed back to Siberia.

In my time,

the Siberians who came here and stayed were Walanga and Alngigwtaq.

Their second generations are doing well now. They have big houses.

It has always been said that Sivuaq is a good place to live.

When I was a bigger boy, a little man named Sheldon Jackson came, a missionary.

He was wearing glasses when I saw him.

He brought the missionary here a reindeer and a pig.

The Siberians were asked to kill the reindeer.

I suppose Sivuaq people could have done it.

Then somehow the pig got loose and ran away.

I saw it myself. A man was chasing after the pig,

That pig was so different from dogs. It wasn't too fast!

Somehow they finally got a hold of the pig and killed it.

“When I was old enough not to forget, the first missionary came here... He did not seemingly try to convert us. He was just telling stories.”

Afterwards, they put it in hot water while it was still wiggling, and all the hair came off.

From then on, as I was growing up, everything was alright. We went up to Siberia and the Siberians came over here.

Much has changed, but I remember well those times before airplanes.

Today life is easier.

We have machines to travel in.

We are beginning to be a little like the white people.

I myself have learned to speak some English.

But now, some of the younger people are forgetting their own language.

They don't even know some of the words we use.

When I was older, they started getting wooden whaling boats from the Whites.

They stopped making so many skin boats.

I was old enough to remember clearly by then.

Hunters got many whales with these wooden boats, even young hunters.

I can remember when the village got five whales in one year - twice that happened.

I remember captains who got two whales in a year.

That was Eghqaaghaq and Yaavgaghsiq. Also Quwaaren.

He was always good at bringing in whales. Almost every year he got a whale.

Later we started to make skin boats again like long ago.

We added keels and curved ribs like on the wooden boats.

These are good, sturdy boats. We have caught many whales using them.

With these boats they got a whale just the other day, those children of Qilleghquun.

Today we are all eating mangtak [whale skin and blubber].

Everyone received some.

Long ago, they didn't divide up mangtak equally.

The ambitious hunters took a bigger share.

Poor hunters got very little.

It was Uziva who started the custom of dividing mangtak more equally.

Now the whole village shares mangtak equally.

We even give some to the mainland people, and to the Savoonga people, as well.

In many ways our life is changing.

We have come to love each other. We've be-

come believers in God.

Our souls have become as one. I wish everyone would be this way.

Now our way of living is easier.

Look how many times the airplanes came today!

We have many machines for traveling. The younger people don't walk anymore.

They don't even walk a short distance.

Long ago,

we walked great distances, all the way to Savoonga and Pugughileq, not even by dog team.

Those mountains way over there, we walked to the top of them.

Now the younger people, our own children, don't do that anymore.

They don't travel that way.

And they sleep so deeply now!

Long ago, we slept little and became used to it.

Even myself, I was accustomed to sleeping that way.

It is the time for eating whale now.

There is a lot of open water out there.

Some men -went out hunting today. I wonder what the news is.

## Notes

Presbyterian missionary V. C. Gambell and his family were killed in 1893 when their ship was lost at sea while returning to St. Lawrence Island. The settlement of Sivuqaq was renamed Gambell in his honor, although St. Lawrence Islanders still refer to the village as Sivuqaq when speaking in Siberian Yupik. Gambell first arrived on the island in 1894, not 1891 as Samuel says (Hughes 1984).

Irrigoo is referring to the attruk orchkwaek, meaning "sacrifice", which was held by each patrician at the time of a full moon between February and April, before the whaling season began. Preparations began long in advance with collection and storage of the ceremonial foods including greens, reindeer fat (obtained through trade) and later, tobacco. Hughes (1984) describes one clan's ceremony:

When later in the winter the day of the ceremony finally arrived, the boat captain, his wife, his harpooner, and sometimes the rest of the crew took all the foods down from the meat rack and, working on several wooden platters, molded them into long low mounds. These were placed in the center of the room in the boat captain's house and covered with a walrus skin. Over the foods were hung the captain's hunting gear--such as his special visor, worn only on the hunt and symbolic of his status as well as presumably possessing an inherent power. The captain's bag of special hunting charms was also hung over the foods... The captain and the rest of the group then sat around these foods singing and praying through the night.

Long before sunrise all the participants went

down to the shore, carrying the trays of food with them. There they lowered the boat into the water, all the crew got into the craft, and they paddled out a short distance from the shore [as if they were going out on a hunt] where they once more uttered prayers. Then they returned to the shore to await the coming of sunrise. At dawn, the sacrifice of food began. The captain took a small portion from each platter, broke this into small bits, and threw these into the air, into the sea, and onto the land. As he did so he recited prayers asking for a successful hunt during the coming season. Following the sacrifice of ritual foods, the crew ate what was left on the platters, and anything remaining after that was distributed to other people in the village.

Lincoln Blassi and John Apangalook give similar descriptions of the ceremony in *Lore of St. Lawrence Island* (1985), but they place more emphasis on the feast and distribution of food after the sacrifice at the water's edge.

Gambell's methods of converting the people are in keeping with the traditional Eskimo way of affecting change in others, through indirect communication without making demands or creating a confrontation. The translators suggest that Irrigoo gives this story as an example of the "right way" to persuade people to one's own side.

Food supplies often became scarce at the end of winter. If spring weather and ice conditions were bad, sometimes St. Lawrence Islanders, communities on the Siberian Coast, or both, were not able to reach the spring migrations of sea mammals. While such food shortages were sometimes responsible for travel back and forth across the Straits, more often such trips were made for trading or other purposes. Siberians often came to

Gambell to collect driftwood for boat frames, since driftwood was scarce on their side of the Straits.

William F. Doty (1899), the second Presbyterian missionary to live on St. Lawrence Island makes the following entries in his journal about Siberian visitors:

May 15: ...'Captain Jack,' Mycokuk, and one or two others, all of the Indian Point [Siberia] contingent that has wintered here, attacked the house about midnight, hurtling large stones at one of the doors. They were too drunk to accomplish their purpose ...The Indian Point element ought to be prevented from such attempts, and probably their expulsion alone can guarantee this. The other natives here were oblivious that an assault was in progress upon the school building, and in any event would not want to interfere with Indian Point natives, who are more numerous and better equipped to carry on war than are the natives of this place. Indian Point, in Siberia, is only 40 miles distant from Gambell, and has a population double that of this village, yet the deer men [Chukchi] are their allies, furthermore. Again and again in former times, the Siberians have nearly exterminated the natives of this island.

Missionary V.C. Gambell (1910) reports on his relations with the St. Lawrence Islanders. These comments suggest that the Villagers also caused some trouble for the missionaries:

On the whole, our Eskimo neighbors were by no means bad people to live among. All except the four shamans were well disposed to us, and often showed their good will by neighborly services.

Their desire to learn our methods was prob-

ably the chief reason why Aabwook plays the Paul Pry about our doors and windows. He also tried to ‘bewitch’ us, use the power of the evil eye, and make incantations, which would cause the Eskimo demons to enter our house. Moreover, he was a cunning thief - a regular old fox. A book would hardly suffice to contain all the irritating, odious experiences, which we had with this unspeakable old knave.

...had they [Aabwook and another shaman] not been afraid Captain Healy, of the cutter Bear, would inquire into it and hang them, I make little doubt they would have had us killed.

In 1900, Sheldon Jackson, a Presbyterian missionary who became the U.S. General Agent for Education in

Alaska, arranged for 42 reindeer and several Lapp herders to be brought to the island to insure greater stability in the island’s food resources and economy. When the pig and reindeer that Irrigoo speaks of were brought to the island is not known. No one from Gambell that I spoke with had heard this story, though all found Samuel’s telling of the story extremely funny.

The traditional flat-bottomed skin boat (angyapik) built by St. Lawrence Islanders

was very similar in design to skin boats used by Eskimos throughout the Arctic. The boat was made of split walrus skins stretched and sewn with sinew over a wooden frame with baleen lashings. The wooden boats that St. Lawrence Islanders began to acquire from the whalers were larger, more sea worthy, and especially fast and maneuverable while under sail as compared to the skin boats due to their centerboard and “false keel” assembly.

Whaling ships entered the waters of the Bering Straits around 1848. Between 1869 and 1932 St. Lawrence Islanders gradually made the transition to wooden boats. The flat bottomed skin boats continued to be used for excursions close to shore.



Before 1900, whaling boats were obtained mostly through the trade of baleen, a relatively useless and abundant commodity for the St. Lawrence Islanders. At the season’s end, the baleen from one whale could buy many used whaling boats for the village.



After 1900, when the market for baleen fell off, the Islanders purchased wooden boats with money

made from trading fox furs.

Around 1930 some King Islanders visited St. Lawrence Island (probably staying with the

Irrigoo family, and brought with them a new technology for making skin boats, as Irrigoo says, “ones with keels and curved ribs like the wooden whale boats.” These skin boats were considered far better than the old flat-bottomed skin boats or the wooden boats. At the same time the wooden whaling boats were becoming harder to acquire due to a collapse in the fox fur market.

The new skin boats held an equal load to the wooden boats and were equally seaworthy, but they were much lighter and easier to slide over the ice due to their ivory keel strip.

These last factors were very important since if a crew was caught in bad ice conditions they might have to drag a boat several miles to the safety of open water. The new skin boats were also more flexible and thus held up better to the stresses of ice in the water. Finally, they could be made right on the island, mostly out of local materials. In comparison to the original flat-bottomed skin boats, the new skin boats were much easier to build, carried a larger load, were faster and more seaworthy, and accommodated an outboard motor more readily. Between 1930 and 1954 the new “keeled” skin boats entirely replaced the wooden boats (Braun 1981).



Mangtak is equivalent in Siberian Yupik to what is called Muktuk in other Eskimo languages. This layer of whale skin and underlying fat is a widespread delicacy and is the most coveted part of a whale, although meat and baleen are also recovered.

Hughes (1960) reports that traditionally, the boats that assisted in striking a whale were entitled to a bigger share of its mangtak, baleen etc. than the other boats, with the first boat to strike getting the most. In dividing the mangtak, the whale’s skin was divided into concentric circles around its girth and the boats that struck the whale took the sections of larger girth. However, within each boat the meat was often divided equally among the crew-members.

Between 1940 and 1960 Hughes (1960) reports that:

This system of boat shares has changed so that now the household is usually the basic unit of division, with each share being equal. This change has been attributed to two of the elderly men, each of whose boats had killed whales (which therefore “belonged” to them as far as directing the butchering was concerned). On the first such occasion the mangtak was placed in equal piles; the meat was then divided equally among the crew members. On the second occasion, which occurred within the last four or five years apparently, the pattern of equality went one step further. Division this time was in terms of piles for each household. The rationale

for this newer pattern of division was that, under the older system, some households which contained no men able to hunt in a boat crew, such as that of a widow with young children, might not receive any, or at least very little, mangtak. This did happen sometimes.

The method of distribution is still flexible today, depending on the wishes of the boat owner. Usually, Gambell shares its whale(s) equally with Savoonga, and Savoonga reciprocates. Mangtak is also sent to relatives of St. Lawrence Islanders whom are living in Nome and elsewhere throughout the state.

Savoonga is about 39 air miles, and 48 miles by trail from Gambell. Puguhileq is about 10 miles beyond Savoonga.

Staying in top physical shape was traditionally given great importance. Climbing mountains was one way to get exercise. In *Lore of St. Lawrence Island* (1985) Lloyd Oovi recounts that there was an area designated for recreation in the village where men would run on a circular track, wrestle or lift heavy rocks. Oovi remembers (translation):

When enough people had gathered at the recreation site, they would start running or jogging from one of the houses, down to the boat racks, all around the beach, and up to the mountain. We were always told by the elders to complete the full course all the way back to the village, that is, not to take any short cuts. Along the home stretch, we were always met by elders. They would run behind us and were always encouraging us not to stop. No matter how far we lagged behind, we were told not to stop. If we did something they told us not to do, we were scolded.

Upon arrival at the recreation area, everyone would start wresting. In those days we older boys took part too. There was always someone stronger than everyone else. Soonagrok was the one who was upcoming and forever getting stronger in my young adult days. The strongest man in the village was Amahu who had moved here from Siberia. He and his brother were domineering men. They were always trying to rule everything in the village. Later on, Soonagrok became a match for Amahu. Then Ameba was no longer ruler or the leader in the village. Soonagrok overshadowed him. He caught up with him and passed him. Amahu was no longer bully of the village.

### **Guide to Joe Sun**

Iminaluuraq: Joe Sun

Joe Sun was the most respected elder of Shungnak and among the most respected throughout the NANA region when Elder and Kamerling filmed there in 1975. Sun says he was born on January 3, 1900 in Coal Mine, near his mother's village of Kiana. (The opening paragraph to the film is incorrect when it says that Sun was born in 1901 at Qaala. Sun often says that he is "from Qaala", but this is probably because his father was from Qaala and he therefore considers it his traditional land.)

Sun grew up in the traditional way, moving between established seasonal camps along the Kobuk. The most permanent camp, the winter camp, was located about 10 miles down the Kobuk River from Shungnak. There was a missionary school in Kobuk, but Sun never attended. Instead, he continued to travel with his family, learning everything from his father about how to hunt, trap and make

equipment such as sleds, snowshoes, rafts, and fish traps.

About the time he married, he acquired his own dog team and began to travel extensively throughout the area along trapping and trading routes.

He and his wife would go up to the Noatak drainage or into the Selewick area to set up winter trapping lines, and then would float down to Selewick on a raft to trade with a partner. From there they would go on to Kotzebue to do more trading before returning back up the Kobuk.

Around 1912 Sun started working summers in the gold mines then operating near Shungnak. From his contact with miners Sun learned to speak English. When the mining operations petered out, Sun worked in a variety of other jobs: as a carpenter's assistant in Nome, at a cannery in Bristol Bay, as a boat navigator on the Kobuk. He mined in the Fairbanks area between 1949 and 1951, and for another eight years or so closer to Shungnak before retiring.

More recently Sun has become a leader in the NANA region's Inupiaq Ilitqisiat, or Spirit Program. The program is designed to teach young people traditional knowledge and values. In 1983 he was made President of the regional Elder's Council.

Sun's mother's name was Nasruk and his father was Siqiniq. Sun grew up with his half-brother, Anarraaq, and his full brother and sister, Tuksruk and Paanniikaaluk. Ma-



niilaq, the prophet of the Kobuk people whom Joe talks about on film, was the brother of his mother, Sinaana. In Inupiaq this makes Maniilaq Joe's grandfather, which is how Sun refers to Maniilaq in Inupiaq.

Though Sun never met Maniilaq, he learned of him through Sinaana, who lived with the family at Sun Camp. He married in 1927 and had nine children, six of whom lived.

### Context of Filming

Joe Sun agreed to speak on film when Elder and Kamerling approached him, but shortly afterwards he left for fall camp where he remained most of October and November. Elder and Kamerling filmed him in the last days of their

stay in the village when he returned from camp. Only his wife was there during the filming; no translator was present. In the course of filming the filmmakers asked him to talk about ice fishing and dogs, subjects they had filmed. Otherwise his talk was un-directed.

### Narrative Genre

Sun talks in uqaaqtuaq, a talk about a subject or related subjects that do not follow a set or pre-determined pattern, but that is created by the speaker in the moment. Uqaaqtuaq are not descriptions of historical events as are the Siberian Yupik unqipamsuk. To make his points, Joe Sun weaves his story with thoughts pulled from different time periods and experiences. However, he refers to the source and extent of his knowledge in a given area a similar was as Samuel Irrigoo: "My parents told me...", "I know a lot about

dogs.”

Uqaaqtuaq is a traditional form of expression. Elders gave uqaaqtuaq talks when younger people came to seek advice, or to hear what they had to say on a particular subject. Usually such talks were only given upon request. The genre continues today, but the content of the talks has changed. Some elders feel it is urgent to give uqaaqtuaq now, because the young people will not be able to acquire the knowledge on their own. Though the form in which Joe Sun speaks is traditional, in places he speaks as though talking to someone who isn't familiar with Inupiaq culture.

### **Transcript of English Subtitles**

In the time before the white man came,

there was a great man who was a prophet. My great uncle, Maniilaq.

Maniilaq always spoke about the future, about events to come.

He said that in the future,

people would live differently.

I've been around for 75 years and I'm going to talk.

Long ago, before school teachers,

from the head of the Kobuk River down to Ambler, lived the Kobuk People.

Upriver from here was an old settlement called Aullaqsrugiatchiaq.

And up along the Kuukpik Channel, by the mouth of the Qugluqtuq, was another old place.

It's even mentioned in those stories from long ago.

And up above there was Inuksuk, also a settlement from before people remember.

All along the Kobuk, there were places where people lived.

Those people long ago didn't have many dogs.

My parents told me that four dogs was enough.

Those people traveled all the time,

always by dog team.

What they liked to hunt didn't stay in one place.

They didn't even have tents to camp with.

For shelter they used snow caves.

From Ambler, way up the Kobuk, people lived all over the country.

In that time, the first women suffered much.

When a woman was ready to have her baby, they put her outside, away from the village.

She had to have the baby all by herself.

“I've been around for 75 years and I'm going to talk.”

And when a girl started her period, they put her outside the village too.

They thought they would catch something from it.  
Maniilaq predicted that some day in the future

people would come with a different language, and live among them.

And everything would



change.

He said that when a girl started her period, people wouldn't even notice.

And when a woman had babies, she would have them right inside the house.

Now these things are here.

Nowadays, sometimes we don't even know a woman is pregnant until she has her baby.

And Maniilaq predicted that later on, people would even start traveling through the air.

Everything that Maniilaq said has come true.

I used to travel a lot when I was younger. I really knew about dogs.

Raising puppies long ago,  
when a puppy first started to walk around,  
they would pick him up by the tail and tap him on the back.

They would say, "He's running home!  
He's running home!"

That would make the dog fast.

After that, they would take the puppy by the arms and stretch them outward.

They didn't want the elbows inside,  
they wanted them to stick out.



That's the way they did it.

But we don't see people doing these things anymore.

People keep lots of dogs now, in every village.

Because now there are dog team races.

When dogs are racing,

I can tell the difference between a good team and a losing one.

Ever since I first became aware, I could tell about dogs.

When a dog breathes hard running, like a person working hard, the dog's no good for racing.

But those with good, normal breath always win.

When we're choosing puppies, we open the puppy's mouth to see if it's kind of black.

And we turn the puppy's pads up to see if they are black.

Dogs with black pads don't wear their feet out traveling.

Long ago, when they used to travel from village to village, using dogs,

a man didn't yell "Gee" and "Haw" to turn his dogs, the way they do now.

Instead he hollered "Taavva," which made the lead dog look back. Then he gestured which way to go.

When I was 6 years old, people were already training their dogs the white man's way.

I don't have a dog team anymore. When I was young, I handled many dogs.

Dogs used to be the only way to travel around the Kobuk.

In winter, dogs traveled on the river ice.

And in summer, when people went upriver by boat, dogs towed the boats from the bank.

Even those people who paddled way down to Kotzebue used dogs to pull the boat all the way back.

“Our way of life has changed. The first time people saw a plane coming ...some people almost lost their senses. Even the old men started running. Now they don't even use those first planes anymore. Everything is changing again.”

There weren't any Evinrudes (outboard motors).

When I was older, they started having Evinrudes, the ones that could afford it.

Even myself, when I began working, I bought an Evinrude.

But now, people can't even go check their nets a few bends up if they don't have an Evinrude.

All that Maniilaq said has come true -

that people with a different language would come from far away,

and everyone would live more easily, and travel easily too.

Our way of life has changed.

The first time people saw a plane coming

everybody got excited. Some people almost lost their senses.

Even the old men started running.

Now they don't even use those first planes anymore.

Everything is changing again.

Everything is growing bigger and bigger.

I'm running out of stories to tell. If these people don't mind staying, I think I'll quit for a while.

## Notes

In pre-contact times, families normally had two or three dogs; they could not afford to feed more since dogs and people ate the same foods. Along the coast where food was more abundant, large teams were more common. Traditionally dogs were not used to transport people, but rather one or two helped the family pull its heavily laden sledge. Dogs also packed supplies in paniers during summer travel.

The size of dog teams in the Kobuk region began to increase as technology improved and the need for fast transportation increased. Food for the dogs became easier

to obtain with the introduction of firearms and twine for fishnets. Improvements in sled and harness designs and the development of voice-trained lead dogs allowed people to cross great distances between trapping and trading grounds more quickly. More dogs meant more speed and better profits. Eventually, teams came to have as many as fourteen dogs. People were also leaving their nomadic camps in favor of the villages, and every year villagers had to travel farther to find game and other food resources.

Snow shelters took several forms. A hole dug deep enough to crouch down in and pull a cover over served as an emergency shelter. A more comfortable shelter was made by digging a room out from the side of a packed down, piling of snow. Spruce bows covered the floor, and heated rocks were brought in to provide warmth.

Giving birth was a solitary event. Giddings' informant, Pegliruk, who was born before 1870 (and thus an adult by the time of first contact) describes the event (Giddings 1961): 'If that girl got knocked up and she is going to have a child, when she feels like the child is coming out, people make a big fire out back of the village and send her out alone. Some women tell her how to work her body. After she has her baby, she has to stay in a little snow house for four days. Then she rubs herself all over with snow and goes back to the village. In the house they hang up a skin to hide her bed, and she has to stay back of that skin for one month. Then she goes to the place where she had her baby and cleans herself with snow. Then she is alright for her husband again.'

Giddings added:

Peligruk explained that the little shelter used in these observances had a circular frame of intertwined willows over which snow was

piled up. A small lamp furnished necessary heat and light.

Giddings himself describes the event in his monograph (1956):

A young woman who is pregnant has come near to the time of childbirth... When it is decided by her older advisors that her time is near, she prevails upon the old man to exert himself to prepare a place for her away from the village. He goes out into a dense part of the spruce forest, well away from the sights and sounds of the riverbank, where there is no danger that either the fish or the children will intrude upon the silence. Here he throws together a tepee of spruce saplings. This is called a milyuk...

When he has completed the milyuk, the old man reports back to the pregnant woman, who thanks him and learns directions to the hut. When she feels the first rhythms of childbirth, she retires to her forest concealment, and there, without the aid of a midwife, and away from the sounds of humanity, she gives birth to her child. Kneeling and working her body with her hands inside the shelter of the hut she makes her own delivery, and cuts the cord with a knife of obsidian that she has obtained for this purpose. She bathes the infant and herself in a nearby stream, and returns to the seclusion of her hut. Here she remains for four full days, careful not to make her presence known to individuals who may inadvertently wander past, for she is kongok...[see paragraph on puberty below]

The new mother's only visitors during this time will be an old woman or so who is more or less immune to kongok by virtue of her age.

An informant in a study conducted for the National Park Service (Andersen et al, 1977) tells what she heard from people of her parent's generation:

No matter how young a girl is she gives birth outside all by herself even if she does not know anything about childbirth. She suffers, but at the end she always survives. Although she is brought food, she goes through the pregnancy alone. When giving birth in the cold weather, she has to have strength stronger than her normal self. That is how it was for those people.

Pegliruk gave the following description of a girl reaching puberty (Giddings 1961):

'A young girl, when she is beginning to be a woman, she know it. She goes way behind the village and stays a whole year in a little house her family built for her. Nobody but her mother and little boys can go near. Her face is always covered by a hood that hangs down to her waist in front. On the front of that hood hang beads. When that girl has her monthly, she has to stay inside that monthly for four days--never go out. After that she looked around to see which was the highest mountain. She looks at that high mountain and says, I want to see you forever!' She has to do that. After this, somebody makes a pole for her out of spruce wood. On the end of that straight pole is a knob. On that knob she hangs some kind of images--a little caribou, or something like that. The girl takes the pole and throws it over her head, goes and picks it up and throws it again, until she has thrown it four times. The last time she leaves it in the ground and goes back to her house. Next day she goes again. If something has been taken from those toys tied to the knob it is bad luck. If everything is still tied on, she will have no trouble. That girl stays in the little house for one year. Then she can come home. She is ready for a young man.'

Giddings (1956) provides this description: ...a daughter of the family finds to her alarm that she is no longer a child. Her first men-

struation renders her kongok, as though she were dying or giving birth to a child. She is quickly isolated from the camp. She walks far behind her family while they are on the trail, and at night her father builds her a small brush hut in which to remain. The family must camp for four days while she is in strictest isolation, and must continue to avoid her for an even longer period of time. While she is in the puberty hut, the girl is visited only by her mother or an old woman, and she is given a parka with a wide hood that falls down over her face so that she cannot look anywhere but at her feet as she walks. She does not touch her hair with her hands, but employs a scratching stick if the lice become too playful for comfort. She eats none of the rich foods that are cooked in the family tent, but subsists for a while on a diet of cold meat and fish. Her father prepares for her a divining stick, consisting of a long handle to the end of which are tied three or four thongs, each having a small animal image at the end. She goes out of her hut at intervals to twirl this about her head, letting it fly at random and then searching for it to examine the positions of the animal figures as they lie in the snow. They tell her facts about the future, for she is in a state of kongok that is very close to that of the unseen world of spirits.

A translator who worked on the Sun film related that families from the upper Kobuk used to send their daughters when they first menstruated to live with relatives along the coast because coastal customs regarding puberty were much less severe. Practices involving kongok women were dropped around the turn of the century, shortly after the first missionaries arrived.

Sun, himself uses the word kongok here, which is best translated as “poison”

Much has been recorded about Maniilaq (see the collection of accounts related by Elders from the NANA region in the book *Maniilaq*. See also Joe Sun's *Life History and Giddings* (1961)). Maniilaq was born near the present village of Kobuk sometime in the 1820's. He lived according to the times and was known as an adept hunter.

Beyond Maniilaq's many predictions that have come true, there are others that as of yet have not. In Sun's *Life History*, after he speaks of the same predictions that he mentions in the film, he adds the following: His predictions came through. But there are three predictions, which haven't yet been fulfilled. Maniilaq said that people up here will have an easy life for an extended period of time, without extreme suffering. But then there will come a time of hardship, which has yet to be faced. Before summer comes, after spring, there will be another winter. The two consecutive winters will pass without a summer, and that will be the beginning of suffering. This has not happened yet. And also it is said that Ivisaapaat (Ambler) would become a big city. At the time Maniilaq said this Ambler wasn't even in existence. The newcomers, who spoke a different language, would settle here in great numbers. He said his name, Maniilaq, would emerge and become a part of the town. And in an area near Ivisaapaat the newcomers with a different language will find an extremely valuable resource, which they desperately want and will go after. They will settle in Ivisaapaat. I think this has already started. The town is already growing steadily. And when that happens, in an area across from Ivisaapaat, in an old fishing site (with nets) called Isigakpak (literally: big foot), will emerge an “agviq,” a bowhead whale, which will surface regularly. This has not come to pass yet.

After this the third happening will occur. After some time the Kobuk River will snow. So much that only the tips of the trees will show. Then in the spring, when the ice breaks up and the snow melts, the mountains which will wash out the town. These three prophecies have not been talked about.

There are many stories of how Maniilaq spurned the shamans. He challenged ta-boos that were held as truth and yet he lived. This was amazing to the people. Frequent reference is made to Maniilaq being an early Christian. Sun tells of a widely known encounter between Maniilaq and the shamans in his Life History:

One time in Kotzebue when people started gathering for the trade fair, after the white man came, two Selawik men, Ayaunigrauk and Tuuyuk, both well known and powerful shamans went to Kotzebue. When these two men didn't think too highly of someone they would start killing people, even just an innocent passerby. They would kill the person by any means, however they felt like doing it. They would spear them enough to kill them although they wouldn't finish the act then and there.

Anyway, during this gathering in Kotzebue they both got drunk. So drunk that they were laughing and carrying on, holding hands the entire time. They were becoming a nuisance, getting in everyone's way. The people realized this and went to another area to get out of the shamans' way because they were afraid of these two men.

When Maniilaq saw them he started to dare them to try something on him. He sat down on the trail on their path where they were sure to see him. When they reached the path and encountered him Maniilaq said, "What

do you two think you are doing?" The two looked at each other and one said to the other shaman, "If he tries to swallow us our cousin will be on our side." After that Maniilaq let them through.

Later on that evening when the shaman went home they plotted to kill Maniilaq because no one had ever taunted them before. They started to look for his soul to kill him but they were not successful [they couldn't find his soul]. It is said that this is what happened. It is said that when Maniilaq said, "There is no one in this land who I am afraid of," he was speaking the truth. The two shamans were not able to hurt him. That was the type of man Maniilaq was. But, as everyone says and knows, death claims everyone. It is the truth. Maniilaq also died when his time came. (translation)

In several versions of this story, Maniilaq doesn't ask the Shamans what they are doing, instead he says to them that he could swallow them [eliminate their source of power] if he wanted to. They reply that if he tried to swallow them, they would make him choke. After the widespread adoption of snow machines in the late 1960's, the populations of village dogs declined drastically, but only briefly. By the mid 70's dogs were on the increase again due to racing, as Sun describes. Where the river current was strong, dogs were unloaded on sand bar and hitched to the boat to pull it up. When the bar ended, the dogs were paddled or poled up to the next bar. Even a large powered tug boat in the 1940's took three days to travel up the Kobuk to Shungnak from Kotzebue.

Outboard motors first appeared on the upper Kobuk in the late 1930's. Sun mentions in his Life History that his brother had an Evinrude down near Selewick in 1976 that Sun used when he was there. However it was not until the early 1950's that they became

common.

The first plane came to Shungnak in 1927 according to Sun in his Life History.

## **Guide to Reindeer Thief**

Pelaasi Lincoln Blassi

Lincoln Blassi was born in Gambell March 21, 1894, and he died in 1980 (not 1982 as stated in introductory paragraph at head of film). He was regarded highly as a whale harpooner and ivory carver. He was also respected as a composer

of traditional songs, although he never danced himself. In his later years Lincoln was known for his ungi-pamsuget (historical narratives of the sort Samuel Irrigoo tells). Clarence Irrigoo remembers Lincoln as “a good man, very very friendly” and a “busy man who never idled himself”. Clarence explains:

“Quite often we would gather there in the local store. We liked to visit other people. We’d stand in the room after we had purchased a few things and in a little while Lincoln would say Oh, I’m waisting my time! I should be home doing a little ivory carving.”

Lincoln belonged to the Aymaramka clan. His father’s name was Saavla. His oldest brother was Apaata, a distinguished pipe-maker, and his younger siblings were Maligutkaq (Chauncey Malewotkuk, husband of the artist Florence Malewotkuk), Yaghaq (Adam Yaghaq), and Kulukan (Rosie Kulukhon). Lincoln lived with his brothers and

never married.

## **Context of Filming**

When Elder and Kamerling filmed Lincoln in 1974 he was 78 years old. He was in poor health and lived with his nephew, Woodrow Malewotkuk (Maligutkaq). The filming took place in Lincoln’s attic room which was entered from a trap-door in the ceiling of the room below. There was no one else present during the filming. Before he began to speak, he showed the filmmakers the ivory carving

tools that he had made over the years and the ivory “fox head” buttons he was working on. He spoke some English, which he learned in the missionary school, but on film he chose to speak in Siberian Yupik. Because of the Gambell community’s request to include whaling in the film, the filmmakers asked

“They would stop on the right word, at the right part of the story, and you just sat there, waiting for what was going to happen next. It was just like commercials”.

Lincoln Blassi to talk about the subject. He described a bad whaling accident, in which a whale jumped from the water and landed on a boat killing a hunter (this segment is included in the film *At the Time of Whaling*) He then continued with the story about a man in search of a reindeer thief that is presented in the film.

## **Narrative Genre**

Note: Information about genre and style has been provided by Project translator Linda Badten (who grew up in Gambell and later taught school in Fairbanks), and reviewed by

other people from the Island. Lincoln Blassi's story is an Unigipaghaq, a tale that has been passed down from generation to generation and is believed to be based in truth. Such stories always begin with "Ungipaghaningug", "Reaching back to the time when no one remembers".

Stories for adults were usually long, often lasting several hours. Shorter, more simple stories such as the one Lincoln tells were considered children's stories. Many of the legends told in Gambell take place in Siberia among the Chukchi, the Reindeer People. Though there is no mention of location in the story, people from Gambell who 'have listened to the story are certain it takes place in Siberia. None had heard the story before.

In traditional times (before the 1940's), most adults in Gambell could tell three or four stories, but some people gained reputations for being especially good. Good story tellers had large memories and vocabularies, but more importantly they knew how to entertain: "They would stop on the right word, at the right part of the story, and you just sat there, waiting for what was going to happen next. It was just like commercials". (Linda Badten) Stories were not associated with seasons or events; they were told in the evening or dur-

ing the daytime in bad weather - any time when people could not be out hunting. I heard most of the stories from my fathers friends. He'd bring them over to the house - good story tellers - and we'd eat and then right after tea they would start a story. The guest knew that one of the purposes of being brought to that house was that he was expected to tell stories. He was obligated to do that, after dinner. He was returning the hospitality of the host to him. He would be looking at the host and telling him, but everyone else was listening too." (Linda Badten)

To let the story teller know that the listeners were interested they would interject "Mmmm", which meant "go



on, what happens, we're listening". Women and children could come and go during a long story, but the host could not. All stories end as Lincoln's does, with "Tefay", which he spits into the air emphatically. This means, "Now the truth is out. For this honesty let something good happen."

**Transcript of English Narration**

NOTE: Translations have not been condensed except as follows: Each time the Traveler is felt by the Host, the Traveler runs out of the room, and from there overhears the Host whispering to his wife. The Traveler would then come back in and sit down to begin eating again. Similarly, when the Traveler begins to feel the Host, the Host runs out of the room, and then returns. This action is expressed so quickly that there was no room to include it in the English translation.

In the time before people remember,

there was a man who lived alone, but as though he had company.

He talked and talked to himself and he answered himself.

And so he lived on.

In the course of time he heard about a man of the Reindeer People who was said to be a thief.

Talking to himself he said, "I'd like to go see this reindeer thief."

"No, don't go," he answered himself. He is a thief and he will steal you."

Later on he said again, "I want to go out and look for this man."

"No, don't go," he answered.

"He will steal you as well. He is a thief remember."

Over time he said to himself again, "I would

really like to go out and find this man whom the people say is a thief."

He began preparations to go. As he did so he said, "My, you are so insistent on finding this thief that you will be stolen, too. Be very careful."

He started out anyway.

Along the way people asked him where he was traveling, and he told them.

Each time he traveled through a village, people questioned him.

He came to another village.

People asked, "Where are you going?" "I'm looking for the reindeer thief."

"You are getting close," they said.

As he traveled on he saw a man with a reindeer and sled.

The man waited for him.

"Where are you going?" asked the man with the reindeer.

"I'm looking for the reindeer thief."

"You are close. Over that hill is a big village. You will find him there."

But the Traveler who talked to himself was now feeling this man's reindeer all over.

"My, what big thighs!" the Traveler exclaimed.

"Lots of marrow! Lots of marrow!"

The Traveler felt the reindeer's stomach, saying "My, what a big belly! Lots of guts! Lots of guts!"

Then he left.

As he walked away, the reindeer fell dead. The reindeer's fat and marrow had transferred to the traveler's own body.

The Traveler went over the hill and sure enough there he saw a big village.

He went up to a man outside the biggest house. "Where are you going?" asked the man.

"I'm looking for the reindeer thief." the Traveler said.

"Here, I am the one." "Come in to my house. Let's eat together."

The man's wife cut up pieces of meat for them.

As the Traveler reached for the food, the Host felt his arm up and down, and said, "My how fat! Lots of marrow! Lots of marrow!"

The Host whispered to his wife, "This traveler feels like a reindeer to me."

Then the Host felt the Traveler's legs, saying "My how fat! Lots of marrow! Lots of marrow!"

The Host whispered again, "He feels just like a reindeer to me."

Now the Host felt the Traveler's stomach,

saying, "My, what a big belly! Lots of guts! Lots of guts!"

To his wife the Host whispered, "This guest feels exactly like a reindeer to me."

But the Traveler had caught on. The Traveler reached over and began to feel his Host's arm!

"My, How fat! Lots of marrow! Lots of marrow!" the Traveler exclaimed.

And the Host cried out, "I can't feel my arms anymore!"

Then the Traveler felt his Host's legs up and down all the way to the ankles, saying "My, what big legs! Lots of marrow! Lots of marrow!"

And the Host cried out again, "I can't move my legs anymore!"

Now the Traveler felt the Host's stomach, saying "My, what a big belly! Lots of guts! Lots of guts!"

The Host cried out one last time, "Why, this traveler is a thief himself! He has stolen all my marrow and guts."

As the Host cried this, he fell dead.

It was true. All of his marrow and guts were gone.

So, the Traveler started back the way he had come, through all the villages.

In the course of time he arrived back at his empty house and went inside.

There he said to himself, “You thought I would be stolen. But here I am, back again.”

“You see, I am a thief myself.”

It so happened that he was the thief himself.

Old men tell children they are going to make good weather when they end a story with “Thief!”

All is said for good weather. May it be calm.

Some children believed it was true.



## Film Credits

Produced and directed by: Katrina Kassler Waters

Executive Producers and Creative Consultants: Sarah Elder and Leonard Kamerling

Gambell footage produced in 1974 and Shugnak footage produced in 1975: Sarah Elder and Leonard Kamerling

Sound: Sarah Elder

Editing: Katrina Kassler Waters

In Iirgu's Time and The Reindeer Thief translated by: Linda Womkon Badten and Vera Oovi Kaneshiro

Joe Sun translated by

Rachel Craig, Elmer Jackson, Ida Ross, and Lorna Williams

Major Funding Provided by

National Endowment for the Arts

Alaska Humanities Forum

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## Purchasing Information

### In Iirgu's Time

color, 20 minutes, 1988

dvd/vhs/16mm

sale \$145 rental \$30

### Joe Sun

color, 19 minutes, 1988

dvd/vhs/16mm

sale \$145 rental \$30

### Reindeer Thief

color, 13 minutes, 1988

dvd/vhs/16mm

sale \$145 rental \$20

## Study Guide Credits

Written by  
Katrina Kassler Waters

Compiled and Edited by  
Lauren DeSantis

Designed by  
Lauren DeSantis

## Contact Information

**Documentary Educational Resources**  
101 Morse St.  
Watertown MA 02472

800-569-6621 or 617-926-0491  
<http://www.der.org>  
[docued@der.org](mailto:docued@der.org)