

H85-113

KUAC Chinook Radio Series: Inupiat Music part 2, Tom Johnston, Ethel Beck, Eagle Village Health Aide

Part 1:

Chinook Profiles

This program continues the conversation with alternate health aide Ethel Beck from Eagle Village. Her sister Bertha is the primary health aide and Elva Scott, a public health nurse, lives in the neighboring town of Eagle. These three women help everyone and are the major source of medical knowledge for people who live on the river. Mainly these women see problems such as colds or flus and accidents, but there is also the problem of alcoholism. Usually the health aides work as a team, but sometimes something happens. Ethel talks about the last winter when her sister went out on a trap line from October to December and she was left in charge of everything herself. She had one accident: a young guy shot himself. No one had gone in to see him till she went in to check him out herself. She had a couple of attempted suicides but it's not something they have every day, in fact she has not encountered that since then. Beck tells that when she first started she was really scared, but she always had Bertha and the public health nurse Elva Scott who were usually around to help. However, Elva Scott goes on vacation every winter and she wasn't there at the time that these things happened and there weren't any other nurses or anyone around who had had the appropriate training. Ethel was really scared without this support system but continued doing her job as a health aide. When the kid shot himself they told her that she really handled it well; she didn't get upset or get carried away or anything. She remained calm and it didn't bother her in the way that death bothers a lot of people, but she prayed a lot too, every morning before going to work. Although she couldn't remember exactly how long she'd been working as a health aide, Ethel said she thought it was around four or five years. She and her sister-in-law were health aides when they first started but they didn't get paid and didn't go in for training. They were single and young and they'd come to Fairbanks often and were in Fairbanks and Bertha [decided...*part of this is garbled*] to be a health aide. She doesn't remember what year that was, but not long after they started to be paid for their work. Ethel always wanted to be a practical nurse, but some problems came up and she quit. She isn't sure if she'll continue in her training to be a nurse. She just got a job back home and doesn't really want to be a full time nurse. Her sister asked if she wanted to be the primary health aide and she said she didn't mind but didn't know if she wanted the full time job. She's not afraid of the responsibility, but doesn't want the time commitment. Her sister is doing a good job and if they put her in Bertha's place then she'd have to go through more training and that would be spending a lot more money that no one needs to spend. She never gets tired of the work, but she and her sister both dislike the paperwork. They need to do a lot of it and don't really care for it. But they do feel very good about working with patients. Drinking is a large problem in the community. Ethel doesn't drink anymore. She drank last fall but she got very sick and it hurt a lot of people and she prayed about it and told herself she'd never do it again. So though she doesn't consider herself exactly a role model, she thinks her story helps other people. They know she used to drink and yet she's also strong enough not to. It wasn't easy. It was hard for her to quit too, but once she quit it was easier to be strong enough to stay out of it because she knows what it can do to her. Drinking is the main problem in the village. Everyone who's been in to see the doctor in the past has an issue that is related to drinking. They try to talk to their patients about the cause of their problems but it doesn't always do any good. If people are going to drink they're going to

drink. Ethel thinks it helps some of them, at least for a while, to share her experiences about what it did to her and her family, but eventually they start drinking again. It's very depressing, especially when you see what they're doing to their kids. Ethel doesn't know how to help these people. AA programs have been implemented in the past but they didn't work. In order for a person to quit drinking they really need to want to do it and there's not much Ethel can say to make them want to do it. Although she loves to help people, it's hard to work with a person who's drinking because it's difficult to get what's wrong with them or examine them right or deal with them when they're drinking. There are some improvements, but not as much as they'd like to see. They tried getting rid of liquor but they couldn't; it's hard to do. Recently they started having the community hall open every night and the kids and sometimes a few adults come around. They're working on having it open for activities to keep the village busy so maybe they won't want to spend time drinking. She enjoys helping people; it makes her feel good to be able to do it.

Part 2: Chinook Echoes

This program continues the discussion with Professor Tom Johnston of the University of Alaska Music Department about music, stories and ceremonies of the Inupiaq people. All culture is changing all of the time. But there has been one big difference in the use of Eskimo music, the sound of Eskimo music is very much the same they haven't changed the sound very much, but it used to be used to please the hunting spirits. For instance, to make sure the seals came back again they would have a song where they blew up the bladders of the seals and threw them back into the sea because the seal would be entertained at the ceremony and want to come back. Now the use of Eskimo music is more for emphasizing ethnic and community pride. They're still composing songs for special new occasions. When the Gambell Dance team from St. Lawrence Island went to visit the president a few years ago, they had a song where they sang 1, 2, 3, very energetically and when the president asked them what that was for they said "well, that's for you to have a third term." One of the most interesting things about the music of the Eskimos of Northwest Alaska these days is the large number of very special dances that are still carried on that aren't found anywhere else in Alaska or Siberia or Canada or Greenland or anywhere else in the world. These include the Spinning Top Dance of Point Hope where the whaling hunters, just before the whaling season begins, all gather around a large wooden spinning top with white feathers sticking out of it. They sing the Spinning Top Dance and the chord is pulled and the spinning top pulls out all of its feathers into the air and the hunters are supposed to catch these feathers. The one who catches the whitest feather, the snow owl feather, is going to have the best luck in the forthcoming whaling season. There is also a dark side to this ancient custom. If you mishandle the top, by dropping it or some other means, you will die within twelve months. The people at Point Hope have told me this has often happened. Another very ancient dance from Point Hope is the Puppet Dance where a very elaborate, beautiful puppet about two feet high is built and it has strings attached to its legs and its head and its arms and the puppet dances. This has survived from some of the ancient ceremonies where there used to be many mechanical contrivances, like birds flying across the ceiling of the ceremonial qargi hut, and foxes coming out of holes and flying across in time to music. Other important dances and ceremonies still held include the Box Drum Dance called Kalukaq. This is done at Wainwright, Barrow, and by the

King Islanders in Nome. They have this large box about two feet high with this zigzag wooden top which symbolizes the feathers of the eagle and the beat of the drum, which is hit on the side with a wooden baton, symbolizes the heartbeat of the eagle. There's an ancient legend attached to this story of the origin of the Box Drum Dance about how the box came floating in like a kite from the sea and the voice within said to take the box out of the water and to use it as a special drum in the Wolf Dance where they put on real wolf heads as masks and wear long gauntlet rattles and shake their arms with a rattling motion and the rattles are made of puffin bills, large beaks taken from the Arctic Puffin Bird which are sewn onto the gauntlet rattles by the women. At this point, Tom Johnston plays a sample of music by Wier Negovanna of the Wainwright Dance Team performing and explaining about the Box Drum and the Kalukaq Dance as he goes. The Box Drum dance is a very special ceremonial dance for giving gifts. The gifts are laid out on the floor of the qargi, the ceremonial hut, in front of the man who is seated playing the Box Drum. This large crate is suspended from the ceiling and it is swung from side to side. On his head the drummer must wear a loon skin headdress, which is made of the loon bird hollowed out and worn across the crown of the head. He beats the side of the drum with a heavy beater and the man standing in front of him passes him the gifts and the drummer calls out the name of the recipient of the gift who is one of the audience present, maybe a distinguished visitor from a neighboring village, and he passes it to a man behind him who gives it to the honored guest who comes up to receive his gift. This is a very interesting dance full of lots of floor motions where the lines of women and men are moving backwards and forwards across the floor. The culminating dance of the Box Drum Dance is called the Exit Song. At this point Tom Johnston plays a sample of music by Wier Negovanna and Homer Bodfish and all of the expert drummers and singers from Wainwright explaining and performing the Exit Dance. There are certain differences, Johnston explains, in the music of the Inupiaq speaking Eskimos from that of the Yupik speaking people. The sound of the music is different. The songs and the way they compose them is a different style. In the southwest they have many verses and the song goes on longer instead of being sung twice through, at first softly and slowly and then fast and loud, the first time with nonsense syllables and the second time with real words. In the southwest, every verse is part of a story and goes on and on like a long tale, and in between each verse there's a kind of interlude done by the drummers; just a little pitter-pat, and during that time the dance leader may shout some cues to the dancers and drummers and singers or he might tell a little bit of the story to the audience, and then they go into the next verse. Also in the southwest, men kneel and use dance fans. They have these beautiful circular hoops with feathers on and they manipulate them in the air, sort of extending the arms up into space, almost like the Eskimo personality itself which is a very expansive, outgoing personality. These dance fans greatly enhance these dance motions and help tell the story. Another difference is in the southwest they beat the drums on top whereas in the northwest the drums are hit from underneath. The program ends with one more song before fading into the Chinook credits.