

Mr. & Mrs. Michael Christmas  
Eskasoni, N.S.

Lil--How did your father make a living and also how did you make a living?

--My husband's family, the Christmases, have never been poor. They had a big farm.

Lil--What did they grow on their farm?

--Potatoes, carrots, turnips, cabbage and all kinds of vegetables.

--We even had a strawberry patch, about an acre of it. They had a lot of cows.

Lil--How many?

--We had 8 at the most, at one time.

Lil--How many horses did you have?

--Three, and we usually raised 2 or 3 piglets.

This was for our winter's meat supply. If meat ran short my father killed an heifer or a cow.

We would have a cellar full of potatoes that would last us all winter. In the fall we started trapping for mink and muskrats and foxes. Three of us trapped, my father, brother and I. My father couldn't venture out too far because he had to tend to the animals. We got a lot of fur. We also fished for codfish and eels. We owned a lot of land. In the summer we made hay. They also collected ice in the summer. This enabled us to keep our fish fresh in the summer. We had two barns and we also kept our hay in stocks. Our house was located where the Agency office buildings are located.

Lil--So, I guess you didn't buy too much in the way of food.

--We only bought sugar, tea and tobacco. My brother and I didn't smoke, however, my father chewed tobacco.

Lil--So your father didn't depend on welfare.

--No, he never got any welfare, and Even Michael and I didn't get any welfare. We started getting it when Michael became disabled.

Lil--I guess it was inadequate anyway.

--I think it used to be \$5.00 a month.

Lil--I suppose your father was adept in preserving food.

--Oh yes, he was. He salted eels and other fish.

Lil--Were there a lot of fish here at the time?

--There used to be a lot of eels. I don't know what happened to them.

Lil--How much did you get for eels when you sold them?

--50¢ a dozen.

(The rest of this interview will be by Mrs. Christmas.)

--My mother knew a lot of Indian medicine. Whenever someone in my family became sick my mother would mix and prepare various kinds of bark, plants, roots and after it was finished she called it pegoak. For instance, if you had a sore back she would put some of that (pegoak) plaster on your back. My mother was 78 when she died but she never had to wear glasses. And she could still thread a needle. I can't do that myself without my glasses and then she used snake roots for eye trouble. Michael had trouble with his eyes one time, he couldn't even see. My mother cured him. She boiled snake roots, then after she

strained them until the water was full of any particles. She cured Michael. She had eye trouble at one time and she cured herself. As I said before her eye sight was very good. There aren't too many old people who have good eye sight.

Lil--My aunt, Isabel also told me about the remedy for sore eyes and she also mentioned using snake roots.

--Some people call them gold threads.

Lil--Yes.

--They grow under moss, they are like threads. My grandmother would gather these and washed them thoroughly. And I don't know how many times she strained them with cloth. Oh yes, she also had a remedy for ear trouble, but I don't remember what she used. Then she used to use what she called bayberry, for colds. She used to grind this into powder and she inhaled this through the nostrils. This broke up her cold. And she used alder for fever. She steeped the bark in water. Also she used some kind of leaves, I think she called them (who-ge-gun-ipk-col). She would put a bandage on which these leaves were wrapped around your head. She wouldn't tire when the leaves dried up. She would change them. It seems like we never suffered from any serious illness, because she always administered her medicine to us when we first became sick. My mother really depended on her. Whenever any of us became sick she would go to her mother and ask her to come over and take care of us. Within a short time of grandmother's medication one would be up and around. Indian medicine is good.

Lil--It is good, I've heard a lot about it in my interviews.

--She used alder bark even on infants to cure fever. She put this liquid in the baby's milk and wrapped alder leaves around the baby's head.

Lil--I suppose you've heard of pagosi?

--Pagosi is good for arthritis.

Lil--How do you prepare this medicine?

--I am not sure. I don't know if you steep them and drink the liquid or if you wash your feet with this water. And also pagosi is good for preventing the spread of disease, e.g. if there was measles in the neighborhood and you didn't want your children to catch it--you keep a pot boiling in your house at all times. This kills germs.

Lil--A lot of people have told me the same thing. They even wear it around their neck in a small packets after it is grinded into powder.

--Yes, just like camphor. That works the same way. Pagosi is good. My son, Michael has never had measles. He's a married man today. The reason why is this; he was a sickly child and when my other children had the measles I made sure that he wouldn't catch it. I used pagosi, I made a packet for him to wear around his neck and I also kept a pot boiling containing pagosi. I did this until all the children got over their measles except Michael didn't get it.

Lil--Do you know any natural dyes.

--My mother used to make it out of alder bark I remember but I never made it myself. My mother used to make it when we lived over at MacNabs Cove, near Barra Head. My father was cutting pulp there and my mother made baskets. I was 7 or 8 at the time. I couldn't even use commercial dye myself because I have excema.

Lil--Indians were able to cure that at one time.

--Yes, Roddie Steven's mother was able to cure it. I don't know if Roddie or his other brothers know that medicine.

--But I know that they used cow manure. Anyway when that salve is all mixed it looked like tar. Roddie's mother treated me one time when my hands were broken out, from using dye.

Lil--Do you know what Indians smoked at one time?

--Moss, that is on old rocks. They dried this up and smoked it. And tobacco didn't cost that much.

Lil--That must have been long ago though. I understand that Indians were the first ones to use tobacco. We have introduced a lot of things, to the white people like canoes, snowshoes, etc.

--Yes, and we are even mixed in with them today.

Lil--Yes, and Indians also administered Indian medicine to them. They delivered their babies. Indians were healthy, at first there were no doctors.