Interviewee: Ella Anagick
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My mom, Ella Anagick, received the Covid vaccines earlier in January and early February, 2021. She came to visit Albuquerque. Her grandkids had not seen her since late 2019.

Holly: So I have everything recording. So I'll start with an introduction. My name is Dr. Holly Guise, Miowak Guise. And I'm here today on February 23, 2021, and I'm interviewing Ella Anagick, my mother (short laugh) here in Albuquerque, New Mexico. So, mom, if you wanted to start by introducing your name, where you're from, what year you were born, and maybe Native name. (1:00)

Ella: Okay, my name is Ella Anagick. I originally grew up in Unalakleet, Alaska. But I was born in Nome, Alaska at the Maynard McDougall Memorial Hospital on April 4th, 1951. I attended from first grade until the 10th grade, the Bureau of Indian Affairs elementary school and partial high school in Unalakleet. For my junior year of high school, I attended Mt. Edgecumbe High School which is on or near Sitka, Alaska. Mt Edgecumbe was actually an older military base so there were huge hangers. And back then, (2:00) the BIA school system, the policy of the federal government was to actually take Alaska Native children or students from all over the state and transport them to Mt. Edgecumbe for high school. The 9th through the 12th grade. Basically back then, as I said it was geared toward vocational education. There was no, a lot of the students

were not told about attending college or any type of academic type of experiences at Mt. Edgecumbe. In my junior year, I took typing, cooking, a baking class, sewing, and home economics that was required for us. (3:00) And basically, I had some very good teachers. I had actually Ms. Powell, who was a m*latto, that means she actually was biracial. And she was a very nice encouraging person that I had in my English class. She treated me very well and got me a job helping a white woman in Sitka, who at that time had advanced breast cancer doing cleaning and helping her do other small things across the island. I have to say her husband was creepy; I didn't feel comfortable around that man. (4:00) She did allow me to see that film Dr. Zhivago. Which back then it was almost unheard of for young Natives kids to go to an essentially all-white movie theater on the Sitka side. In Mt Edgecumbe, our dorms were essentially, excuse me, cubicles, which means that in each cubicle there were two bunkbeds with four girls sleeping in each bunkbed. And there was really no place to study, although there was a library downstairs. But (5:00) part of the duties that we had to do was to buff the halls with these huge buffers, vacuum cleaners. That was not only what was required but whenever some of the aids felt that they could essentially do anything to the girls, they would assign some of these duties. I had one [dorm mother] by the name of Mrs. Blankenship. She felt that it was her, part of her authority to come and check out how our beds were made, because I had an older sister Dorothy who may have displeased her in some fashion, she would come whenever I had my bed fixed and she would rip out those sheets (6:00) and tell me in a very specific clear way how to fold those sheets. But, you know she was on a power kick, that's how I always felt, cause I always got my sheets ripped off. In any event, also part of the entertainment in Mt. Edgecumbe, was in one of the hangers that was on the island, that we were on, they had us go and do roller blading. So I had friends from Unalakleet and there would be music, I can't remember the music. But we would spend some time in the evenings roller blading. Just round and round it was a huge hanger (7:00) in that facility. Mt Edgecumbe also had dances for us during the weekends in the hanger there. And there was a Native band who'd sing all these songs, popular songs at the time. And the band leader I remember his name was James Norton from Kotzebue. He was actually very nice looking at that time. But, we'd see kids dancing like to music like there's a light that never shined on me. You know some of these different types of songs that would play during some of these dances in the hanger there. (8:00) I also had a teacher (goes through notes she prepared) by the name of Mr. Brady, Gil Brady. He always looked kind've tired. He was kind've like a jaded white male. He was my Algebra II teacher. And I remember when he mentioned Rice University and he spoke about that University in Texas very highly. And I got excited. I went up and I asked him, I said, is there any way that I can apply to a place like that? His response at the time was that I couldn't get in there and that it was essentially back then impossible practically (9:00) for someone like myself to get into a place and succeed in a place like Rice University. And I think that's, that was part of the policy back then because most of the educational experiences for a lot of the gifted Native students was not geared toward vocational, I'm sorry, was not geared toward academic performance but vocational education. I found this out when I attended Stanford and one of the other older Native American students, Chris McNeil (Tlingit), was trying to get me funding from the Bureau of Indian Affairs, or grants so that I could continue my education at Stanford. Back then, he was told by the Bureau of Indian Affairs officials that (10:00) there was no funding for academic college performance of Native Americans or American Indians, but that it was all geared toward vocational education. Which was sort of the policy of the federal government, how we were treated as Alaska Native and American Indian students at that time. I've since learned that the BIA now supports college

education funding and I don't know if there's any for vocational training because I think that kind of policy really stunted a lot of Native kids in my generation and it also reflected the extreme segregation that there was in the State of Alaska, Mt Edgecumbe was part of the segregation policy that existed in the State of Alaska in (11:00) I believe I was in Mt Edgecumbe in 1967-68. And I did not want to attend college there because I knew that I would face a much stiffer opposition than if I went outside, which I did. In Mt. Edgecumbe there was a cook, Oash, who was a cook in the mess hall. And, I don't know if he saw something in me because we used to have these tin metal plates where they would slop there food (laughs) onto sections off the metal plate, and I remember I got some type of meal from Oash. He had red hair, just a kindly male, white male. (12:00) And he looked at me, one day, and he said to me, "You need to hold your head high and keep going." That was a real surprise to me because other than Ms. Powell, I didn't get that kind of encouragement from any of the other teachers in Mt Edgecumbe. I did have a teacher in Chemistry, and I can't remember his name, but he seemed to be pretty (pause) fairly supportive given the atmosphere in Mt. Edgecumbe. By and large I really didn't like the facility, I didn't really care for Mt. Edgecumbe (13:00). I think it was part of the treatment I got with Mrs. Blankenship. And it was also on an island, so we couldn't really go anywhere. And it was very restrictive. By being restrictive, as I said in the dorms there were four to a cubicle and every night at 9[PM] there was a big announcement, "lights out." 9[PM] in the evening. So, all the lights the big lights in evening would go out at 9[PM] every night and we had to be in bed at that time. That was part of how the students, I guess how they kept control of the kids in the dorms back then. I do remember (14:00) (pause) I was part of the drill team and Jennifer I think was from Hydaburg. She was a very good drill team captain, she was focused, it was almost like a military type style of being a part of this drill team and we had these cute little white outfits with a hat you know and we would learn to twirl these batons you know. And kick up as we were walking. And she made sure that we followed all these steps and got these steps down precisely. And in fact, we were invited to a parade, to participate on the Sitka side, they called Sitka "the sunny side." "Sitka sunny side" or something to that effect. So, when we got to Sitka, oh, "Sunny Sitka by the sea," (15:00) we had our little hats on, we marched in out lil' white uniforms and we, you know she was in the front kind've barking her orders and we were all in line as we started marching down Sitka, and it was an all-girls team, we were booed, we were hissed at, cat-calls were made to us, derogatory comments were made against us but we held our heads high and we stayed focused. And think that's probably the reason why we got that type of reception because we were probably more formally trained than some of the other individuals non-Natives who were (16:00) marching in that parade. But I do recall very clearly, how we were treated. And we just kind've did what we had to do. We couldn't let these comments or catcalls, or hisses and boos make us falter or misstep or do anything which probably would have cost a lot of jeering. There was, there was a, when I think about it now in retrospect, they were trying to make us feel like we were less than some of the other individuals participating in that parade but that didn't happen. And so that's something that I have to thank Jennifer for and I don't know what happened to her. But I do know that because a lot of kids were not encouraged (17:00) to go on to college and were not even told about the opportunities available to advance themselves, I did run into some of these individuals later including Norton in Kotzebue and he looked awful. I mean it's like, you know you take kids from their communities, villages across the state, you're charged to educate them you're charged to kind've build them up as the support group for the white population that was then in Alaska without giving them the requisite skills for training you know to get better jobs, to advance themselves, so there were a lot of broken dreams I think, and

broken lives because a lot of these kids (18:00) once they left they couldn't really fit back into village life. I know this because I grew up in a totally subsistence lifestyle in Unalakleet where the only contact that we had with the whites were either through the missionary, the Evangelical covenant church, the BIA school system, the FAA, the Air Force and the White Alice had military bases there which were part of the Dooline effort during the Cold War. In fact, I can tell you that in elementary school, we actually had, and the BIA didn't really keep track of what teachers came to teach us because most of teachers who taught us (19:00) in these far-flung places in Alaska were actually minority teachers who had college degrees but could not get jobs in the white school system in the lower 48. So a consequence of this is, in fact, in Unalakleet we had Mr. Butts and the I think it was the Shirtz's(?). They ended up being (clears throat) military spies from Russia. (Clears throat) I know, I think it was Mr. Shirtz (?) I can't exactly remember his name but I know he was a teacher of my older sister and brother, and when he went up to the military site there he started taking a lot of pictures which raised a lot of suspicions at the Air Force (20:00) site. And he was later arrested I think by the military and found out to be a spy. And that was some of the lax qualifications for letting in some of these different teachers in rural Alaska. I heard stories when teachers could not pronounce the names of students, they gave names like, "Moon melons" or other names from comic-strips or whatever to individuals because they could not speak or understand either Yupik or Iñupiaq or made any attempt to do so. In any event, that was part of the history of being a part of the BIA school system. (21:00) My first-grade teacher was Mrs. Jackson, she was African American, today they're called Black Americans, Mrs. Moore and Mr. Moore, they were also Black Americans very loving people, very intelligent people. I had my second-grade teacher was Mae Ivanoff and Eva Ryan, they were actually Native teachers from Unalakleet. My fourth, my fifth and sixth grade I think was Bernadette Trantham, who was a Native teacher and they lived in a nice house. I asked, "How did you get to live in a nice house?" She said that she went to (22:00) college. Bernadette Trantham actually grew up in Nome, Alaska and has a niece who has a PhD in Nome, I can't recall her name but she's part of Sitnasuak Native Corporation. And then I had 7th and 8th grade, Mr. Ponte who was a white male. He was one of the first white males that I had. But that was my experience growing up in Unalakleet and I got my inspiration to go onto college from Bernadette Trantham. Otherwise, I probably would have ended up living in Unalakleet and there's still the subsistence lifestyle there where people hunt and fish. That's what my parents did, I was one of nine. They had to hunt and fish to feed us. And that was extremely difficult (23:00) because there was a lot of poverty there. A lot of abuse and a lot of, it was very difficult. I remember my parents hunting for food so that we could eat. And that was how it was in the village of Unalakleet. Is there anymore?

Holly: Um, let me pause this for a second. This one, it has like a thing on it (the video camera had a flashing digital image indicating too hot or low battery). I think it might be overheating so let me turn it off for a second. (Turns off). Okay, I put it back on, yeah I guess, here why don't you set the paper down, thank you for going through that. It just makes a wrinkly sound. So, one of the questions is, why did you decide to go to Mt Edgecumbe High School? Was there a choice? Like what would your other option have been if you didn't go to Mt. Edgecumbe? Was there a school in Unalakleet (24:00) or no?

Ella: Can we turn that off for a while so that I can talk?

Holly: Yeah. (Turns camera and recorders off)

(Part 2 of the interview- the camera resumes)

Holly: Okay, so tell me about the Upward Bound program. How did you hear about that and did you have to travel to participate?

Ella: Yes, I actually heard about the Upward Bound program from Pete Garrison, he was a year older than me and he had heard about it in Mt. Edgecumbe. I remember meeting him up on the street in Unalakleet and asking him if he knew of any programs, and he said, "Yeah, there's the Upward Bound program in Fairbanks." And I think I asked him how to apply. Again it was, and I can't remember how I applied, but I did apply, and I ended up in the Upward Bound program at the University of Alaska in Fairbanks and I think that was in 1966. I think they had a big earthquake then too on the campus. Linda Ryan, now Linda Towarak was my roommate. (1:00) And we were introduced to different types of programs there was a woman there who played the guitar, and she would sing songs like, "This land is your land, this land is my land, from California, all the way to the New York Island." All these different songs that are part of the folklore of Americana. And from the Upward Bound I actually then went to Mt. Edgecumbe, I went back to the Upward Bound program after my junior year. And I was in an electronics class, I have a friend, Randy Judd, who is in Oregon who was in that class, he was from Homer. I want to make it clear that back then the Upward Bound program (2:00) was for both Native Alaskans and white Alaskans. The whole Alaska used to be a territory before the state, but the whole state before the pipeline was discovered, there was poverty everywhere. So, there were kids from Wasilla, kids from Barrow, kids from Fairbanks, kids from the Kenai, Ninilchik, Randy was from Homer and I still have been in contact with him. But it was through the Upward Bound program that I remember Sgt. Shriver came to speak with us. He was an aid I think of then President Kennedy, or part of, I just remember it was set up I think through (3:00) the Kennedy administration, I'm not sure. But it was through this Upward Bound program where there were six Alaskans chosen to go to the State of Hawaii, I was one of those chosen and I stayed with a Japanese family on Oahu in Aiea, that's where I graduated from high school. Aiea High School. And that's where I heard about Stanford. And ended up attending Stanford. They didn't have a Native American program but there were four of us who petitioned President, I think it was Pitzer, to help initiate the Native American program when I first went onto that campus the Stanford campus, they didn't know what to do with me so they put me with the Blacks (4:00) and Hispanics as part of the orientation program. I was very privileged to attend a place like Stanford.

Holly: I have a question about your friends, the other day you mentioned that you had friends at Mt. Edgecumbe and that some of your friends weren't here anymore. How many of your friends went to school with you at Mt Edgecumbe?

Ella: From Unalakleet I think there were probably about ten or twelve who went to Mt. Edgecumbe. I think now there's only, other than myself, maybe two or three that are alive. A lot of the other kids from (5:00) Mt. Edgecumbe either died from alcohol abuse or cancer or other similar situations. Maybe there's 3 or 4 I can't remember.

Holly: Did anyone get sick while they were going to school there?

Ella: In Mt. Edgecumbe? Um, no, but there was a Mt. Edgecumbe hospital that was federally owned.

Holly: Um, who was Viola?

Ella: Viola was my very close friend from the time of the first grade, Viola was highly gifted, she knew how to read at the first-grade level and when she read she could look at a page and read straight down (6:00) from top to bottom. We used to talk about going to college together. I lost track of Viola when I attended high school in Hawaii. She actually went to finish her high school years in Mt. Edgecumbe, again you know there were a lot of issues, family issues that Viola experienced, and she ended up dying at a very young age while I was in law school. She drank herself to death.

Holly: Why did I think it was a plane crash?

Ella: That was Kay Koweluk. Kay was one of the students, one of the five that I was in the Upward Bound program (7:00) and who attended Trinity College on the east coast after graduating from Kailua High School on the windward side of the island. Kay I think had majored in, I can't remember what she majored in whether it was economics or- but she did come back to Anchorage and we actually worked together for the community enterprise development corporation which was supposed to help some of these different areas and villages with business development. Julian Morgan was our boss, he was a very good boss, he ended up marrying a Yupik woman. But Kay was on a plane to attend a conference in the Bering Straits area, and she was one of eight, my daughter Christina was only 4 months old at the time (8:00). And the pilot was flying low, it was cloudy, and flew right into a mountain, and there were no survivors. That was a very difficult situation for me because Kay was educated and we would get together and talk, we had some things in common, so that was a loss. It was a loss I think for the Native community up in Anchorage when this happened. That was I believe in 1980, July 12, 1980 when she passed.

Holly: Did you have uniforms at the boarding school?

Ella: No, we didn't have uniforms. In fact, a lot of kids who did travel out of the villages didn't have suitcases, so some (9:00) of them had gunnysacks. And they would carry (both laugh) and they would carry their clothes in gunnysacks. I don't know if people know about that, that was the poverty of Alaska. Those who-

Holly: Did you have a gunnysack? Or did you have a suitcase?

Ella: I think by the grace of god I may have had a suitcase, but I can't remember (laughs).

Holly: Okay, um how often did you get to go home? Like just the holidays or did, summer break, Christmas break, spring break, or did you ever get to go home from the boarding school?

Ella: Well, while we were in the boarding school, we stayed there the entire nine months.

Holly: How did you get there?

Ella: We flew by plane, because in order to get into Unalakleet you still have to fly into that place there's no roads (10:00) to Unalakleet. The shoreline is not as deep. You know, years ago, when I was growing up, when Unalakleet was a territory, in order for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the federal government to get into the supplies into villages, they would use the North Star, which I think is an old ice breaker, I'm not sure. But, that's how they got supplies into the villages using the North Star.

Holly: A ship?

Ella: It was a huge ship, yes. (Pause) And other than that it was by flying in, and that's still the case to this day.

Holly: How did you stay in touch with your friends in the village? Did you write letters to each other when you were at school?

Ella: Yes, that's the only way that we could actually have (11:00) communication with parents or friends, is by writing letters. Because we didn't have access to phones, there were no movies, no tvs, (pause) none of all these other things that kids have today. No ipads. None of that stuff, no texts.

Holly: Did you ever do any kind of job or work while you were attending Mt. Edgecumbe High School to earn money?

Ella: Yes, I told you that I worked for Ms. Powell, got me a job with this elderly white woman who was very nice on the Sitka side and I did a lot of cleaning for her and I did things to help her around her house and made some little extra money. I always bought those doughnuts. It was great to be able to get pop, soda pop back then. (12:00)

Holly: Is that called the outing program when you were working at someone's house? Or was that just- like how many hours per week was that?

Ella: That was only, maybe a few hours. No, it was not an outing program, it was a personal favor that Ms. Powell did to me because most of the kids had to stay on the island. We couldn't really go onto the Sitka side, sunny Sitka by the sea. We never really associated with the white kids. They had nothing to do with us. That was how the State of Alaska was. (pause) But I can tell you that the whites who lived in Unalakleet, the missionaries, they were actually very nice people. But the Air Force (13:00) back then they were told, part of the military policy was to leave the Natives. Although they did hire people, Native men who were mistreated on that Air Force site by one of the majors. I know because my dad worked up there. My dad is a mixed, half Iñupiaq and half white. And this one particular major, I don't know what his name is, had my dad and all these Native men stand in front of him for hours until they peed in their pants or

soiled their pants and he wouldn't let them go to the bathroom. It was just an extreme abuse of authority on a part of this man.

Holly: Was this in the 50s?

Ella: I believe so. That's when I was a child. (14:00) That was part of the DEW Line.

Holly: Well, I guess, um, that's- you've covered a lot of stories today, so thank you for sitting here and sharing some of these stories. Are there any last memories or reflections that you want to share about attending the Native boarding school, and maybe transitions, and if not, do you have any final reflections or words of wisdom for the younger generation today?

Ella: For the younger Native generation, and I've spoken to a lot of different times in my life, to Native kids, even to some white kids, I've always told, especially Native kids, (15:00) not to let what their very own tribe, sometimes Bob Willard, he was a Tlingit from Southeast, told me, Native people can be their own worst enemies. So, for those kids who aspire to do things, don't let what close friends or relatives, you know try to bring you down by saying, you know, "That's so white of you." Or make other comments to make you feel bad. That's usually a form of manipulation or jealousy, and you need to see it for what it is and rise above it and do the very best that you can to pursue your own dreams or destiny that the lord has in place for you. Thank you.

Holly: Thanks, I'll turn this off. (End Part 2 at 16:00).

After the interview with the camera off, mom spoke about the graves of Native kids at Carlisle when she went to law school there.