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Elsie Casina Adams
ELSIE CASINA ADAMS
GRANDDAUGHTER OF PT. HOPE, ALASKA
SETTLER, JOSEPH FERREIRA

Interviews conducted by
Don Warrin
in 2005

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Elsie Casina Adams

Interview History—Elsie Casina Adams

On August 3, 2005, I met with Elsie Adams at her home in Anchorage, Alaska. Also present was her niece, Carolyn Harris. Mrs. Adams is the granddaughter of Joseph Ferreira, who immigrated from the Cape Verde Islands to Massachusetts at an early age and later became a whaler. His father was apparently from the Azores, and his mother was Cape Verdean. Ferreira came to the North Slope of Alaska at the end of the nineteenth century, settling down as a shore whaler and marrying an Inupiat woman. Mrs. Adams's contacts with her grandfather were limited, but she related what she remembered of him. Much of the interview concerns her growing up in the native environment of Arctic Alaska.

Interview #1: August 3, 2005

00:00:13

Warrin: Could you tell me, first of all, your full name?

00:00:20

Adams: Elsie Casina Adams. My maiden name was Greene.

00:00:28

Warrin: G-R-E-E-N-E? Elsie, and your middle name?

00:00:39

Adams: Casina.

00:00:41

Warrin: How do you spell that?

00:00:42

Adams: C-A-S-I-N-A.

00:00:49

Warrin: Casina. Where were you born?

00:00:55

Adams: I was born at Sisaulik, our camp, fall time, September 27, 1919.

00:01:04

Warrin: 1919.

00:01:06

Adams: Yes, right across the Kotzebue sound. That's where I was born.

00:01:11

Warrin: When you say a camp, what do you mean by a camp?

00:01:16

Adams: They always do the camping, trying to get the game or anything to put away for the winter. And fishing, seal hunting, anything they can hunt. In the ocean, too. And they always try to gather all that and put away in what we call those pokes, seal pokes [a bag or sack] they call them. I don't know what they are in English. We don't have any name for them.

00:02:06

Warrin: Could you describe what a poke is?

00:02:09

Adams: They do that especially in the spring time...springtime. Papa like to do some hunting along the coast. We go to our camping ground in Sisaulik to do the fishing and berry picking. Our food that we hunt and gather is stored for the winter. After camping in Sisaulik our family relocate to our home in the country for the winter.

00:02:49

Warrin: Keep going, that's fine.

00:02:49

Adams: When I was growing up, we didn't have much food...you had to live in the country to try to make a living – meaning...to hunt wild life...for example, snare rabbits and ptarmigans.

00:03:10

Warrin: That's right.

00:03:10

Adams: So us older children didn't have much schooling. We spent so much out in the country.

00:03:21

Warrin: Were there schools there?

00:03:24

Adams: Yes, there was a school in Kotzebue. I was eight years old when I go to school. And I was the oldest from Mama's family?

00:03:36

Warrin: But because the family was moving around a lot, it was hard to go to school?

00:03:42

Adams: Yes, we were always moving.

00:03:43

Warrin: When you did go to school, did you have to stay with relatives in your family when you stayed out?

00:03:49

Adams: Yes, and I don't stay away too long. Right after Christmas I liked to follow my family and go home.

00:04:01

Warrin: What were the months that you went to school?

00:04:03

Adams: Huh?

00:04:05

Warrin: What were the months of the year that you went to school?

00:04:08

Adams: ... after it freezes up, October somewhere around there.

00:04:17

Warrin: And then school would be over in December?

00:04:21

Adams: No, my folks will be coming across to spend the Christmas 'cause there's always programs and treats. Goodies, candy, Christmas gifts. And they have a vacation til the end of December. The children then go back to school in January. But I don't like to be left behind. I have to follow my folks to go home with them.

00:04:56

Warrin: Right, how many years did you go to school?

00:04:59

Adams: I just can't remember, 'cause I'm always in school just part time; and then the only I can remember is one year, that was the last time I even was too old to go to school. I didn't go to school much. I go up to fourth and part of fifth grade, 'cause we never have a house in Kotzebue. Papa was always taking us out in the country and trying to make living. He have to do the hunting, like foxes and things to trade in some food from the stores. That's what they always do.

00:06:00

Warrin: Was fox hunting, was that the main occupation that he had? For fox skins?

00:06:07

Adams: What's that?

00:06:08

Warrin: Was that the main occupation, was that the main work that he did, was going and getting fox skins?

00:06:14

Adams: Yes, and in the winter time til the season is over for hunting, and then in spring time, we always go down the coast to do the hunting for—seal hunting, bearded seals, the *ugruk*, we called them *ugruk*—bearded seals. You have to excuse me, I got no teeth, that's why I'm talking like that.

00:06:52

Warrin: No, this is fine.

00:06:58

Adams: That's the time they make these pokes—seal pokes we call them. It's a seal, the women all have to take all that blubber off, and as long as you can reach, they have a little knife—*ulu*, they call them—and after they do all that, Mom used to take all the blubber off. I learned to do that, even me, I used to do that. And then you blow air in it, from your mouth [laughs]... blow it in. And then when there's little holes, then you can tell, then you sew those and make sure it won't leak. And after they do that, rub it with ashes from the campfire.

Harris:

The residue from the fire, the black stuff?

- Adams: No. it's the brown stuff. When the woods are all burned. Leave ashes. Oh, yeah. You rub the skin with ashes, the whole skin and dry it up, and you put bearded seal meat. And then the meat is dried. Add them to the rendered blubber (blubber from the bearded seal) inside the poke.
- 00:09:14
Warrin: Through the mouth?
- 00:09:15
Adams: Yes, uh huh. You have to keep the seal poke mouth open in order to put the blubber inside the poke to render and add cut-up dried meat after.
- 00:09:26
Warrin: Oh, I see. O.K.
- 00:09:31
Adams: And they put the dried stuff in there, like meat, dried fish and whatnot.
- 00:09:33
Warrin: Inside?
- 00:09:35
Adams: Uh huh, yes. And all kept real good, and they put the pokes in a cool place. Yes, store them inside the poke. Some people build a dugout storage on the ground, about four feet deep. Build door on top and we call them *Sig luaq* – Eskimo cache.
- 00:09:58
Warrin: What was a typical meal that you would have? What was some of the food that you ate when you were in camp?
- 00:10:08
Adams: Most of my life we eat our own kind of food, what we gathered. Our people know what to pick and hunt during the summer when the berries grow. We have the salmon berries, blackberries, cranberries, blueberries, and what sour docks, what they always put away and they know how to do them. The women know how to do that. And they always put them into those sealskin pokes what they make. They kept real good inside.
- 00:10:58
Warrin: How long would they keep?
- 00:11:00
Adams: They will keep til one year, til springtime. All year round.
- 00:11:09
Warrin: What did you children do for play?
- 00:11:17
Adams: Oh, we hardly have any toys, I remember that any little paper you find, to me they are so precious to us [laughs]. So what we always do is cut out those little

papers and make a little doll—make it look like a doll—and make them sit, and play around with them like they’re living in a home. That’s the kind we play with. And in the winter we put out snares to catch wild rabbits for food and us children save the jack rabbit jaw for play sled.... Oh yes, I have one over here just for show.

Warrin: Oh yeah?

Adams: Uh huh, they’re good to eat, they are. And there’s a caribou jaw. And we use those jaws for toys, play sled. And use rabbits feet for play dogs and make little harness, and when we pull them through the snow the sled make the trail just like real sled. That’s what we used to play with, and if you had a little piece of square cloth, you fold it in half and tie it little above half with string... that’s our doll. [To Harris] You remember that?

00:13:27

Warrin: So everything was just from things you had around, and you made things yourself?

00:13:32

Adams: Yes.

00:13:33

Warrin: Yes. [Adams laughs] What were the names of your parents?

00:13:40

Adams: My parents... my father was Andrew Greene.

00:13:50

Warrin: And your mother?

00:13:52

Adams: Maggie Ferreira Greene.

00:14:07

Warrin: And what would your mother do during the day, say while your father was out hunting? What were some things that your mother would do?

00:14:16

Adams: She took care of us, she do the sewing. We never have anything store-bought, all ready made—what you call ready to wear. Things like mukluks, parkas and that’s what Mom, Mother’s always doing, sewing. And we never have these real bright gasoline lamps. We only had these little lanterns, but.... Yeah, we do have lanterns, but the ones that have a glass. I don’t know what to call them in English.

00:15:05

Warrin: Chimneys.

00:15:08

Adams:

Yes, that kind. Uh huh, that's what she used even to sew, making our mukluks, making our parkas, what we can wear. Even she had... my father bought her a sewing machine, hand-machine, I mean that you could do it by hand. And she make our clothes out of cloth that she made little dresses. We never wear... pants those days [laughs].

00:15:46

Warrin:

Yes.

00:15:50

Adams:

Then Papa had to hunt foxes, and when he trade those furs, he always get those materials and things to make and we have long stockings, cotton kind, that's what he had to buy.

00:16:17

Warrin:

Could you talk about your grandparents? How many of your grandparents did you know?

00:16:25

Adams:

I don't know my grandfather from my dad's side. I don't know him. Both of them I don't know, not even my grandmother. She died after I was born. So I don't know them that much.

00:16:50

Warrin:

Did you hear talk about, did people talk about your grandfather Ferreira?

00:17:03

Adams:

Yes, I can tell you about my Mom's side. She's from Point Hope. My father is on this side, Kotzebue, somewhere in the area. And then when my Mom, I mean Grandpa Joe, he stays home the way my Mom used to say, but her mother always do the dog teaming, hunting, and things like that. I guess that's how she died between Kivalena and Point Hope, somewhere in that area. She must have had a heart attack, that's what I always think of... they found her.

00:17:59

Warrin:

How old was she?

00:18:02

Adams:

I wouldn't know.

00:18:03

Warrin:

So Ferreira didn't go out hunting?

Adams:

I don't know... he always do the whaling.

Warrin:

He did the whaling, yes.

Adams:

I wouldn't know how he was making a living. I only knew my first cousin from Mama's oldest sister. Her daughter, my first cousin, she was telling

me—Not her, her husband, telling me about the little bit, about Joe, my grandpa. He said he built the Episcopal church there.

00:18:57

Warrin: In Point Hope?

00:18:58

Adams: Yes, in Point Hope, the first church. And then he do the hunting, I mean whaling... One time he told me about the whaling There was a whale out there, somebody [had] to pick it up, but then it was so windy and rough nobody can get out there and get back, and he's the one that went out and got back with it.

Warrin: And got the whale.

Adams: Yeah, that's the story of that man, Frankson, told me. I've forgotten his first name. My first cousin's husband. I should know him. I'm sure beginning to forget so much—getting old [laughs]. Ah yes, I remember, Alex Frankson.

00:20:04

Warrin: That was a long time ago. So did he have a reputation of being a brave man?

Adams: Yeah.

Warrin: Do you remember any other stories about your grandfather Joe?

00:20:15

Adams: Not that much, only thing was about him. I mean, I knew him. I was just telling her [Harris], after Mom knew Papa, she moved on this side in Kotzebue, in that area. And when I was born after our grandma died—no, that was before. I remember both of them. They went to see my mother in Kotzebue. I don't know how old I was. I only remembered, just only the time when I was so scared of my grandpa. I see them sleeping on the floor in the house that we were staying—my mother's friend's house we were staying in Kotzebue; and I was so scared of him I go around, and that's the only time I remembered. I didn't even know how old I was.

00:21:31

Warrin: But this is your grandfather Joe and his wife?

00:21:32

Adams: Yes, that was the first time I saw my grandparents. Second time, after my grandma died, my grandpa came with this son Franklin to visit my Mom and family. We were camping at Sisaulik across from Kozebue where lots of people do the camping during the summer: fishing, berry picking, and other things. I remembered playing with Franklin. He was older than I am, but I don't remember how old I was, and that's the only one time I saw him before he died. If you want to hear their story how they died. I can tell you what little I know. The lady that I worked with told me about them. She's from Point

Hope and married a man from Noatak (village). Her name Marie Stalker. This is how she told me. My grandpa (Joe) and his son Franklin were on their way maybe go visit Mom again. She said her parents and family were camping this side of Point Hope around the coast towards Sisaulik way. Them two were traveling with the dogteam and stopped day or two and stayed with the family. And while they were there, Marie's mother sew the holes and patched Grandpa's mukluks. Marie said her father try to warn him (grandpa Joe) it was too early to travel. The ocean was still open and rivers that come out to the ocean, the mouths are still dangerous. So, he told him to try cross the river more in[land] where the ice is more thick (because he want to keep going) and that's where someone found them [at the] mouth of the river. They come out from the water alright, but froze to death. Grandpa got inside the sleeping bag alright, but died, and Franklin died sitting down. Sad alright to hear them died that way, but it happened.

00:25:58

Warrin: Is that because they fell in the water?

00:26:03

Adams: Yeah.

Warrin: And it must have been very cold.

Adams: Yes, it sure must have been cold because it's already freezing time, and when it's around October that's the time it's always getting cold. But the ocean don't freeze up right away.

00:26:22

Warrin: What time, what month of the year was this?

00:26:28

Adams: I don't know. I wouldn't know.

Warrin: Do you know what year?

Adams: No, she didn't tell me what year. I never heard.

00:26:29

Warrin: Yes, but this was how your grandfather Joe and your uncle Franklin died.

Adams: Yes.

Warrin: That's sad.

00:26:44

Adams: Yes. I remember, my mother had a picture of her dad and the brother, Franklin. He was a good-looking man, like... I have a picture of the youngest one, too. His name Leo. You'll see them later.

00:27:09

Warrin: O.K., good. Evidently he, Joe Ferreira, arrived in 1891, and had you heard any stories about how he got to Alaska?

Adams:

I only heard from the people that he was one of the whalers crossing from Massachusetts. And landed somewhere in Point Hope, that's the only thing I hear from the people when they talk about him.

00:27:52

Warrin: Did anybody talk about where he was from in Portugal?

00:27:59

Adams: I have it written down, the place where my great-grandparents had their own house and living. In Bedford, Road house.

00:28:15

Warrin: New Bedford?

00:28:17

Adams: I have their place written down in my notebook. I forgot to get them out and don't know where they are.

00:28:28

Warrin: Maybe later you'll have some time, or I can come by tomorrow.

Adams:

Yeah, O.K.

Warrin:

Evidently he arrived in the United States when he was only six or seven years old. And he came from... his parents came... His mother was born in Cape Verde, off the coast of Africa—a Portuguese island. And then... I don't know where his father was from, it's hard to read on the census, but I don't think he was from Cape Verde—maybe the Azores.

00:29:03

Adams: Two of my aunts told me little, 'cause I'm always trying to find out about my mother's side. That time when they told me, I should have asked Nellie. Nellie knew more about her parents, but one of them, the youngest one, Florence, told me she seen her grandmother's picture. And one of my sisters, she have a face just like their grandmother in her picture.

00:30:02

Warrin: Really?

00:30:04

Adams: Uh huh, she's got a long face, that's what she told me...and their grandpa was a Portuguese. And then my other aunt told me the opposite, so I don't know which is right. Other sister Mary was the one she told me her grandma was a Portuguese. No, no, I get mixed up. The youngest one, Florence, told me my sister looked like her grandma in the picture. Mary was the one said their dad

was French, but the younger one was the one said their grandmother is from the French side.

00:31:27

Warrin: Well, I'll...

00:31:28

Adams: Is that true?

00:31:28

Warrin: No.

00:31:29

Adams: O.K., that's what the sisters were telling me...now I'm glad to find out the truth, where my grandparents were from, thank you.

00:31:34

Warrin: I'll show you after we finish talking. I have some census information, and I can share with both of you. And I brought a couple of things of interest to you. Do you know if Joe Ferreira, did he speak any Inupiaq?

00:32:01

Adams: I don't know.

00:32:04

Warrin: Your family spoke, I guess.

00:32:10

Adams: Yes they do and Grandmother.

00:32:13

Warrin: What language did you speak when you were growing up?

00:32:15

Adams: Inupiaq, that's Eskimo. [Laughs] All my life. My first time I go to school, I was eight years old. I didn't even know how to ask the teacher when I want to go bathroom, I've forgotten what signal we used for the girls, to raise three fingers and the boys maybe two fingers at that time. The school it was so quiet you could hear any little noise!

00:32:57

Warrin: The lessons were in English then in school?

00:33:01

Adams: Yes, I didn't know how to speak English, nothing.

00:33:03

Warrin: Yes. Did any Portuguese words come down through the family? Or any influence at all from him?

00:33:15

Adams: Not that I know of.

00:33:15

Warrin: And how many children did Joe Ferreira and his wife have?

00:33:23

Adams: Tilly is the oldest, mama is next...third, I don't know which one is next, Mamie or Nellie. Mamie was adopted [by] our grandma's sister (Aliikkak). I don't know if she have any English name, she was married to a white guy, they had two sons. I got their names written in that notebook, the father took his family and moved to Seattle. One time I check the area for the family's name but them two never find the name. Then Mary, and Florence is the youngest from the women. Two boys, Franklin and Leo.

00:34:59

Warrin: I imagine they're all deceased now?

00:35:02

Adams: Yes.

00:35:02

Warrin: Because that was quite awhile ago. Do you know how as children, being half European and half native, how did that affect their life? Were there many other children like that?

00:35:25

Adams: We're all rich now [laughs]. O.K., I guess ever since I could remember it has been happening.

00:35:26

Warrin: How does that happen?

00:35:36

Adams: In my family were eight girls—No, seven girls, and only one boy. I got married to a full native, Eskimo, and my next sister she was married to a full Eskimo too, alright; but they got divorced. And now she's got three sons and they're all half native, half white. Their fathers are all white [laughs]. One of them was going to come over, but he had a meeting at two o'clock. She [Harris] was going to be in touch with him. He works for our NANA corporation back home, in that area. And he comes down here all the time and works. His wife is the president [of NANA]. She's mixed, her father is half white and Inupiaq, her mother full Inupiaq.

00:37:10

Warrin: Did you have, when you were little, were there shamans there?

00:37:17

Adams: Not in my time. I don't know them.

00:37:22

Warrin: Oh, O.K. That was dying out, perhaps.

00:37:26

Adams: I just knew a little bit of stories about them, from the woman that used to tell me, older than me, she was close to me. And when the first missionaries came to that area, Kotzebue – there were some others before them, their names were Robert and Carrie Sams. I knew them real well. I was already a young lady. When they came back the second time, my father went to school, the first time when they came up to Kotzebue and go to the second grade.

Warrin: He learned quickly.

Adams: He learned a lot, he likes to read. He talks pretty good English too. He don't talk at all sometime, but when he have to talk to his grandchildren or anyone that speaks English, he's got good English. Those are the missionaries that teach at the school.

00:38:46

Warrin: Yes, the...

00:38:48

Adams: If you want to know about the shaman, I know just a very little from the lady that told me. Right from Kotzebue, across in the mountains, they call that Nipaaqtugtuuk. Right across there you could see it from Kotzebue. You go there, you'll see the big mountain right across, a little bit this way. That's where the people used to live, too.

Warrin: I see.

Adams: Uh huh. And it was Mary Curtis used to tell me, Lena her sister, they used to live right there in that mountain, below it somewhere in that area, people used to live. And the people from Kotzebue they go over there and watch the Eskimo dancers, and then those two couple, the missionaries used to go there and watch them dance. Then one time they were watching a man who was doing the dancing, and there was a [piece of] wood...some, I don't know what kind, had a little hole I think in the middle and while them two were watching, that man who was doing the dancing, he go through that tiny hole. He was a Shaman. Since then those missionaries don't go there to watch anymore because they think it's not right they're doing it with a shaman, all that stuff. You know, that is devilry, something like that, so that's the story I heard. I know Lena, and her sister talks about it too, how they used to do all that. I've heard some little stories that same lady told me. Those two couples, Sams, when they first go to Kotzebue they can't understand anyone when they try to talk to them. And below [the] main town, further down the beach some, there's always some driftwood that's coming out of the Noatak River. And them two were going to go after some wood for their stove for burning. No oil. They have to have wood... they have a little dory and his wife was inside the dory and her husband was pulling it with a rope, 'cause his wife has to steer it to make it stay on the water. That how we used to do it, pulling the

boat, and they were going there the same way, and what the people living in those, like Indians always use for tent.

Harris: Tepee.

00:42:36

Warrin: Tepee.

00:42:36

Adams: Yes, that's what the people use, but with caribou skins, though. People living in tepees. And they had a net out using a pulley connected to anchor, put the rope through it and pull [it] in to set net.

00:43:08

Warrin: A pulley?

00:43:10

Adams: Yeah. With a rope and they would always set, put their anchor out there somehow and pull the net out like that—pull it from that side. They had that kind of net out, and the people there, the ones that lived there, came over to them and made that man get in the dory too, and pushed them out. They must have been motioning, 'cause they wouldn't know what to do. They just go around the float, and landed back on other side. And surely they get some wood from down there. Here they had a person that was sick in that... whatever you call that Indian...

Harris: Tepee.

Adams: Oh, tepee. Anyway, that's the kind of thing they used to have for tent, made with the caribou skin. The reason them two had to go around the net. So that person wouldn't die, that's how superstition they were. If they crossed those ropes, the people think that man would die. That's why they make them go out [laughs]. They couldn't understand why they make them do that. Those two couple (Sams) learned how to talk our dialect.

Warrin: Oh yeah?

Adams: Yeah, and she teaches the bible.

Warrin: This was the missionary wife?

Adams: Yes.

00:45:08

Warrin: What religion were they? What...

00:45:15

Adams: We called them Friends Church... Friends.

00:45:24
Warrin: The Friends, the Quakers.

00:45:26
Adams: Quakers, yes.

00:45:27
Warrin: Right. The Quakers were in Kotzebue. And in Point Hope, the Episcopalians.

00:45:34
Adams: But they were always sharing.

00:45:38
Warrin: They were all Protestants, yes. Were there other taboos that you knew about?

00:45:48
Adams: Huh?

00:45:48
Warrin: Other taboos? You know, taboo things, things like crossing the rope and the danger of that?

00:45:59
Adams: Oh, that's the only thing that I knew I heard about [laughs].

00:46:03
Warrin: Oh, O.K. Good, I think we've covered a lot of material. Is there anything that you can think of that I didn't ask you?

00:46:17
Adams: Oh, I don't know, I might think later. I know I always asked my aunts about Mama's side, 'cause you know some of the people think they were black people. We came from the Toksibuk [African descent].

Adams: I always wanted to really find out, because our grandpa don't look that way, black all the way.

00:47:01
Warrin: How did he look? Could you describe him?

00:47:06
Adams: He's got the skin just like us.

00:47:12
Warrin: Like the Eskimos?

00:47:13
Adams: Yeah. In the picture.

00:47:16
Warrin: And his hair? People sometimes talk about the Portuguese having curly hair.

00:47:27

Adams: My mother have natural wave, some of my sisters, curls. My only brother, he's got natural waves. And his kids curly, some of them really have a curly hair.

Harris: Natural black, curly hair.

Adams: Yeah, curly hair. My aunt's children, some of them have curly hair. I always say, "How come my hair is straight." Don't like to work good even when I get perm [laughs] I have straight hair.

00:48:11

Warrin: Well, wonderful. Thank you very much. And we'll...

Adams: You'll be here yet tomorrow?

Warrin: Yes, I'll be here til the end of the week. I leave on Saturday.

Adams: Oh, O.K. then.

[End of Interview]