

**BORN:**

August 4, 1918

BIRTHPLACE:

Near Fort McPherson

PARENTS:

Peter Vittrekwa (also known as Peter Neyando) and Mary Shananzhaa

GWICH'IN:

Teetl'it Gwich'in

MARRIED:

Peter Alexie in July 1941 in Aklavik (d); William Elias in Fort McPherson

CHILDREN:

Effie, Abe, Louisa, Rosie (adopted)

Although Lydia never attended school, Lydia learned by listening to other's teachings and by watching. She worked hard to learn traditional skills herself and is very proud that she can sew well and tan hides.

After Lydia and Peter were married, they travelled up the Peel River where they set up a bush camp. They lived on the land all the time. "I think those were the happiest years of my life because I did not wish for anything," says Lydia. There was lots of moose to hunt in the winter and lots of fish to cut and dry in the summer. From March to June they would go muskrat hunting and then, in July, visit Aklavik. In August they would return to their bush camp and stay there until the following March.

After Peter passed away, Lydia spent many years working hard so she could raise her children. She worked at the hostel in Fort McPherson, at the Hudson's Bay Company and for the RCMP.

For Lydia, her language is very important and she hopes that in the future, young people will speak their native language again. "My first husband and I spoke our language and so did our children. Only our native language was spoken in our home.

Maybe if our young people visit the elders, if they listen well, they could learn about the past stories, their history, their culture. We should be speaking to them in our language so someday they will come to understand their culture and their language."

Lydia Elias LYDIA (VITREKWA/VANELTSI/ NEYANDO) ALEXIE/ELIAS

As a child, Lydia was raised by her mother's sister, Annie Vaneltsi and her husband William Vaneltsi. "All the way up almost to Mayo and half way to Dawson, all that country people travelled in those days.

My aunt went everywhere these people travelled. They never travelled without me. Just like a little puppy, I followed," recalls Lydia. "I know travelling and living out on the land, I know the land

where we lived and I remember it," she adds.

Working hard was something Lydia learned early in her life. Her chores included doing all the outside work such as cutting wood, packing it home and making sure it was piled by the door.

Lydia remembers that a large part of everyday was spent cutting wood.