

Introducing Dr. Ted Mala and a new column

By Ted Mala, MD

Tundra Times

I was surprised and excited when General Manager George Gardner asked me to write a bi-weekly column for the Tundra Times. What kind of a column would it be? Would it just be about health and medical things? I hoped not.

The Tundra Times is a very special newspaper for me. I remember in the seventies when I was a medical student living in University of Alaska's Bartlett Hall in Fairbanks doing an externship through Alaska Federation of Natives' (AFN's) Health Careers Program, how I would spend my free time learning, talking, and watching Howard Rock work for many hours on his newspaper.

I learned that this was not an ordinary newspaper. Where else would the editor compose, write, edit and set his own copy? As we would have lunch at Tommy's Elbow Room, he would point out that his paper was important to

bringing out news about the Alaska Native Community that otherwise would not get printed, as well as a way to educate those people Outside as to what our backgrounds and needs are all about.

As far as I know, the Tundra Times has never had a regular health and science column. So why start now? Do we really need one? I feel that we do, as long as it is written with the needs of our Alaska Native Community at heart. I would like it to be something that you will normally not find in other larger publications.

Together we will look at a number of exciting events happening around us. Some of them will include the upcoming Circumpolar Health Conference in May of 1984; the development of the US National Arctic Health Science Policy; the beginning of a grant to put Alaska Natives through the University of Alaska's Science Programs; traditional circumpolar and Native Medicine;

a look at how different health problems affect our lives; and many other topics of interest.

To all of this I will add some salt and pepper in the form of my own thoughts, will shake them all together and let them out right here in this column.

Part of the fun in this is to have your thoughts and suggestions as well as questions at things you think we should look at. One week you might want to pat me on the back and shake my hand and the next you might want to tell me off. That's what I want to hear.

Your ideas, suggestions, when you agree and when you don't. The best way is to write to me here in care of the Tundra Times. Be sure to tell me if you do not want your name or letter printed.

Getting back to Fairbanks and the Fairbanks Native Clinic where I studied under Dr. Bill James and Dr. Wayne Myers of the WAMI Medical Program, I also had a chance

to work with Claude Demientieff, then the Director of the Tanana Chiefs Health Authority.

Those were the days when AFN had control of many centralized non-profit activities and the health corporations were just starting to flex their newly found muscles. The Tundra Times was in Fairbanks, along with the pipeline construction workers. History was in the making.

Alongside of all of these political and important giants came myself, a not very well-known student who was the son of an Eskimo father from Candle, Alaska and a Russian mother from Kazan, Russia.

But that was enough in Alaska, where most of us have relatives and friends all over the state. If no one had ever heard of you, someone at least knew your parents. And so it turned out that Howard Rock knew my dad well when he was at Point Hope and the rest is history.

Not only did he put my

name in headlines reading "Ted Mala to be a Doctor. Son of Famed Eskimo Movie Star to be an M.D. Practitioner" but also let me write several editorial columns entitled "Other Voices: Viewpoint."

Those days have long past but people continue to remind me of them to this day. There are so many of you reading this that I hope I will be able to meet.

It is a special honor to be allowed to have this column in Howard's paper to share with you. It has meant much to me when people say "here is one of our own (Alaska Native) doctors. So many have helped me with their thoughts, hopes, prayers and trust. The time has come for me to give back some of that to our Native People now through this column.

And so begins a new chapter in my life. That of a columnist. With your help and encouragement we will grow and learn together. See you here in two weeks.