

Jerue files bitter Iditarod protest

By Bill Hess
Tundra Times

When Beverly Jerue left the starting line of the Iditarod, the excited smile on her face said it all; she expected to have a great time on the 1,100 mile trail. It did not work out that way. In McGrath, Jerue pulled out of the race, charging that the "spirit of Alaska" had been driven from the event by intense competition, and alleging that she had endured racism to which race officials expressed indifference.

The problems began for the Native musher, originally from Anvik but now living at Stuck-again Heights just outside of Anchorage, in the Rainy Pass area, some 10 miles from Rohn River. As Jerue tells it, she was traveling with her friend, Jan Masek, when she came to a ditch some six to eight feet deep. The ditch was spanned by a bridge made of three logs, and was empty of water.

Her lead dog crossed the bridge, and then stopped, unable to continue because a musher from New York by the name of Bob Bright had set up camp in the middle of the trail and was feeding himself and his dogs, Jerue said. This, she said, caused her dogs to fall off the bridge and resulted in her lead dog being hurt badly enough that she soon had to pull it from the race.

Masek helped her untangle the dogs, Jerue said, but Brite did nothing. Upon questioning Bright said he had fallen in the water and had to stop, although Jerue and Masek both argue that there was no water there to fall into. Jerue said

she told Bright that he could have warned her he was there, and at that point, he became angry.

"He started cussing," Jerue charged, "and calling me dirty names. He said he didn't have to warn no squaw!" Some of the names which Jerue and Masek said Bright called her are unprintable in a paper such as this. The dirtiest expletives were followed with the word "Indian," they said.

When Masek entered the conversation, they said Brite moved at him menacingly with some sort of object in his hand, whereon Masek ran back up to his sled and grabbed a snowshoe before Bright backed off.

The two mushers were delayed for nearly an hour, they said. Both stated that there was room off the trail for Bright to have taken his dogs if he needed to set up a camp.

In Rohn River, both Jerue and Masek claimed to have filed a protest against Bright's camping in the trail, which is strictly illegal, Jerue said, and of his use of foul language and racist comments directed at Jerue. Both signed each other's forms, which had been given to them by Sandy Williams, Jerue said.

In Nicolai, Masek got into a conversation with race marshal Bobby Lee about his protest. No mention was being made by Lee of Jerue's. "I asked him 'where's mine?' Jerue said. "'You don't have one!' he told me!" After that, Jerue charged that Lee would not talk to her or answer any of her questions. Whatever inquiries she presented him with were not answered, Jerue said.

When she asked to fill out another form, Lee said nothing. Masek backs up Jerue's allegations. There was another judge on hand, John Woods, who Jerue said also gave her the silent treatment, and whom she believes to be prejudiced against Alaska Natives.

The two mushed on to McGrath. There, Jerue said, she decided to withdraw from the race in protest of the bad treatment she felt she had received. "The dogs were just anxious to go," Jerue said. "I felt really good too, ready to keep going. But I had to take a stand."

Jerue's troubles did not end when she left McGrath. She could not bring her dogs with her, and so she left \$100 plus five bags of dogfood for the few days until they could be returned to her, Jerue said. "When I got them back some of them looked real sad," Jerue charged. "Real hungry,

like they hadn't been fed."

Another musher had had trouble with his sled, and, without contacting her, Jerue said the Iditarod Trail Committee okayed his use of her sled. "He is a big man!" Jerue exclaimed. "And I am small. That sled was made especially for me."

When she got the sled back, the runners had been damaged — damage which Jerue claimed had not happened when she withdrew from the race. Worse yet, she charges, her sled bag and much of its contents were also missing. At this writing, Jerue claimed not to have seen them.

Jerue was also unhappy with reports that she and Masek had scratched. "I didn't scratch," she argued. "I withdrew in protest!" By her and Masek's interpretation of the rules, they can still continue on and finish this race, even if

they wait until next year to do so.

In Anchorage, Jerue complained to race president Bob Sept and is still awaiting final word from him. The Tundra Times made five phone calls in an attempt to contact Sept and was told he would call back. Brite's bid at the Iditarod ended when some of his dogs were killed by a snowmachine.

Jerue and Masek charge that the race has become too competitive; that high prize money and tremendous attention have left the mid runners out in the cold. (Jerue withdrew. "If there was no money in Nome, it would be better," Masek argued. "More mushers would run." This was Masek's fourth year in the Iditarod. Jerue was a rookie.

Comments from other mushers and race officials will be printed as they become available to the Tundra Times.



PHOTO BY BILL HESS

Beverly Jerue shares a happy moment with one of the sled dogs owned by her and Jan Masek. Jerue was not so happy with this year's Iditarod Sled Dog Race.