



PARTY AT ANAKTUVUK — A Valentine's Day party at Anaktuvuk's village school. Children's Cache Aide, Louisa Morry, helps schoolteachers,

Mike, and Pat De Marco, seated, arrange the room for the day's festivities.

— Photo by LAEL MORGAN

## Bush Teachers' Trials Tribulations—

### *Anaktuvuk School Stoves Blow up at 50 Below*

By LAEL MORGAN

ANAKTUVUK PASS—It was 1:30 a.m. at 50° below zero when the stove blew up in the living quarters of the school this winter. Teacher Mike De Marco fought his way to the kitchen and found the fire extinguisher on a wall behind the flames while his wife, Pat, opened all the windows.

In about fifteen minutes the fire was out and the sooty De Marcos began repairs and clean-up with room temperatures below zero.

By 5:00 a.m. they had the job done and went back to bed. An hour later a guest, John Nowak of the Anchorage Weather Bureau, who had been sleeping in the school, woke them up to report the stove in the classroom had blown up.

The second fire and clean-up operation was as tough as the first and had their company not been sleeping in the school, it probably would have burned.

Running a two-teacher school in an isolated Alaskan village involves a lot more than "readin', writin', and 'rithmetic". The De Marco's fire fighting experience, while not an average day, was not unusual.

Last year in a high wind the roof blew off this same school, forcing the teacher (now moved away) to set up shop in the

village church.

The De Marco's are bush veterans of several years. When they took the job at Anaktuvuk Pass they knew the work it would involve, but the problems they face are many.

The school living quarters are plumbed but nothing works in the winter. The sewer system backed up with the first good

freeze and Mrs. De Marco was forced to bail out the bathroom. (She discovered her roast baster

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# Trials, Tribulations...

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was the best tool for cleaning the corners.)

The school is built on a hill away from the main village and on windy nights when the ice is bare, the De Marco's sometimes have to crawl home on their hands and knees.

Mike is also in charge of maintaining the school light plant which can be quite a responsibility in the winter above the Arctic Circle. If a part gives out he must wait for delivery by the twice weekly mail plane which can't fly in bad weather.

Often, when the part comes, it's the wrong one because the home office of State Operated Schools have a confusing record of the type of machinery installed at the Pass.

As for the teaching job itself, the De Marco's find some of their material as useless as the generator parts they get by mistake.

The Anaktuvuk children speak both English and Inupiat but are fluent in neither. They need special teaching aids. Their teachers know such materials are being developed but finding out where to obtain them isn't easy.

Communications with the State Operated Schools' main office in Anchorage is bad. From correspondence one gets the impression that some staffers there have never seen a bush school or an Eskimo village and believe that what works for Southern California schools should apply to all.

It's difficult for bush teachers to communicate with each other too. When De Marco requested leave to attend a workshop for village teachers in Tanana he

was informed by the Anchorage office he would have to make the trip on his own time and money, which he did.

In addition, there are village problems that need attention. Not many people at Anaktuvuk speak English as a first language and the De Marco's are often called on to help untangle the red tape that materializes when the village deals with outside government agencies.

The teachers believe the villagers should make their own decisions and they try not to meddle, but they want to help where needed and they're needed quite often.

One project they're working on currently is establishment of a junior high school so Anaktuvuk teenagers won't have to travel hundreds or even thousands of miles to continue their education.

The project has been stalled in the Anchorage office for some time but the village of Kivalina successfully sued the state for a similar program and the De Marco's think Anaktuvuk's prospects look good.

And they're hopeful their own teaching program will improve. Teachers of State Operated Schools are planning to go on strike if their demands for better teaching materials are not met and despite the problems of communication, they're well-organized.

The De Marcos plan to keep plugging for improvements and are confident enough in the future so that they're negotiating to buy a sod house in the village and become well established full-time residents.