

Mae Jacobson dies in Kotzebue plane crash

By Stan Jones

Editor's note: On Sept. 10, Mae Jacobson of Kotzebue was killed in a plane crash in the Brooks Range. She was the niece of Tundra Times founder Howard Rock, and the mother of Sandra Shroyer, who chairs the board of the Eskimo, Indian, Aleut Publishing Company, Inc., the corporation that owns and publishes the Tundra Times. Stan Jones, a long-time friend, provided this reminiscence.

Mae Tuzroyluk Jacobson was a tiny, beautiful woman of ceaseless energy and fierce, independent pride.

I met her in 1973, when my wife and I moved to Kotzebue. We became fast friends with Mae and her husband, Jake, a guide, Bush pilot, and the only private dentist in Kotzebue.

Like most people who live in the Arctic, Mae was involved in a daunting number of activities. She ran Arctic Rivers Trading Company, a gift and variety store on Second Street in Kotzebue. She also held an assistant guide's license, helped Jake in their guiding business.

More personally, she ran dogs, loved to pick berries, sew, hunt, fish and travel, and could fry up fresh caribou

quicker and tastier than anyone else I ever knew.

Her Eskimo name was Nunmuk, which, appropriately, translates roughly as "packer" or "carrier." Although she was only five feet tall, she kept up with her six-foot husband on the most grueling scrambles up and down the Brooks Range in pursuit of Dall sheep. Mae calculated that because of the difference in the length of their legs, she had to take two steps for every one of his, pretty much running to stay abreast.

She was born Mae Tuzroyluk on Feb. 23, 1933, in Point Hope, the daughter of Bob and Helen Tuzroyluk.

She attended grade school there, later went to school in White Mountain, and graduated from Mt. Edgecumbe.

In 1955, she married Gene Shroyer of the U.S. Air Force. Their son Martin was born in Troy, Ohio, in 1956 and Sandra was born in Dreux, France in 1958.

Mae returned to Alaska and divorced Gene Shroyer in the early 1960s, living in Fairbanks, then Kotzebue.

She met Jake in 1969, and they were married in 1971. They enjoyed a noisy but loving relationship, which endured

while nearly every other couple in the circle of friends we knew in Kotzebue in the mid-70s has long since split up.

The Jacobsons traveled frequently: to the Orient and Europe on business and to visit friends, to the USSR when Jake presented a dental paper there in 1978, and to Africa on safari last year, where Mae took a leopard, sable antelope, impala, warthog, and several other trophies.

Mae Jacobson's life ended abruptly and violently, as Arctic lives often do, on Sept. 10 of this year.

She had taken a bull caribou on the Kuguruk River north of Kotzebue. As she and Jake loaded the meat into their Supercub, she complained of her head and eyes hurting, but said she wanted to go back to their cabin rather than to the hospital in Kotzebue.

They took off in a strong left crosswind. Jake estimates they were ten to twenty feet in the air, with the left wing low to offset the crosswind, when Mae had a seizure. He heard her make a strange sound, and felt her kick the right rudder.

The pressure on the rudder, coupled with the low altitude,

plunged the Supercub back into the gravel bar, and Mae died of head injuries received in the crash.

Memorial services for Mae were held on Sept. 16 in Kotzebue, and her many friends filled the big Episcopal Church to overflowing.

She is survived by Jake, Sandra, Martin, and three grandchildren, plus her mother Helen Seveck of Fairbanks, brother Seymour Tuzroyluk of Point Hope, and sisters Dorothy Amazzola of Anchorage, Irene Tooyak of Point Hope, and Mary Dirks of Fairbanks.