

'I always carried my copy of *Kashtanka*'

by Arkadi Kudrya
Novosti Press Agency
for the Tundra Times

A new collection of Zoya Nenlyumkina's verse sold out of the bookstores of Chukotka — in the extreme northeast of the USSR bordering on Alaska — in no time in late 1986.

The book, *Where Are You?*, is the fourth collection by Nenlyumkina, who is extremely popular with the local people. Two of her works have been in the Eskimo language and the other two in Russian.

Nenlyumkina, 36, is a graduate of the teacher's training school in Anadyr, the capital of Chukotka. For 14 years, she worked at Radio Anadyr on the Eskimo language program. She started composing verse when still at the teacher's training school.

Her works are mostly devoted to the life of her fellow Eskimos. Later on, as a well known poet, she established contacts with Alaska Eskimos, and she learned many of them tuned in to hear of Eskimos in the USSR.

Nenlyumkina says she inherited her zest for reading and learning from her grandfather and her romantic nature from her grandmother Alpya, who was a great connoisseur of folk legends and traditions.

"I remember Granddad bringing a sackful of something. 'It's books,' he said with an air of importance.

"We were still living in a yaranga (the traditional pelt tent of Chukchi and Eskimos of Chukotka). I washed and put on my Sunday best for scanning the books for pictures.

"When I learned to read, my favorites were Pushkin tales and Chekhov's story *"Kashtanka"* in Eskimo translation. I always carried my copy of *"Kashtanka"* with me, even to the tundra," the poet said.

In 1984, a collection of her verse was published in Copenhagen. Petr Essen, the Danish authority in Eskimo studies referred to that event as "epoch-making" in his message to the poet, stressing it was the first book produced by Soviet Eskimos to be published abroad and the first one to be translated from a foreign Eskimo tongue into the language of the Greenland Eskimos.

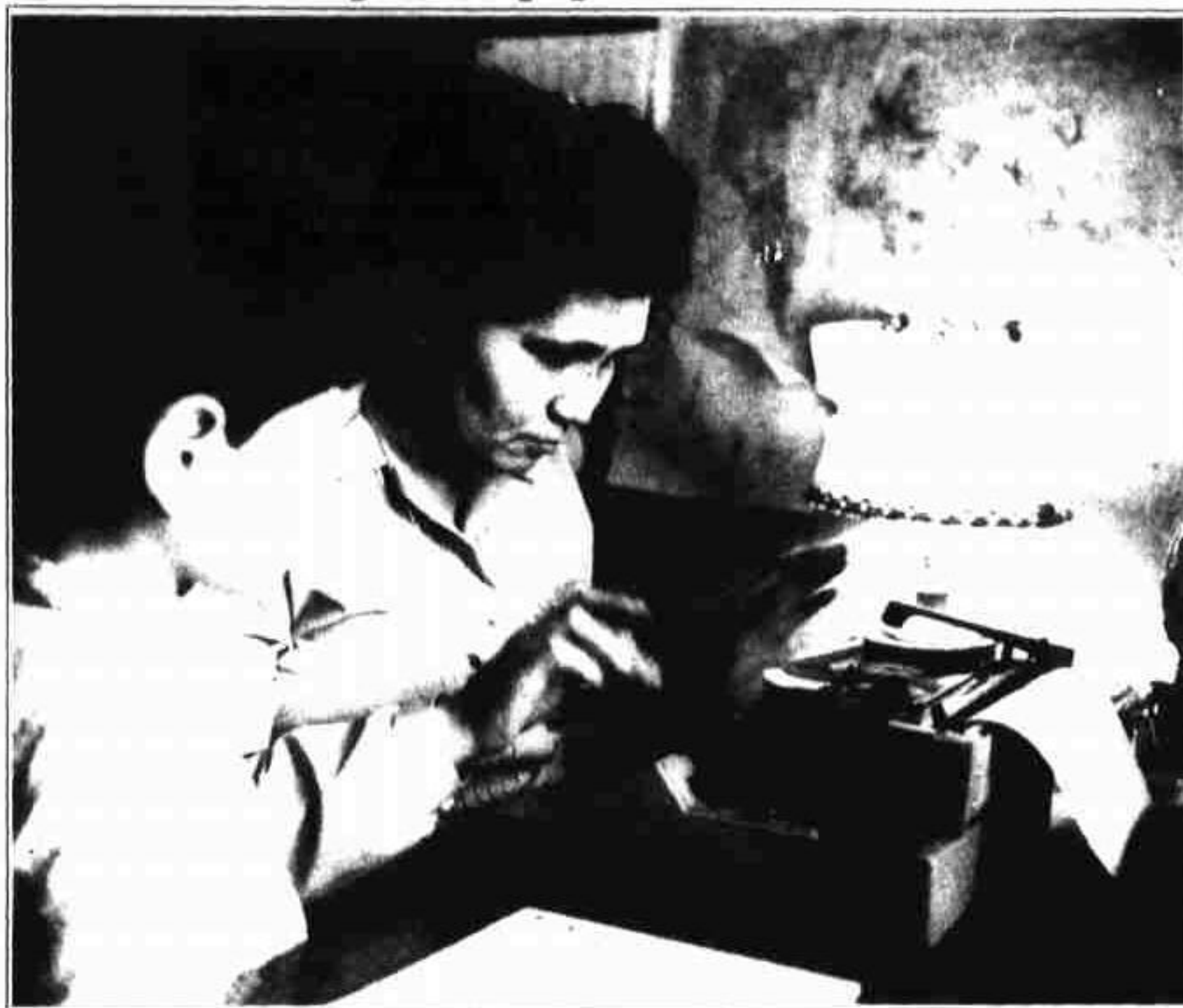
Nenlyumkina lives in Providenya Township and is employed at the local community center as a folk arts instructor. She is the top Soviet Eskimo personality today, but not the first.

Among her predecessors is the Eskimo pilot and poet Yuri Anko. He graduated from Leningrad's Herzen Teacher Training Institute and finished flying school. He flew over Chukotka and elsewhere in this country.

The Soviet Union's Eskimo population numbers around 1,500 people who live on the Chukchi Peninsula in villages dotting the Bering Sea coast.

The people generally hunt the sea mammals, such as walrus and ugrug and small seals. Also, fur hunting is important, and the area abounds in the polar fox.

The Eskimo village of Sireniki is the



Eskimo poet Zoya Nenlyumkina works at her desk as her son Vladik looks on.

Novosti Press Agency photo

only place in Chukotka where the traditional skin boats compete in hunting with the modern motor boats. Many local people hold that the old-type boats have advantages over the modern vessels. For example, they are not prone to ice filming.

The problem is that there are few people today who know how to make them, and craftsmen are in short supply.

Sea hunting itself, as an occupation, is at risk of dying out. Young people prefer to become machine operators, teachers and medics. The Chukchi Peninsula, in fact, may have oversold modern ways. Measures have been taken to solve this problem. Schools offer special courses in sea hunting.

In their first four years at school, Eskimo children use the primer and Eskimo language textbooks compiled by the former school teacher Lyudmila Ayana, an Eskimo.

Ayana lives in the same township as Nenlyumkina and is employed at the Chukotka branch of the Moscow-based Institute of Ethnic Schools.

Folk arts have made the Eskimo community famous. There is a bone-carving factory, decades old, in the village of Uelen, the easternmost part of the USSR. It carries on the Chukchi and Eskimo tradition in that folk craft. The walrus-tusk articles produced by the local craftsmen were a success at exhibitions in Paris, Montreal and Osaka.

Also popular are the folk song and

dance companies. Every Eskimo village has a folk company of its own: Lorino, "The White Sail"; Sireniki, "Northern Lights"; and Uelen, a company of the same name.

Last summer, a group of amateur dancers and singers from "Uelen" and "Northern Lights" attended the traditional Aasivik Eskimo festival in Greenland.

I interviewed some of them upon their return.

"They gave us a most cordial reception in Greenland," said Yakov Tagyck from Uelen. "The local papers front-paged our visit. They called us their 'Siberian brothers,' and their attitude was really fraternal.

"We were gratified to learn that the Greenland Eskimos are so much

devoted to the Native tongue. They speak more Eskimo than we do," Tagyck said.

He also said Siberian and Greenland Eskimos discussed ecology.

"The Greenlanders are opposed to cross-country vehicles for ecological considerations. Their dislike for that means of transportation also stems from it being unsafe," he said. "In Greenland, such vehicles will sometimes sink into cracks in ice. There have been casualties. So they prefer the traditional dog teams."

Yakov said he hopes more such meetings can be possible.

"We parted in the hope of more such meets in the near future. We had a really great time together."