



MRS. GRACE SLWOOKO, chosen by Alaska Press Women as their first honorary member, is photographed by Tom Busch of KNOM against the late spring snow at Nome. The wind that day reminded her of her home at Gambell on St. Lawrence Island and she was glad there was so

much snow for the background. "I like snow, especially over here when they with great instruments like trucks make high walls of snow . . . otherwise I wouldn't have high walls of white without much backache."

— Photo by TOM BUSCH

Press Women Choose TT Writer Honorary Member

By BETZI WOODMAN

Alaska Press Women have chosen Grace Slwooko, an Eskimo writer from Gambell, to be the first honorary member in the group's 10-year history. The selection is a salute to Mrs. Slwooko's success in communicating matters of one culture to another, in a language other than her native tongue.

Now a widow living in Nome during the school year, Mrs. Slwooko began writing for the Nome Nugget in 1965 and for the past two years has also contributed to the Tundra Times.

Although she writes in a "second language," Mrs. Slwooko's English has a lyrical quality which attracted the Press Women's interest.

A dedicated writer's desire to communicate is apparent in her work which tells of life on St. Lawrence Island in the Bering Sea, both memories of things past and reports of current happenings.

She also writes occasional poetry.

In her response to the invitation to become the honorary member, Mrs. Slwooko wrote:

"Writing is a treasure to me . . . the markings that curve so beautifully and tell, really tell, are so wonderful to me. If ever I write a book . . . it will be like when Mr. Columbus discovered America!"

Born October 22, 1921 at Gambell, Mrs. Slwooko tells of her struggles to achieve an education.

"From 1941 to 1949 I finally

got three years in high school . . . I would work at the hospitals and find some school."

Church schools, particularly the Seventh Day Adventists,

helped young Grace with her high school and she completed the 11th grade at College Place, Washington.

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Grace Slwooko Chosen..

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"After that year I gave up," she says, "And off to my home village I went."

She married Joe Slwooko in 1950 and they had nine children. Joe was killed in a Nome truck accident more than two years ago.

Of her work, Mrs. Slwooko says:

"To me, writing is an art, if I only learn more words . . . when I see something beautiful, I just couldn't keep from doing something . . . writing them down answers this thirst in my lonely life. Everything seems boring and is wasted when I don't put them down. So writing just comes in handy."

Even while she was raising her children, Mrs. Slwooko found time to make notes — "what some dearest child would say" — "sometimes even using shorthand in her diary. Now, she says, she has "piles of paper junk at home."

"But all that was like happy to me," she continues. Of course, poems cheer me up; when they come to my mind, I just smile and cheer up."

Mrs. Slwooko says she feels more comfortable at her home in Gambell than any other place

— mostly because of her height — four feet 11½ inches tall," she writes. "Although I like big places and long, long hallways and telephones and many other convenient things of big cities.

"And I like schools where they teach writing."

Letters and words "are useful for everything," she continues. "So that's why they are so precious, — they are so little and can tell lots! I can even put my thoughts down and put them in a little folded paper called an envelope and send them away. My, see how important writing is. That's why I pursue it."

Mrs. Slwooko notes that "it wasn't long ago we learn this English," her father being among the "first kids to go to school."

She says she always speaks Eskimo at home.

The diminutive Eskimo says she sometimes waits for chances to write, but there is so much to write any time that "all writing is precious" to her.

Again emphasizing her feelings about writing, Mrs. Slwooko says "I feel when things are not written, precious time is wasted."