

Health aide's trip turns into battle for his own life

by Jennifer Gordon

Tundra Times reporter

Editor's Note — This story was related to the Tundra Times by David Norcross, director of the health aide program for the Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corp. in Bethel.

When health aide Simeon Moses started across the tundra to get medication for two sick children earlier this month, he couldn't have known that the brewing storm would turn a 15-minute trip into a 17-hour struggle for his own life.

Moses has been a health aide for Toksook Bay for two years and has

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lived in the village his whole life.

On Jan. 11, two infants in Toksook Bay needed antibiotics to combat pneumonia, but weather had kept planes from landing in the village for two weeks.

Moses found out that the right kind of antibiotics were available in Tununak, a village about seven miles away, 15 minutes by snowmachine.

Moses set out across the tundra, but had gotten only half way when he was trapped in whiteout conditions. The temperature plummeted to a wind chill of -100, and he could no longer see which direction to go.

Remembering his father's teachings, Moses stopped and settled in to wait out the storm. He used the canvas cover of his snowmachine to keep the snow off, and he kept his fingers and toes moving to protect them from freezing.

Moses said later that the only way he kept alive was by thinking of his wife Priscilla and their four children. Who would take care of them if he didn't return?

Although he stayed under the cover for 17 hours, Moses did not eat snow because he knew it would make him even weaker.

Once the storm slowed, Moses uncovered himself and tried to start his snowmachine. It was frozen. Gathering his strength, he walked another 40 minutes into Tununak.

Moses stopped at the first house in the village to ask for help. Mr. and Mrs. Hubert Hooper took him in and stripped him of his frozen clothes.

Health aides Isabel Oscar and Martha Albert took care of Moses for two days until he could be flown to Bethel for treatment. Moses suffered frostbite on his face, fingers and abdomen.

After returning to Toksook Bay,

Moses took two days of sick leave, then went back to work. The two infants were given a different antibiotic during the ordeal and survived. Another man, from Tununak, however, died when he was trapped in the blizzard.

"Simeon symbolizes the dedication and courage which personifies each

and every health aide in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta and this state," said David Norcross, director of the health aide program in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corp. in Bethel.

Simeon will be honored for his heroism Feb. 3, during the Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corp.'s annual awards banquet.