



Sava Stephan Sr., 66, of Tyonek, was born at Susitna Station and today is a retired fisherman.

photo by Douglas Van Reeth



Victor Antone Jr., 63, of Kenai, is a retired trapper and fisherman who was born in Kenai. photo by Douglas Van Reeth, courtesy of The CIRI Foundation

Cook Inlet elders offer their viewpoints in new book: *Our Stories, Our Lives*

by Pamela Cravez
for the Tundra Times

When Chickalusion, the great Tyonek chief, gave Shem Pete the chief clothes — dress, beads, feathers, hat and rattle — Pete refused them. Pete saw that the white people were taking over, and he didn't want to be chief under those conditions.

Pete, now 86 years old, chose to pass on his cultural roots in a different way.

He teaches children Native dances and songs. He spent four years teaching his Native language to a professor from the University of Alaska.

And Pete, with 22 other Natives from all over Alaska, participated in an oral history project.

The result of the project, sponsored by Cook Inlet Region Inc., is a new book, *Our Stories, Our Lives*.

The book is made up of 23 interviews — each accompanied by a photo. The interviews were conducted by journalist and Tundra Times publisher, A.J. McClanahan.

McClanahan states at the outset that these people were reluctant to talk about themselves. But they relented because they wanted the new generation to know its roots.

Each person talks about the experiences which have shaped his or her life. The remembrances are very personal and many times quite poignant.

The picture of Helen Malcolm shows a cheerful grandmotherly woman crocheting. Malcolm and her sister grew up in the Jesse Lee Home at Unalaska.

Malcolm's father was a Swede. Her mother was an Aleut from the Pribilofs. Malcolm never met her mother or any of her mother's family. She never learned Aleut.

When children came to Jesse Lee they were forced to forget their Native language and speak only English, says Malcolm.

She remembers one 5-year-old girl

who could only speak Aleut. The little girl "just sat on the bench and listened. She didn't talk," says Malcolm.

After a few months the little girl started to talk. She spoke English, Malcolm says.

Unlike Malcolm, most of the others in this book come from large families. They talk about their sisters and brothers, mothers and fathers, and children.

It is quite clear that though elders talk about a great many things in this book, it is really children they care about the most.

Children are warned not to drink. Children are told about the pride of the subsistence lifestyle. And children are told, through these life stories, of the special heritage they have.

Our Stories, Our Lives is a sensitive and compelling memory of a people. There is little resentment in these pages. The people who talk show an amazing ability to remember and cherish the important things in their lives — both good and bad.

Perhaps Frank Haldane sums it up best when he says, "I have learned to survive. I know what's required to survive. And it's not always easy because I'm always torn between a lifestyle that I remember as a youngster. And then... see what's happening in the modern world."

Haldane concludes that it is the values he learned from his parents, "from being reared as a Native," that have gotten him through.

In *Our Stories, Our Lives*, 23 "parents" help their "children" get through.

The book, published by the CIRI Foundation, is available in Book Cache stores in Alaska and at the Anchorage Museum of History and Art Gift Shop. The price is \$15.95, plus mailing charges. Those interested can order copies from the Book Cache, 436 West Fifth Ave., Anchorage 99501.