

Margaret Panigeo Gray passes in Barrow

Margaret Panigeo "Megee" Gray died of cancer August 23 in Barrow with her family at her bedside. She was 81 years old. Born in Barrow, she was the daughter of Bert and Nellie Panigeo, who were reindeer herders and store proprietors. She was one of the first Barrow children sent Outside to school. In those days, it took

more than three months to get to school in Sitka by way of Nome, the Aleutians and Seattle. Her father paid for her education through college by selling fox furs to an agent in Seattle.

Megee returned to Alaska and taught school in Barrow, Wainwright and Gambell before marrying Jason Gray, an air traffic controller with the FAA. His job kept them moving, and her skills as a teacher were put to good use in Alaska and beyond. Among the places they called home were Tanana, Fairbanks, Yakutat, Bethel, Annette, Barrow, Koyuk, Nenana, Juneau, Montana and Honolulu. They raised three daughters: Andre, Jenny and Nancy. Jason Gray died in 1981 and Megee returned to Barrow in 1983.

Megee was known and loved throughout Alaska for her lively wit, her passionate loyalty, and her fearless embrace of life. She overcame polio. She was one of two women accepted in the Alaska Territorial Guard (which did not officially accept women) at the

outbreak of World War II. Her close friends included such notable Alaskans as Muktuk Marston and Sieg Wien.

For all the traveling she did, she always knew she would return to Barrow to live out her days. "I was always homebound," she recalled in an interview a few years ago. "My mother said, 'Before you die you're going to have to come back again because your roots are here.' I always knew that, but I waited until I was almost 69. My home is here. No place else."

Services for Margaret Gray were held in Barrow on August 25. She is survived by her daughters: Andre Leopoldo of Barrow, Jenny Gray of Juneau and Nancy Gray-Keller of Anchorage; her sister Edith Rowray of California; sisters-in-law May A. Panigeo and Kay Panigeo of Barrow; grandchildren Mai-Ono Leopoldo and Cathy Lynn Harris of Honolulu and Leilani Keller and Chase Keller of Anchorage; and many cousins, nieces, nephews and other relatives.