

Canada Eskimo Rues Losing of Language

(Editor's Note: Early last month, Victor Allen, an Eskimo, living in Inuvik, N.W.T., addressed the Fourth National Northern Resources Conference on the theme of Man and the North held in Edmonton, Alberta. Allen's address was printed in full in THE DRUM of Inuvik. The following is an excerpt from the speech on the subject of language of the Eskimos.)

By VICTOR ALLEN
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I love my language. The Eskimo language is a good language. As a friend of mine recently wrote, "The Eskimo language is big. If an Eskimo were a Professor, he can produce great thoughts to his pupils. He can explain his cultural identity and his responsibility to his mother tongue."

Our language tells us who we are. With our language our children will always remember who they are. We have something truly to be proud of.

The language and the culture of the Indian and Eskimo peoples of the Northwest Territories should be taught in our schools. Many of our older people would be happy to serve as teachers for a few hours a week.

We are worried about the future of our children. Today, our children have a good chance. They don't know hard times. They don't know starvation. Lucky for them because nine out of ten of them can't set a snare or back a fish net. But there are many children going to school. Will there be work for them when they leave school? And how about the drop-outs, the in-betweens. There are many drop-outs from our northern schools. These children need help, personal interest and maybe even special counsellors.

But we are worried that if there is no jobs for them all our children can't go back to the bush. My wife and I could go back to the bush tomorrow and live pretty well—maybe not have much money, but we'd have food and be warm. Our children can't go back and we are worried about this.

My wife's grandmother she has said how it is. About kids coming home from school without their language and not knowing how to make a living off the country, she said:

"They'll have open eyes, but they'll be blind up here."

This is an important thing to us. My uncle, Abe Ogpik, who was the first Eskimo Councillor for the Northwest Territories said on this:

"We need our language to keep us happy together. If we lose our language, we lose our responsibility. There are only a few Eskimos but millions of whites, just like mosquitoes.

"It is something very special to be an Eskimo. They are like Snow Geese. If an Eskimo forgets his language and ways, he will be nothing but just another mosquito."