

Jane Pender Reviews Events

By JANE PENDER

KOTZEBUE — 'When I returned home after three weeks Outside, I learned I had been the center of a controversy.

As nearly as I can reconstruct, our mayor did an interview which was published in the ANCHORAGE DAILY NEWS, later in the KOTZEBUE NEWS. Some local people disagreed with his viewpoints and wrote letters to the editor of the OTZ NEWS, which were published. (These were bona fide letters, with signa-

tures, are on file, and the editor had nothing to do with them except receive and publish them.)

At the same time, since I did agree with the mayor's evaluation of the atmosphere of our town: that it was tense and uneasy, and that the white population was defensive, I wrote a column which speculated on why that was. Somewhere along the way, TUNDRA TIMES got a few words in, and finally, the mayor whipped out a strongly worded protest about the col-

umn which was printed in the ANCHORAGE NEWS and reprinted in KOTZEBUE NEWS.

I have no intention of reopening the issues, which are by now pretty well larded with assertions pretty well larded with assertions and rhetoric. The mayor was an angry man, and when I read the column which had stimulated so much overkill, I could understand why. I was guilty (though accidentally) of a gross misrepresentation which singled out the mayor, and the agency

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he represents here. Not only that, but it appeared to be the sly kind of misrepresentation in which the writer hints and implies, but never comes right out and says it.

I would like to correct this as quickly and publicly as possible.

In discussing the polarization of this community, I said that some places a year ago went "off limits" for me, in the sense that they became uncomfortable. Among them, I named the Rural Cap office. In the draft of the column, I qualified all these places: they were public, or semi-public places in which people met and talked and through which many people passed. I was thinking about places, not agencies, not businesses. Through error (no doubt mine, since simple typing tends to make my mind wander) that part of the column was left out of the column as printed. Thus, I managed to imply in a particularly sneaky and weasel way, that Rural Cap, and the mayor, who was then, as now, head honcho for that agency here, were involved in the great increase in local rhetoric which began to happen about that time.

I want to say distinctly: I have not the slightest idea whether that implication is, or is not true. I have no personal knowledge of whether the mayor does, or does not make provocative statements of the kind I objected to. He never has to me, or in my presence.

The same may be said of his staff last summer. All of us here are very well aware that Rural

Cap has served this community very well in a number of ways for a number of years, under a number of leaders, including the present one.

I did not intend to point a finger at any individual, or any organization as being "responsible" for our difficulties. We have many problems involving many different people, ideas, agencies. We are also in a period of rapid change and political struggle. People are tense, since the future seems clouded.

We are also a small town, devoted to gossip and conjecture. We are now involved in a movement of history which is almost unique and for which there are few, or no, precedents. It seems certain we will continue to have hassles and difficulties since there are many points of view; the job ahead is complex and difficult, and there are a lot of roadblocks in the way.

I am extremely sorry I appeared to be attacking the mayor. This was not my intention. Had I been in the state and available for comment, I would have said so much earlier. I have never had any major differences with him in either of his capacities.

At the same time, I cannot retreat from my own most deeply held belief, corny as it may sound; that you cannot measure the worth of any human by race, color, religious beliefs, or sex. As Malcom X said after his return from Mecca and before his murder, "There are only good and bad human beings."