

Neakok: An Inupiaq Woman

Barrow magistrate's life put in perspective

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Sadie Brower Neakok, An Inupiaq Woman by Margaret Blackman. University of Washington Press, Seattle, 1989. \$19.95.

For more than 25 years I have heard fascinating stories coming from Point Barrow about this legendary person, Sadie Neakok. But it has been hard to sort out the facts from the myths until I read Margaret Blackman's new book about Sadie Brower Neakok.

The book is an exceptionally good biography for two reasons.

First, Dr. Blackman has worked out a solution to one of the main problems with biography — how to provide background information and interpretation, and still allow the people to speak for themselves.

This is what she has done. Neakok's actual descriptions or autobiography is set in regular type. Blackman's comments and historical materials are set in italicized type, so the reader can distinguish one from the other quite easily.

This technique has another advantage; the reader learns not only about Neakok and her life, but also sees it in historical perspective and in the local setting.

The second reason why this is an ex-

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ceptionally good biography is because of the subject, Sadie Brower Neakok. Daughter of the famous Charlie Brower and his wife Asiinggataq.

Neakok has spent a lifetime as a full participant in two cultures. She did have some problems when she first went Outside to school in the same way that anyone who is dropped into an unusual situation has difficulties.

Her narrative is both philosophical and at the same time very earthy. It is direct and straightforward, but with a subtle sensitivity regarding person-

al matters and cultural differences.

Many stories I have read about Neakok have been concerning her role as Barrow magistrate.

Chapter eight, "Farthest North Judge," sorts out the fact from the fiction in these stories. The next chapter "A Matter of Survival" puts the whole subsistence issue in proper perspective.

The book is an important report on life in Point Barrow and cross-cultural problems.

For non-Alaskans whose only information on the Northern Eskimos comes from stereotypes and sensationalism, the book should help clear up many mistaken ideas.

For Alaskans, especially those of us who have only had limited visits to the North Slope area, it provides much needed information with a insider's explanation.

Over the years, there have been several good biographies or autobiographies about Native Alaskans, but I would rate Blackman's latest publication *Sadie Brower Neakok, An Inupiaq Woman*, the best I have seen so far.