

Oldest Person in Alaska?—

At 114 Minnie Lives Strong Life

By AGNES PETE

At age 114, Minnie Tucker of Fairbanks has led a long and very strong life.

Born in Rocky Point near Nome about 114 years ago, she has come through many hardships and physical injuries.

According to her daughter, Edna Wilder, Minnie's age is estimated by the fact that she was about ten years older than her husband when she married. She was born about the time the salmon berries begin to ripen in Rocky Point, so her birthday was set at August 12.

Apparently Minnie has a strong will to live with her heartening faith in God, and that He will someday come for her.

Though she has suffered many physical injuries, she has the strength to endure them. Last winter she was in a car accident necessitating her move to Careage North. When I visited her Monday she seemed well enough to want to go home.

Seeing all the snow coming down she says, "I wish it were clear so I could walk home. I have no mukluks on, though." After her accident, she needed constant care so Careage North provided a place for her.

Edna says she would like to have her, but if she has to go off to her part-time job at the University in the Home Economics Department demonstrating how to sew fur and skins,



AMAZING ESKIMO LADY — Although plagued by numerous injuries throughout her latest years, Minnie Tucker, 114 years old, has been able to shake them off and keeps living a good, strong life. — Photo by HARVEY O. HAGGARD

Minnie would worry because she was not actually in the house.

At Careage North, Minnie doesn't worry about Edna, be-

cause she knows Edna is not supposed to be there.

Several years ago, Minnie's

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hip fractured and she has to walk around with several pins in it. She amazed doctors by continuing to walk, which they predicted she would never do again.

Minnie also "had a 'red skin' disease many years ago and lost all of her hair. When it grew back it was very fine and thin. A few years later, an epidemic of the disease took the lives of members of her family and many people in her village.

Having the disease earlier probably made her immune to it when the epidemic came. She cared for her family and others who were sick. Another time, a flu epidemic took the last of her relatives," wrote Dorothy Freestone, Society Editor for Fairbanks Daily News-Miner, in their August 26, 1970 issue.

"One year early in her life, she was carrying a seal poke and it was so heavy filled with dried salmon and seal oil. She dropped it as she slipped and fell and it landed on her back. Her back was broken, so the villagers carried her on a flat board to her home and tied her between two flat boards like a sandwich."

"There she lay all winter, and in the spring very slowly she began to heal and could get around and walk a little. Her people got a woman who was supposed to know how to spear people to rid them of old blood, which was the practice in those days. She speared Grandma Tucker, and she survived this loss of blood the same way she seemed to survive all the tragic circumstances which happened during her lifetime," wrote Ms. Freestone.

"She remembers when the first white man came to her village. They traded with him, and one coffee can of flour was traded to them for one white fox. Fifty pounds of flour would be traded for one tall pair of mukluks and one short pair."

"She was suffering from rheumatism one year, and an Englishman named Arthur Samuel Tucker took her some tomatoes and some medicine. He told her to eat the tomatoes and to take the medicine, and it did seem to help her get well. Two years later, they were married at Golovin Bay."

The Tuckers had eight children, but only two had survived. There is her only daughter Edna here in Fairbanks, and a son Sam Tucker lives in Nome.

"Four of my children were still born, two of them a set of twins," Minnie said. "But I count them just the same." Mrs Wilder is their only daughter and the rest were sons.

Edna, proficient in skin sewing, easily finishing a pair of

baby booties in an hour and a half, says she did not learn this skill from her mother.

"She always thought I should not have to learn this; she said I should marry a rich man," Edna jokes.

Minnie was indeed a proficient seamstress of furs and skins. Usually, she made parkas, mittens and gloves for her family and relatives.

"She made presents for us at Christmas time — mukluks and mittens, etc. She would surprise us by sewing when we were out or late at night when we went to bed," Edna says.

"She did lots of fur sewing"

out of reindeer and squirrel, making fancy squirrel parkas with fancy trim, ruff, and beadwork," Edna continued. Showing me two small doll parkas, with tiny, neat stitches that appeared machine-stitched, and with intricate designs, Mrs. Wilder said she would save these.

Only after Minnie came to Fairbanks, did she sell some of her sewing. "I used to sew for people, for children without homes," Minnie said. "I never took any pay for that. But someday when the Lord takes me up there with Him, then I will get my pay."

"She worked hard. She would

gather berries in the summer and dry fish," Edna said. When Minnie lived alone in her cabin in Fairbanks, she also baked her own bread, cooked herself meals, chopped wood, and kept her house tidy.

Fluent in Eskimo, and a good English speaker, Minnie has trouble hearing now after her accident last fall. Therefore, she is not as talkative as she normally would be. This is amazing since some elderly Eskimos that I have known, have completely gone back to speaking Eskimo in their last few years.

"I think she's been a good mother," Edna says. "She's tried

to raise us right. She taught us to be honest, to be kind to old people, and to help other people when we can."

"She's tried to live what she's preached. Her main saying was 'Do the right thing — don't cheat, rob or steal. Tell the truth though it may be hard,'" Edna says of her mother.

Minnie's husband died in 1941 and was buried near Bluff on a hill overlooking their home beside their still born twins and two other sons.

Outliving him and her brothers and sisters, Minnie's trust in the Lord and hard work has brought her a long way.