

# Delightful Sesame Street Fascinates Native Village Children

"This program is brought to you by the letter W," goes one program. For you unexposed adults who have never seen **SESAME STREET**, the delights of Big Bird, Oscar the Grouch and a host of other characters are probably familiar to your pre-school youngsters.

**SESAME STREET**, the learning experience via T.V. which has invaded millions of American homes is even seen in remotest Alaskan villages—via T.V. tapes and broadcasters in Alaska's schools and Head Start Centers.

From all indications, **SESAME STREET** is as popular in village Alaska as it is in its native New York.

Last week, Mrs. Allonia Gadsden, a woman who loves children and who is one of the founders of **SESAME STREET** and the Children's Television Workshop which produces it, came to Fairbanks.

There, at the University of Alaska, she explained the history behind a program based on "love, joy, music and laughter" and her own experiences as a child which made her reject the classroom.

As a child, Mrs. Gadsden recalled, she was puny, crippled, and partially deaf. Teachers "tuned her out," rejecting any method of teaching which would appeal to young children. So, she learned from her older sister—with love.

**SESAME STREET** grew out of a day many years ago when a **NEW YORK TIMES** article attacked day care centers, one of which Mrs. Gadsden ran. Enraged, she went to see the editor. From there, she and a group of early childhood educators went to Ford Foundation with a proposal for early childhood education via television.

Two years later, after Head Start had hit the headlines, Ford recruited Mrs. Joan Cooney, producer for Channel 13 television in New York, to produce a T.V. show which would provide the "day care experience" for children in the inner cities.

"We decided that our program would just be a world for young children, filled with love, joy, music, dancing, color and movement," said Mrs. Gadsden, one of the panel of educators who formed the Children's Television Workshop to design a format.

They rejected the concept of a school. Schools had tuned out children, the pre-school educators felt, and children would tune out school.

So, **SESAME STREET** became a "world for children," a wonderful, magical city street filled with imaginary characters as big as a 6 foot bird and as odd as Oscar, the grumpy schmo who lives in a garbage can with velvet carpeting.

**SESAME STREET** is set against the pattern which television commercials have used for years—jingles, color, patterns,

music and constant repetition. Young children, the researchers found, tune out a program with a story line. Yet, their attention is drawn by the commercial—short, colorful, active spots.

They are drawn to the music, the easily recognizable jingles, the color, the opportunity to identify products on the screen with household object.

**SESAME STREET** became one giant learning commercial, brought to you by the "people who brought you the alphabet." Each program became a letter, a number, as children in crowded homes learned the alphabet, how to count to 10, how to identify objects.

The program also had to appeal to older children, and adults. Otherwise, they felt, older children would change the station.

"Our purpose was to make the child feel about himself, provide interest, love and understanding. This would be a new avenue of learning," explained

Mrs. Gadsden speaking for the educators who met at Harvard.

On **SESAME STREET**, amazing cartoon characters, monsters and jingles teach music numbers, identification concepts.

"Today in New York City, children riding in the subways, sing the jingles," said Mrs. Gadsden. "Slum children arrive in school knowing numbers, letters and other things which middle class children are taught by their parents."

Children learn to sing the alphabet, dance to numbers and are drawn with joy into dozens of learning situations. Rapid, with no discernable story line, designed with enough repetition to drive the average adult mad, the program draws young children like a magnet. Singing, dancing and music are the keys.

"We don't try to lock young children in," explained Mrs. Gadsden. "Nobody expects a 4 year old to act like he's 40

in order to learn."

This month, Children's Television Workshop premiered "The Electric Company" a new program designed for seven to eleven year old children with reading problems. The Electric Company teaches reading. Another projected program will teach adults to read.

The **SESAME STREET** program, already seen in 21 companies, will soon be seen in Spanish, French and German versions.