

Hobson recalls reasons for Act

Strains from "On Top of Old Smokey" rise from a newly finished violin being tested in a nearby room, setting the mood as the daughter of Chief Doug Billum sips coffee and recalls the changes brought into her life after passage of ANCSA led to construction of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline.

By Walya Hobson's reckoning, few of those changes were good. "It was a nightmare," she says as husband Frank Hobson, the famed Eskimo violin maker of Tazlina, switches to "Swanee River."

"It was crazy! We don't hate white people. 'Be ye kind one to another,' that's what the Bible says. But the things they did to us when they came on our land was very bad!"

In earlier times, Hobson recalled her father, who she said was accepted as chief by the people of Chitina and Lower

Tazlina because of his leadership capabilities and his skill at solving problems brought to her by the people, had saved whites who were starving and freezing as they passed through the Copper River area.

During the pipeline days, newcomers also sought assistance from the local people Hobson recalled, and she and Frank had put up a few and had even given permission to big companies, who in turn never cleaned up after themselves, to dump great piles of snow and whatever garbage they picked up with it - on their land.

"We kept getting pushed, back, back, back off our land," Hobson recalls the thanks they received for helping out. Even their obviously private property was not respected. At all hours, they would find people coming in to take water from their

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Walya Hobson testifying at ANRC hearings.

"Our way will not die"

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well.

Workers living in Winnebagos and mobile homes heisted a pile of lumber which Frank, who built the home they now live in and who besides being a violin maker is an excellent carpenter, had gotten for his own use.

She then used it to construct a porch and other trap-pings for their own place. Fishing areas used by Native families for generations were taken over, with no one asking or caring what the local people thought. The same held true with trapping areas. The game they had always hunted was put under increasing pressure, Hobson says, with her beloved ground squirrel all but disappearing.

And there was the berry pickers. They would come onto the Hobson's Native/Allotment without ever asking permission, and virtually clean them out. "There was these ladies. They would come over and ask me to go berry picking with them. But I wouldn't go.

"Then one day I said, 'well, all right.' So they took me to another family's allotment. 'We can't pick here!' I said. 'This is someone else's property!' They were surprised. 'Does it really bother you?' They asked me."

Evelyn Pete, Hobson's 38-year-old granddaughter, has her own berry picking story to tell. One day she ventured out to her Native allotment to pick berries. When she got there, a non-Native was already busy picking away.

"I figured there was enough for everybody, so I left her alone and went to another spot. Pretty soon, she came over to me, and angry look on her face. 'I was her first,' she haughtily told me. 'You go find somewhere else.'

" 'Lady, this is my land,' I told her. 'But I thought there was enough for both of us!'"

It is hard for Hobson to understand how these men, who she describes as always going

around writing things on pads, who come, and who go, can tell her and her people what to do on the land which has been theirs for untold centuries.

"I liked it better when Indian men, the chiefs and the councils, made the laws," Hobson says. "That's how I'd like to see it again."

She does not like the regulations of hunting and fishing, which come from a society which sees such activities primarily as recreation, and which make it more difficult for her people to feed themselves.

"Our way will not die," Hobson says, despite her description of the changes brought to the land. Then talk turns to a young relative who just returned to the area after being away for awhile.

Forget the potlatches, forget the old ways, he advised. A new day is here, a new way of doing things and the old is fading out.

Hobson smiles. "In a while, he will learn. We are going to be here for a long time!"