

Food for each season in Togiak

by Marie Andrews
for the Tundra Times

While we were in Togiak, we lived off the land. Dad had a large garden, and in the summer he would plant a variety of vegetables, including potatoes, turnips, carrots, cabbage and beets. Spinach and peas, too, as well as strawberries and raspberry and blackberry bushes.

In the fall we would pick wild blueberries, salmonberries and low-bush cranberries.

We had a big, well sodded root cellar near the house, and when it was time, we would all work at picking and cleaning the produce. They were then put into gunny sacks that were saved for this purpose and stowed in the root cellar.

We also canned some, so we had enough vegetables for most of the winter.

In the summer, ducks and geese were plentiful, as well as squirrels and muskrat. We gathered eggs, too, mostly seagull, and would preserve the excess in a barrel of water, along with our "store-bought" ones.

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Fall was the time for seal hunting. We used to watch from the beach as the men left in their kayaks carrying harpoons and longlines. When they returned with their catch, everyone would help with skinning and cleaning.

The meat was then divided equally among us all. Sometimes they would spear a beluga; then there would be a great feast.

Winter brought thousands of ptarmigan to the tundra, and in the sparse timber a few miles inland, large flocks of spruce hens. Rabbits were so numerous you could walk on their trails in the deep snow.

There were three large reindeer herds around Togiak, and for \$9 or \$10 you could have a deer freshly slaughtered and loaded on your sled.

The herds were owned by the government, but each herder was paid

so many head per year, and so could sell them.

Meat wasn't eaten right away, it was smoked or salted for winter use. The hides were stretched and dried and used for many purposes. Nothing was wasted.

In our "winter grubstake" we had kegs of corned beef packed in brine, whole hams and slabs of bacon. Our butter also came in brine, in 50-pound barrels, and our lard in 50-pound tins.

Dad had built a leanto along the side of the house, and in winter that's where the hams and bacon were hung and the brine barrels were stored.

I remember one of the many times I went with my stepmother to visit her friends. There was a very old lady in that house, so old they said she was growing a new set of teeth.

After everyone had tea, dried fish and *akuak* (Eskimo ice cream), the old lady took off her fur parka and her fur boots and called me over. I was bashful and didn't want to go, but Ann took me by the hand and led me to her.

She then proceeded to put her parka and boots on me. They then told me I would live a very long life for donning her clothes, and that made me happy.

