

You didn't go far enough

By Mary Jane Fate

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Two wise and respected elder Indian men were talking, one told the other about a young Indian man who went out hunting and came back without any game. Upon hearing this, an Uncle told the young hunter, "You didn't go far enough." The two elders talking were the late Chief Walter Charlie and Dr. Walter Soboleff, Athabascan and Tlingit, respectively.

It was important and a necessity in order to survive to hunt and trap fur bearing animals, including the wolves. My father was a well respected and a hard working trapper. I heard people say he was also lucky. Our mother worked very hard at his side, tanning the furs and making it into clothing, such as ruffs, boots and mitts. Sales of the furs had to cover our food stake for the winter. Of all the animals, the wolves were the toughest to catch, for they are smart, powerful and hard to hold. There was never any waste, almost all parts of the animals were used and you respected all parts, especially the wolves.

The same was true of the game animals. All parts of the caribou and moose were used, clear down to the hooves. Years ago and even today, these animals provide food, clothing, utility and other items, such as meat, tallow, skin or hides, thread or sinew, string/rope or babbish, buttons from the horns, tools from the leg bones used as fleshers and toy sleds from the jaw bones.

My mother, Sally Woods Hudson said it was hard work, and sometimes for what? She tells a true story about Neil Simon from Stevens Village, who sat out all his traps and caught nothing. At home, he had several little daughters to feed. On his way home, he made up a song, "What am I going to feed all my little children I have at home?" The song was written so well and meaningful, the people in the village easily learned it. When he later went back to check his traps, he found several mink.

Selina Alexander, originally from Huslia and North Fort is a young Athabascan artist and mother who supplements their income with her bead work. She stresses the importance of how the game was successfully managed by the taking of predators and the wise use of animal resources by Athabascan people. To this day, the wolf fur made garments are essential items in the winter.

Will Rogers once said, "We will never have a true civilization until we have learned to recognize the rights of others."

Today, we find ourselves in a truly uncivilized situation. Our right to manage our game and resources wisely is not recognized by the United States government and strong special interest groups. Look who has become the great body of Alaskan authority. Outside interests have much knowledge taken from where they came from and their own emotional concepts of Nature. They are pushing this knowledge and using their time in helping direct the State in its attempt to manage many of the problems change has produced. But is it possible for them to fully equate their knowledge to the total situation in Alaska, both present and future? It may be doubtful, for few places exist where changes are as abrupt and/or lasting as this great State.

Has their body of authority been subjected to the same violence and hardships of our people? Have they or their kids hungered or prospered depending on the variable runs of fish and game? Do they know State and Federal regulations already curtailed our heritage and economy? For example, the sale of dried fish for dog food, once a flourishing industry, is now illegal; the sale of dried eating fish is nearly a dead industry and this goes for other Native foods. The use of certain furs has now been stopped. Ask the Alaska Natives who have survived all odds by true strength and perseverance.

The lucrative fur trader has dwindled as a result of foreign exports, textile technology and powerful special interest lobbying. The truth is some laws or regulations prohibits the exchange of Alaskan resources. For example, according to the Institute of Alaska Native Arts, they have funded a prestigious International UNESCO Multi-national exhibit of Arctic Arts which will

travel for three years. But it is being stagnated because of unfair regulations to Alaska Natives. Ask Alaska Native artists why they are using imported color dyed turkey feathers for art instead of our local feathers. STUPID!

In the last analysis, who is the great body of authority on change in the Great Land? Perhaps, we should re-evaluate who has the collective experience on changes in Alaska. Let's now ask the advice of a greater body of authority- - the people of Alaska, who have endured. I quote Mr. Sydney Huntington of Galena, who has served 19 years on the State Board of Game, "If only one thing comes out of this Summit, I hope it is to recognize in Alaska we are trying to manage wildlife resources as a whole - taking into account prey, predators and people and not as a single species management."

Let's challenge ourselves today to become "civilized" and respect one another's rights. Collectively and together, we can and must make changes to our present Federal and State laws, regulations and policies affecting we Alaskans. Let's finally make relevant recommendations so in a short 100 years from now, our great grandchildren will not have to say, "You didn't go far enough."

Editor's note: The author serves as a University of Alaska Regent, on the Alaska Natives Commission as is a former Tundra Times Board member.

