

TESTIMONIAL ON ALCOHOLISM

Tragedies Due to Alcoholism Related By Eskimo Woman

(Editor's Note: The following is the moving, often gripping, testimony on alcoholism written by an Eskimo woman. She and her family are now living in Anchorage. Their home village is Unalakleet. The woman apologizes for her lack of proper use of English because her schooling was "up to part of the 8th grade." She is the mother of seven children. She said of her writing: "It contains nothing but the TRUTH what I went through and what I've seen...")

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Past and Present Status of Eskimos

I AM GLAD I am under the U.S. Flag. Freedom of speech, freedom of religion. Now it's my turn to speak. I am an Alaskan Eskimo and I'm proud to be one. My English will be poor because I went to school only up to part of the 8th grade. I like to know what's going on in this our new state, some people call it. I read the newspaper a lot and my favorite column is the Editorial page. In this page people bring their dislikes and some wrote letters of appreciation.

LAST SUMMER I came home from my work and sat in front of our television set, just when the announcer came on to read an article about native people who go from bar to bar. Right there I felt choked with tears thinking about my nieces and nephews who are motherless today because of alcoholic beverages. I thought of my two nephews who were burned to death in a house while the parents were out drinking.

THEN THESE questions came to my mind. Who owns and maintains these bars all over Alaska not only here in our All American City? I never see a name with Eskimo last name advertise about his bar or liquor store.

THIS BIG PROBLEM of alcoholism is out of control in our new state already. It's not only here, it's all over in our small villages as well. They order liquor by cases in the villages. Our jails and children homes are over-flowing because of

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"I may not agree with a word you say but I will defend unto death your right to say it." - Voltaire

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alcohol. Parents are separated because of this same matter. White men are taking advantage of our native women, young and old, just because they are divorced and are not employed.

LONG AGO during gold rush days Nome, Alaska was a nice city perhaps, but in today's newspaper it's called worst city slum. As long as Alaska keeps on like this it will never prosper. Laws are no more laws. From here I like to go way back to 1930's. My first school year when I was seven, people help one another. People in our villages are eager to help themselves.

MY PARENTS would camp for seals, oogruk, and tom-cod. They would take all of us along. This is called spring camping for food. Men go out to sea and catch seals and oogruk, women and children hook tom-cods and hang them to dry.

THEN IN MONTH of May we plant our gardens—potatoes, cabbages, rutabagas, yellow turnips, purple tops, carrots, head lettuce, cauliflower. We dig the gardens with shovels until our hands blister. Every home have gardens. We learn this gardening from a missionary from Sweden. He taught us the Gospel and how to plant and take care of our vegetables. He even helped us ship our vegetables to Nome during World War II. Huge cabbages, hundreds of pounds of potatoes.

ON SUNDAY afternoons he would walk around the village and kind of inspect our gardens, see if they're free of weeds. Then he would handle the insecticide himself so we wouldn't get poisoned, to do away with the cut worm and maggots that wants to destroy our vegetables. He taught confirmation as well, visit the sick, and he preached with an interpreter in those days.

THEN AFTER we thin and weed our gardens we moved up river to our fishing camps. Each camper's place have a name. Our camp's name was Land's End in Eskimo, Noonum Issoa. We stay in our camp's until September.

THEN IN MIDDLE 30's I first heard about Welfare, when my uncle died and left his widow with six children. She was getting \$10.00 a month. Finally this Welfare spread like fire in a few years. You think this village have gardens any more today? Maybe only half dozen homes plant today in the spring. Fish camps are covered with willows.

I'M NOT against Welfare when it is given to people who are widows, cripples, orphans. Some of our native people have nice homes they built themselves, even they don't have education, as long as they know their inches. There are too many able people who are under Welfare. Our fore-fathers lived without it.

IN 1930's very seldom you see or hear about someone being drunk. The village we left is getting to be a dangerous place. Sometimes after we're in bed we would hear gunfire. Nobody take these seriously. I've seen nasty wounds from drunken brawlers. I was medical aide there for six years without pay. Me and my helper would take turns taking care of the clinic, sometimes 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. Many times our dinner is late when I wait for an answer for my patient, and yet my husband never discourage me.

I WOULD LIKE to see little pay for our medic aide in our villages because they have big responsibility.

ONE PARTICULAR night I'll never forget. We heard someone knocking on our door. My husband answered the door then he called me out to see this man with big cut on his eye. One lady had brought him over. So I had to bring him up to the Air-Force base for stitching. It was 4:30 a.m. Before I bring him I had to try and find transportation. When I brought him to his house there were three men fighting like cowboys we see in movies. But this was a frightening scene, all of them drunk. Finally one said, "I'll get my gun yet." I ran this way and that way with all my might just like my heart was just about to stop. I left my patient because I want to live too. No more peace.

I NEVER HEAR word BORROW when I was in my first school years. People help one another. No matter how much people fish there use to be lots and lots of fish. No outboard

motors. Only two or three inboard engines. We pole up stream and pull boats with ropes on sand bars, and yet we never go hungry. Too many motors in our rivers these days. They disturb the spawning places too much. Quick transportation for fishing but people never store fish for home use like they use to anymore.

MY PARENTS gave up camping because they want us to go to school. I know it was hard for them to give up the great outdoor living. It's no wonder disease is increasing among our native people. My folks believe in fresh air. They use to take us out squirrel hunting too for parkas in the spring. This too is diminishing event.

NOW LET ME jump to year 1960's. Even before these years of 1960's I really regret why I have sent my first four children to boarding schools under Bureau of Indian Affairs. Many of you will think I'm crazy. My family use to be very close before they start to go to these far away places nine months out of each year. They would write home and say, Mom, I want to come home." How many times I read the letter first and cried. They would go each fall just because their friends are going. They're real different people when they come home. They're restless. They say our towns are dead. Nothing to do. They have no more interest in church or Sunday School.

IN THOSE YEARS I used to wish from the heart that our schools were built nearer to our villages so we could at least let them come home on holidays. Our villages' attitude today is too much. "Let Bureau of Indian Affairs do it."

NOT ALL STUDENTS are successful. Some become real good secretaries. Some who really try become school teachers, carpenters, and some are roaming our streets without jobs and homes. Now, in this past year someone pointed out what the great need was for our natives—WORK.

AN ESKIMO can work if given a chance but his greatest enemy is alcohol. Indians down-fall, Aleuts' enemy, also white man's. First it will be called a sociable drink. Nothing wrong with it, they say. But sociable drink gets hold of you. You can't live without it anymore. Finally you loose your job, your home, your family. Maybe you were a successful business man one time, nice growing family. Then, you are alone today because that sociable drink flare up like fire. Just like playing with matches at first.

THE WORKS of alcohol is nasty. It makes you do things you wouldn't dare to do if you are sober. It can bring you to shame and make you so low, finally you got to have help. Some drop dead because the heart can't take it anymore. I know what I'm talking about because I tried it for several years. Almost lost my family and home but by the grace of the All Mighty God we are a family today.

IN THE CLOSING of this centennial year I am real happy to see results from our visiting whites from Washington, D. C., when they see for themselves what our great need was. After 100 years since our Alaska was bought. Land claims issues are mentioned through radio, T.V. and newspapers. Only if they put our people to work we will be moving forward. We natives should hang on and not settle this in a hurry. It is not a small matter.

IT'S VERY TRUE white people bought Alaska and they have a right to have a big chunk of it because Alaska is big, and you and I have no equipment to survey and dig well for gas, oil, and other minerals. Without white man's help we couldn't do much. We would have been wiped out completely

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by tuberculosis if the doctors hadn't found a right medication for it. It was getting to be a number one killer. Once a person start hemorrhaging he would only live few months.

WE WERE family of nine. My oldest sister and my father died of tuberculosis. Mom taught us cleanliness at an early age. We use to scrub floors on hands and knees with lysol water and lye soap. We were taught to make potato yeast bread.

IN THE FALL of 1953 my sister died of plain whiskey. I saw her before she died. I felt so bad I did not even go to her funeral. From that time on I have tried to tell people the danger of strong liquor. I am not ashamed to tell this because it's true what alcohol can do. It can kill slowly and quickly if taken carelessly. Some of you may mock me and make fun of me but this letter is for my people especially. Some people are afraid to say anything in public because they're not sure of themselves or they are afraid to lose friends.

IN MY SCHOOL days our teacher was strict. He was my teacher for four years. He make a rule that no one speaks Eskimo in school or on the school ground. He listed our names by the door and make a rule that if we hear anybody speak Eskimo we put a mark by that name. And if he speaks five or ten times in a row he would let him chew piece of Ivory soap in front of us, to make sure he chew it.

NOW TO THIS present age, I would like to see a high school built nearer to our remote villages, centrally located in our state so that our students can be nearer to home and not lose their family ties. I have been conscious of the money involved in sending our students to far away places. With this travel money a good boarding school would have been built, because we don't travel by air free. Hundreds of students are taken to far away places each fall and taken back to their homes in the spring. Many times this question came to my mind: Why were we interrupted from our way of life, the Eskimo way? We use to be contented people as long as we have lots to eat -dried fish, seal oil, berries of all kinds stored in wooden barrels, salt fish and tea and bread.

NOW TODAY we have to keep up with Joneses the white people way. Why can't our people get ahead even they have steady jobs: Because \$5.00 is like \$1.00 today in stores we have. No more ceiling prices-only space prices. Electricity \$10.00 minimum. With no steady job it's very hard to keep ahead. That's why we are here today. We wanted to work.

MOST OF ALL I want to mention in this letter to my people is to thank the doctors who left their respective homes and relatives thousands of miles away in order that you and I can enjoy better health. They are dedicated people. They did not learn the knowledge they have over night. It takes years and years of practice and research. Some perhaps work their way through aside from studying.

IF WE WOULD only understand how much medicine cost and how much money it takes to maintain these hospitals we would be more thankful and take our medicine more seriously. Thank you is big booster when you help someone. It makes you want to help more.

WITH THIS BIBLE verse I like to close: Hebrews 13:6, So that we may boldly say, "The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me."

I KNOW I WILL be criticized, but I have no fear because what I say is true. True experience I went through and have seen with my own eyes.

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