

# Eskimo Girl Does Groundwork for Boss's Campaign



**Miss Brenda Itta talks to Mr. & Mrs. Bob Tuckfield and a little girl at Point Hope.**



**She visited 26 northern villages by bush planes and sno-gos.**



## Brenda Itta Visits 26 Villages For Her Boss Sen. Gruening

(Special to the Tundra Times)

An Eskimo girl born in Barrow, Miss Brenda Itta, who has been a member of the Washington, D. C., staff of U.S. Senator Ernest Gruening for the past two years, has just completed travels to 26 villages in northwestern Alaska.

This represents the first time personal visits have been made so extensively to Alaska villages by a member of the staff of any of the offices in the Alaska Congressional delegation.

Notebook in hand, Brenda met with the village councils at all 26 villages and also went from house to house in each one gathering information for Senator Gruening's use on what the village and family problems were.

Reports the Eskimo assistant sent to Washington following each visit to a village are forming the basis of action by Senator Gruening and his staff to improve conditions throughout the region.

Brenda, who speaks the northern Eskimo dialect, began her travels from Barrow on January 24th. She concluded her northwestern Alaska swing at Unalakleet February 27th.

Villages visited ranged in size from her birth place, Barrow, which she calls "the little New York of the North"—present population 2,200—to Kobuk, where only 68 people live.

Although she is understandably partial to her birth place, Brenda offers the opinion that Kiana was the most beautiful of the villages to which she traveled. She described Noorvik also as a very nice village.

The coldest weather Brenda experienced during her mid-winter trek was 62 degrees—below at Shungnak.

Blizzard conditions at Wainwright and Noatak caused transportation delays of two and a half days each at those villages, and she was also weathered in at Kotzebue for several days when bush planes did not fly to outlying villages because of the extreme cold.

Barrow and Kotzebue were the only villages in the list where Brenda had ever visited before. At Point Hope she discovered a relative, a great aunt, whose being there she had not known before her arrival. She also visited a number of cousins at Wainwright.

Other villages Senator Gruening's assistant visited to discuss problems with the people in their own language included Kivalina, Selavik, Ambler, Deering, Buckland, Shishmaref, Wales, Teller, Brevig Mission, Nome, White Mountain, Golovin, Elim, Shaktoolik, Stebbins and St. Michael.

The most persistent village problems Brenda encountered were lack of employment, with literally no people having any gainful work at all in some villages, housing, electricity and transportation.

Brenda found that the absence of adequate lighting was proving to be harmful to children's eyes in most villages. She herself experienced some eye trouble after long exposure to kerosene lamp light.

It was so cold in the armory

at Shungnak, where Brenda met with the city council, that she had to keep her heavy gloves on while making notes.

She attempted to take a photograph of the unique meeting but her camera mechanism froze so that the camera would not operate.

Brenda, who is 24, is the daughter of Noah and Mollie Itta of Barrow. She is the next to the eldest in a family of 11 children.

Brenda has worked for Senator Gruening since January of 1966. She was graduated from Mt. Edgecumbe School, Arkansas City Junior College at Chillico, Okla., and Haskell Institute in Kansas.

She worked briefly for the Bureau of Indian Affairs and for a private firm in Washington, D. C., before joining Senator Gruening's staff.

"So many people all through the villages where I traveled remembered Sen. Gruening," Brenda said. "They all called him Governor." (Gruening was Governor of Alaska from 1939 to 1953 and visited many villages during his incumbency.)

Brenda traveled by bush airplane, snow-go and dog team. She stayed in the villages mostly with Bureau of Indian Affairs teachers although in two places she was a guest of VISTA Volunteers.

While on the village circuit Brenda ate native food almost entirely. This included pickled muktuk, moose, Ptarmigan soup, pickled salmon, reindeer and caribou stew, whale meat, sheefish, dried fish and the Eskimo delicacy known as kwoak (frozen fish or meat slivers dipped in seal oil).

The traveler was greatly surprised to find that young children throughout northwestern Alaska are no longer learning the Eskimo language.

At Noatak a member of the city council told her that his little girl, who had greeted the plane, ran home and said: "Daddy, there's a white lady here who knows how to speak in Eskimo."

Senator Gruening has made it a practice to visit all of the major Native villages in nonelection years.

He is frequently seen at Barrow, Nome, Kotzebue and Unalakleet, and last year he and his administrative assistant, George Sundborg, spent most of a week on St. Lawrence Island delving in depth into the problems of the communities of Savoonga and Gambell.

The older Eskimos know Gruening well. It was he who while serving nearly 14 years as Governor of Alaska fought a successful campaign against the opposition of the entrenched white establishment of those days to open the first polling places in Eskimo villages so that residents of the far North could participate in their government.

Governor Gruening also sponsored and over considerable opposition gained enactment of the Territory's antidiscrimination laws. He encouraged Eskimos to run for the Legislature, and many have served in it with distinction in the ensuing years.