

Gives Rebuttal to Letter by Woman

By RAY BANE

Route #1, Verona, Wisconsin

I have just finished reading the March 25th issue of your newspaper in which I found the obviously controversial item concerning the mentality of Alaska natives as displayed in their dog-keeping practices.

I feel particularly called on to write an answer to this article because: (1) I lived and worked among the Eskimos of northern Alaska for four years; (2) I have now entered the

(Continued on Page 4)

Gives Rebuttal to Letter. . .

(Continued from Page 1)

field of anthropology to professionally study the culture and problems of change among natives; and (3) I am now carrying on a study of dog traction as practiced among Eskimos.

I do not need to tell you that the comment concerning the "eight year old mentality" of natives tells us more of the "self-centered point of view of the writer than it does of the mental ability of natives.

I spent several years traveling by dogteam and umiak beside the Eskimos of Wainwright and Pt. Barrow, and I always knew it was I who was the "uneducated student" forced to rely on the skill, patience, and good humor of native teachers and friends.

I found that this skill was not inborn but had to be learned from older men and practical experience. Mother Nature is a strict disciplinarian who severely punishes the unintelligent and lazy that do not learn their lessons well.

Too often the white man fails to see the richness and complexity of native culture, because they do not go out and attempt to meet them on their own ground.

A non-native sitting in a snug modern home looking out his frosted window gets a warped view of these wonderful people. If he would visit them, he would usually find surprisingly neat and clean homes, even though water is hard to come by.

He would find people who enjoy just being with one-another, and sharing jokes and stories. With a little effort, he would find their language rich and expressive. More Eskimos have learned to speak English than whites who have mastered Inupiat (including myself). His wife would find native women lively and eager to share skills and knowledge.

Most of all, if they were willing to meet the natives and treat them as their rightful equals, they would find hospitality and friendship that lasts a lifetime. My wife and I left the arctic a year ago, and we constantly look forward to the time when we can go back.

You have already ably answered the charge of poor dog keeping. I might add that as of now I have written over 100 pages describing the skills and problems of dog traction and have only scratched the surface. When this paper is completed, I will forward a copy for your review.

Allow me to congratulate you on your efforts to present the problems and progress of Alaskan natives. Too often opinions are influenced by half-truths printed by tourist-writers who really know little of the people who they misrepresent. I hope to someday add my effort to yours in presenting the true picture.