

Moose meat, dancing send Abraham off

By Bill Hess

Tundra Times

An incongruous combination of moose meat, chocolate cake, Hawaiian and Tahitian dancing and snow flurries provided the backdrop for a recent celebration to honor a woman who has spent her life helping Native students.

The celebration was sponsored by the Alaska Native and American Indian Student organization and the Anchorage Community College Student Orientation Services (SOS) organization to honor Elaine Abraham who will soon leave them.

Abraham, who is originally from Yakutat, soon will be flying from Anchorage to Hawaii to further her studies on cross-cultural education.

The celebration potluck thrown in her favor was kept a big secret from her by the students whose lives she so touched.

Under her direction, ANAISO and SOS have grown from ideas to the centers of college life for many students from the Bush. Abraham has been responsible for helping many of them find food, housing and money when they arrived unprepared for academic life in the big city.

The SOS office and lounge have served as a gathering place for the students to get together, visit, hold meetings and provide each other with the spiritual and emotional strength needed to succeed in school.

Before coming to Anchorage, Abraham had served as the Vice-President of Rural Education Affairs at the University of Alaska in Fairbanks after the position was created at the suggestion of the Alaska Federation of Natives. Many people credit her with making the university there more responsive to the needs of Alaska Natives than it had been before.

Earlier, she had served as a nurse at Sheldon Jackson High School in Sitka, where she had become involved in the educational life at the school

and had been a major voice in the move to bring bilingual and cross-cultural education into the school.

In the early 1970's, Abraham also worked with the Title Four program out of the Office of Education in Washington, D.C., and was instrumental in deciding what monies would go where for Title Four activities in Indian country across the United States.

Now, she will be studying "Human Development in Changing Societies and Culture." "I feel the need because of all the changes being brought on my Native people by the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act," Abraham explained.

"I wanted to work in health and education because I love my Native people so much. I feel like I was born into it; like it was a responsibility the Great Spirit gave me."

Several potluck speakers heaped praise upon Abraham. "When we were students in Fairbanks, she gave us support," remembered Chuna McIntyre. "So we give her our support when she leaves for Hawaii."

Chuna performed some traditional Yup'ik songs and dances. "The songs and dances can never be taken away," he explained. "No matter what happens, it's in your heart."

Gordon Jackson, a Legislative aide and former executive vice-president of AFN, described Abraham as a "kind, loving, gentle; a very caring person and a true role model for Alaska Natives throughout the state."

He recalled when he first traveled from his village of Kake to attend high school at Sheldon Jackson. It was a frightening experience being away from home alone for the first time, he said.

"But there was this nurse who was always running around with this big smile on her face . . . just to see her smile lifted your spirits tremendously."

Sammy Lamebull credited

Linda Wilson, chairman of ANAISO, presents Elaine Abraham with one of the many gifts she received at her farewell potluck.

PHOTO BY BILL HESS

Abraham with helping him to see that drinking was not a Native value, and that he could find the strength to overcome that weakness. He remembered her philosophy, "God first, family second, and friends

last."

"She was there when you needed her, ready to lend a helping hand, or in some cases, a good swift kick," Lamebull praised.

Lloyd Sutton, who, like

Abraham, is Tlingit, pointed out that traditionally it was their peoples' custom to honor members of the opposite clan. Sutton pointed out that Abraham was of the Raven clan,

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Abraham may join son

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and he was of the Eagle clan.

He praised Abraham as being a person who helped make the rough transition from the old world into the new a little less difficult for many people.

"In the old tradition, I'm sure, there would have been a totem carved for Elaine!" he praised.

"My reward is to see the success of you people," Abraham said in appreciation, to see that step you take when life is really difficult, but you keep on going."

She then named a string of students and their accomplishments, ranging from "Diane who has succeeded as the first Alaska Native on Channel 13" to "Arlene Lord who came to my house and trusted me with her kitten."

"That's happiness for me!"

Abraham's departure date will be determined by her son, George "Boss" Ramos, Jr. Ramos was featured in the October 5, 1983 edition of the Tundra Times when his marine unit was sitting on a U.S. ship off the coast of Lebanon.

Happily, Ramos has left that war-ravaged region and is now

stationed in Hawaii. If he is able to come home for Christmas, Abraham will not leave until after the holiday. If he must stay on duty, then she will depart on the 20th, and join him in the South Pacific.

Her two daughters, Judy and Charmaine Ramos, her son, David Ramos and his wife Dorinda will take care of things in Anchorage until Abraham's expected return one year from now. Also staying behind will be her granddaughters, Melody and Nirvana.

Flu virus hits Alaska

The Associated Press

Atlanta — The national Centers for Disease Control reported today that isolated cases of influenza virus have been confirmed in six states, including Alaska.

Type A flu of the strain researchers call H3N2 was isolated from a 28-year-old woman and three other people in Fairbanks, where a flu outbreak began in November, the CDC said in its Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report.

Most reported flu activity in Alaska has been in working-age adults; school absence rates have not increased, the CDC said.

CDC researchers point out that their reporting of confirmed laboratory-isolated flu

virus counts just a few of the people who have the flu.

Today's report noted that "it is not possible with available information to determine" which influenza strains will be predominant in the 1983-84 flu season.