

Mrs. Edith Tegoseak Leads Quiet And Serene Religious Life in Fairbanks

By MARGARET A. GRAY

"It seemed like the bottom dropped away." These quiet words were spoken by Mrs. Edith Tegoseak, a 71 year-old Eskimo woman from Fairbanks, Alaska. She remembered this feeling when her father told her she could not become a nurse but must think about marriage. She was only 14 at the time. Her parents had given her to her paternal grandparents when she was born as pre-arranged. This was often done for very practical reasons to couples, usually relatives who had no children or whose children married and left home.

Edith's father was a hunter. Seal, walrus, fox and fish were needed for their food, clothing and income. The family, six remaining children and the parents travelled out above Barrow as well as along the coast, always on the move. Later he herded reindeer east of the village. Edith, however was reared in Barrow and was the only one of the children to attend school. The Presbyterian Missionary, Leander Stevenson had come to Barrow near the end of the nineteenth century to begin a school. This was taken over by the U.S. government in later years. It was in this mission school that Edith received her education through the fifth grade.

Rev. Doctor Spence arrived in Barrow about 1915, as near as Edith can remember, after Dr. and Mrs. Marsh left. They had one son and he was killed in the First World War while the Spencers were serving in Barrow. Edith remembers their sweet spirit during this sad time. Perhaps this girded her for the work that God seemed to direct her to in later years.

Two or three girls and Edith were hired by the doctor to work as nurse's aides at the clinic and to help with housework in the manse. (Edith showed an adeptness in her work and the doctor offered to send her to a hospital "outside" for nurse's training.) These girls were called intermediates. They would hold services in the village homes where they read the translated Ten Commandments, Beatitudes and other portions of scriptures to older people in particular. Some of the adult men had already done some translation of the scriptures under earlier missionaries, recalls Edith. She remembers very few details about this, only that they could teach in their own language from the Bible. The younger couples went on Monday nights to the church to memorize scripture and learn about Bible stories and doctrine.

Reuben Tegoseak came from east of Barrow. He began working for Billie Egowa, Edith's father as a reindeer-herder apprentice. It was at this time Billie arranged for his daughter's marriage. Though Edith desperately wanted to be a nurse she felt she could not go against her father's wishes. She shed many tears in the months that followed but then she set her mind to go the way her people had done for years and prepared to marry Reuben. These two young people had only seen each other a few times before April 1919 when they were married by Rev. Dr. Spence in the Presbyterian Church in Barrow.

With her new husband, a canvas tent, sleeping bags and a few pots and pans, Edith began her married life as a reindeer herder's wife wandering the tundra as they followed the herds winter and summer. She had known some of the people in the herding families, liked and admired them. Her



LEADS A GOOD LIFE — Mrs. Edith Tegoseak of Fairbanks, an Eskimo woman originally from Barrow, lives a quiet religious life.

—Photo by CHARLES GRAY

marriage was filled with contentment as her husband was a kind man who appreciated his wife, his children and his way of life.

Though Reuben had not come under the Christian teaching, he embraced this faith under the influence of his wife. Edith held services in the family tent on Sunday morning even though they were travelling part of the day sometimes.

The tent life was fun for the families in many ways, they were together in work and in purpose. Each family unit was important, the women's work of helping load the sleds, orderly packing, discarding 'junk', caring for the children, cooking and sewing, occupied every minute. The men walked, following the reindeer and moving the 'tent city' four or five days. They let the reindeer go at night in the winter and the Lap dogs helped round them up the next day to direct them to good feeding ground. The Lap dogs were trained by their individual owners and were only used for herding. Other dogs were used for sled work and for packing.

The reindeer travelled continually and with a 1200 to 1500 head herd, it took five or six men and several trained dogs to keep the animals in control. In winter the reindeer pawed the snow to get food. Edith remembers there were originally four large herd but these were split to smaller herds after they reached 1500. The steers were fattened then butchered in early October and transported to a trading post by sled. More dog teams were hired for the trip to Beachy Point. People came in to trade at these isolated places. Barrow-area herders did the same.

Edith drove a 13-dog team with children and gear on these treks. She was afraid of driving the reindeer, although she heard that some women in the Barrow herds did that.

Edith was taken to a more permanent wilderness cabin to be with her real mother when most of the babies were due. There she

stayed quiet for ten days after delivery before her return to the reindeer herder's life. One child was born in the tent on the trek with an elderly woman attending. Boiled water was prepared, thread, sinew or clean hair was used to tie the cord. Scissors were used to cut the cord. "My lead dog, the Lap dog and I all had our babies about the same time," she recalls. She had eight children delivered by her mother. Three were born in the hospital at Barrow where Reuben had gone with his family to work for Puget Sound.

Edith became ill and in 1949 and had to be taken to Fairbanks for medical care because the facilities at Barrow were not adequate for her condition. Reuben felt that it would be wise to move the family to Fairbanks to keep them all together, they moved into the Railroad housing when he started working for the Alaskan Railroad as soon as he arrived in the city.

There were a few Barrow people in Fairbanks by this time as well as families from other northern interior areas. Wilbur and Cora Itchoak (stepsister) had already set up the afternoon church time at the Presbyterian Church where the informal evangelical service in the Inupiaq language was much like you still find in Barrow and in Fairbanks at the 3 PM service. The pastors visited the Tegoseak home and those of the others often in the early days to help weld the city church and the village families. Edith was asked by the congregation to be a deacon. She attends both English and Inupiaq speaking services as do many of the older brethren from the villages even when English is not their main language.

Edith's life has been one of service, she finds the extra time and energy to do the things most of us put off until the right circumstances present themselves. Perhaps this is one reason she seems ageless. For many years the Welfare agencies, the Health Department, and the

Court System called upon her for interpretation both in language and cultural needs. Her home was and still is a place that village people often stay. The rising costs have made this difficult at times. Edith visits at the hospital, goes to homes even if it means a trip to Barrow to comfort loved ones and interprets needs to the church family when necessary. Our deacons have been more effective because of this interpretation.

Tragedy has not been a stranger: the loss of two children by accident, a grandchild by freezing within days of the death of her husband and the ever present problems that affect those in a cultural change are not strangers to her loved ones either.

Mrs. Tegoseak completed her ninth grade education in 1968

under the Adult Education program. At that time cataracts became severe and she had surgery. This ended her ability to sew parkas, fur boots called mukluks, and wolf ruffs for added income, though she can sew to read.

A tourist might remark about the small Eskimo woman they had seen walking the two miles to the Post Office each morning or a visitor at church may comment on the blessing they received as Edith sang a special in the Inupiaq language then asked the congregation in English. She began her walk with God many years ago long before the first airplane shattered the arctic stillness and her quiet voice still carries his name when a road slices the vast arctic to the oil fields on the north coast.

Kootznoowoo's 'Survey Alaska'

Kootznoowoo, Inc., the Angoon Village Corporation, is forming a subsidiary corporation, SURVEY ALASKA.

SURVEY ALASKA will provide services to government and private agencies in the fields of aerial photography, topographic mapping and surveying.

The new corporation, which will be based in Anchorage, will have the capability of providing forest resource photography along with other photogrammetric services.

Jay Whiteford will be General Manager of the corporation and will be responsible to the Board of Directors of SURVEY ALASKA. Mr. Whiteford, a Registered Land Surveyor, Commercial Pilot, and Geologist, has twenty-two years experience in the management of mapping and surveying companies.

"Our major objective in going into this business," says Daniel Johnson, President of Kootznoowoo, Inc., "is to make a profit for our shareholders. SURVEY ALASKA will also provide training for our people in this rapidly expanding field."

Ed Gamble, Land Manager of the Village Corporation, feels that SURVEY ALASKA can supply much of the raw data

needed to develop the Multiple Use Plan now underway in Angoon.

Future plans call for a branch office in Juneau and a training program to bring more Alaskan Natives into the corporation.

BLM Asks Funds

The Bureau of Land Management is asking Congress to appropriate \$19,950,000 in supplemental funds for firefighting with about \$10 million of this to go Alaska.

Ed Hastey, BLM assistant director of administration, gave these figures at a Senate Appropriations Interior Subcommittee budget hearing, chaired by U.S. Sen. Ted Stevens.

This supplemental request is in addition to the regular Fiscal 1975 budget of \$4.8 million. The original firefighting budget is always made low because it is difficult to anticipate expenses for the coming year.

Hastey cited a particularly high fire incidence in most western states because of last year's dry summer, but said that Alaska had only a slightly higher than average fire season.

He said 869 fires burned 663,000 acres of BLM land in Alaska last year.

KIAK 970



MIDNIGHT TO 6 A.M. — STEVE THOMPSON

6 A.M.-10:30 A.M. — LARRY STEPHENS

10:30 A.M.-3 P.M. — DON BYRON

3 P.M.-6:30 P.M. — DICK LOBDELL

6:30 P.M.-MIDNIGHT — LAN CARSON

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