

Letters to the Tundra Times

Gone to extremes

October 23, 1980

Mr. Joe McGinniss
42 South Street
Williamstown, Mass. 01267

Dear Mr. McGinniss:

This letter may not be as interesting as your book but at least it will be truthful.

It was quite obvious that the person you referred to as Olive Cook in your book "Going to Extremes" was myself.

When I invited you to come to my village I did not know you were going to use me and my family in your book. At first I was delighted when I heard that an excerpt from the book appeared in the September 20th Anchorage Daily News. However after reading it I was shocked and amazed that you took advantage of me and my family's hospitality.

I found a lot of that segment about the village and the attitude of me and my family to

be most highly exaggerated and/or fabricated.

In writing this letter I would like to clear up some of the misconceptions that some people would have after reading the chapter about "The Village" in your book.

First of all, I objected to your referring to me as being "drunk and stoned" when I invited you in Washington, D.C. I was of sound mind and body when I extended my invitation. I had heard that you were going to be in Bethel the same time I would be home for Christmas vacation so I invited you. I knew you were coming and told my family about it. If they had objected to that I would have told you not to come when you called from Bethel prior to coming to the village. Also, you would be there during Russian Orthodox Christmas — Slavic. I remember making a point about it because I thought it would be exciting and unique for you to experience one of the highlights of winter in the village. The singing of songs don't start until all the singers (and people) are gathered inside the house and the candles had been lit. It is a ritual in every

house. They don't come "spinning the prayer wheel, waving the incense, and singing the ancient Russian processional hymn . . . the singing was coming now in rich mellow tones through the frigid night air." Mr. McGinniss you must have heard all that in your wild and imaginative head. You also made it sound like I absolutely abhorred Slavic. Like I said it is one of the highlights of winter. I looked forward to Slavic at that time and to this day I anticipate the coming of Slavic.

My mother wouldn't ever dream of asking money or food from her guests whether they are relation or not. You made her sound very rude and indifferent to you. She is not that kind of a person. I'm sorry you were offended by our hospitality and our food. Koolaid was not the only thing to drink in the house. There was coffee, tea, cocoa mix, can milk (to which you can dilute with water to have milk) and dried milk. And why in the world would we want to eat fermented seal meat??? Unless there was a famine and we were

(Continued on Page Twelve)

● Letters to the Editor

(Continued from Page Two)

absolutely starving. Mr. McGinniss, you sure come up with some wild ideas. As for demanding for presents and food and money, I don't remember me or my family doing that. As I remember prior to your leaving you offered to send something to the family.

At the time you were my guest I was not embarrassed of you, remember I had invited you. In fact, I remember feeling excited because after all you were a writer. Now I feel embarrassed and hurt that you wrote all those things about me, my family, food and Slavic. I would not want people (especially in the lower 48) to think you were describing the real way of life of the Eskimo villages in rural Alaska. I feel

like I had been used.

Truthfully yours,
Grace Nichols
Bethel, Alaska 99559

cc: Tundra Times

Mt. Edgecumbe closure

Bristol Bay Area
Health Corporation
P.O. Box 10235
Dillingham, AK. 99576

October 29, 1980

Mr. Earl Barlow, Director
Office of Indian Education
Department of Interior
Bureau of Indian Affairs

18th & "C" Streets,
Northwest, Code 500
Washington, D.C. 29245

Dear Mr. Barlow:

My organization is a tribal organization representing 32 villages. We recently used the P.L. 93-638 contracting process to become the first tribal organization in the U.S. to assume management of a total Indian Health Service Hospital. As you can surmise we strongly believe in self-determination.

Our request is that you visit each and every village in Alaska and most specifically the Bristol Bay Area that has students in Mt. Edgecumbe school before any decision is made to close down this school. Also, further that you formally meet with the four (4) school district boards in our area.

I cannot emphasize enough to you the need to consult with all the people involved in such a decision.

As the President of one of the Regional Education Attendance areas (Southwest Regional Schools) we strongly believe in alternatives and choices. It's not as if we are now forced to send our children thousands of miles away to get an education any more, things have changed. Our village peoples now have had time to analyze two and

three ways of educating their children. They must be listened to!

Though I am in strong support of educating our people at home so that parents have a large part in this process, it is the parents and children affected who must weigh the benefits of going away or staying home for an education. This must be thoroughly explained. Mr. Barlow, BIA's trust responsibility has not ended and an administrative convenience must not dictate Mt. Edgecumbe's fate.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Robert J. Clark
Executive Director

cc: Tundra Times

Needed: a bridge

To: Village & City Councils
From: Ronald Sam
Date: Nov. 10, 1980
Re: Bridge between Alatna and Allakaket

Dear Sirs:

This is a copy of a Resolution that I am having passed at our next Board of Directors of K'oyit'Pots'ina, Ltd. meeting. I am asking for all the help and back up letters (Personal or Otherwise) to appropriate Agencies or to anyone who may help us.

Many of you know that we lost a resident of Alatna recent-

ly because of the problem stated in the Resolution. Through time immemorial, or more accurately stated, since settlement of Allakaket and Alatna, we had tolerated the hardship of the river crossing. It was taken for granted that we had to suffer the crossing as a natural hardship because of our near totally subsistent way of life which was tolerated. Because of the rapid changes brought on by the CIL Discoveries and natural progress since, this is one problem that should be resolved as soon as possible.

For a touch of authentication on the two to three months of living with the problem, it is a fact that can be documented. I would ask that the Residents of Allakaket and Alatna take pictures and record all further hardships suffered by them. This would be from starting cold outboard motors in September through the passing of the last chunk of ice in May.

We have suffered long enough, even through funerals in the spring and fall which is a known fact through out the Interior. With that Thought in mind, I again state that your help will be appreciated.

Respectfully,
Ronald Sam