

Scholarship Named In Honor of Emily I. Brown by Ira Harkey

By EDDI PARKER

Emily Ivanoff Brown frequently gets up at 4 a.m. in order to put in a few hours of writing before her daily round of classes at the University of Alaska begins. Yet this shy, soft-spoken, grandmother says, "I don't work hard enough."

Her colleagues in the university's Journalism Department don't agree with her. Because Emily has dedicated herself to "writing books on everything that has to do with Eskimo life," the department has named the new \$150 Emily Ivanoff Brown Scholarship in her honor.

The award, to be given each semester, is the gift of Ira Harkey of Columbus, Ohio, Pulitzer Prize winning journalist and Carnegie visiting professor in journalism in 1968-69 at the university. In giving the award, Harkey requested that it be named for a Native writer.

The 67-year-old Mrs. Brown is enrolled in two writing courses, one photography ("I'm pretty bad") and one music course at the university. She has a purpose. Her ambition is to translate all phases of Eskimo culture into the written English word so that it can be appreciated by the white man, too.

"I'm writing a book on Eskimo legends," she explains, "and one on the music and songs and one on food. About the food, I'll include in it the 30 kinds of wild eatable greens the Eskimos use and illustrate it with photographs."

This Native of Unalakleet, Alaska, says she will see her writing through to completion "if the Lord willing." And you know He must be for He has seen her through years of tribulations which would have made a lesser woman give up.

A teacher in the Bureau of Indian Affairs' schools most of her life, Mrs. Brown is using her retirement pay now to return to school and she declares that "as long as I'm welcome here I'll come back to write."

In February, 1969, she was felled by a stroke and, while recovering from that, underwent a serious operation in August during which she medically 'died' on the operating table. Yet, two days after her release from the hospital, she was enrolling in the university for fall semester.

But she had bounced back before. Years ago, she recalls, when she was teaching in Shaktoolik in an old church, she came down with pneumonia.

The village ran a black blanket up the flag pole as a distress signal and Jack Jefford, a now-retired bush pilot, saw it.

"He landed on the tundra, unloaded his mail bags and put me aboard."

He flew her to Nome for medical attention and she credits him with saving her life.

Her father was one-half Russian and her mother full Eskimo from the Malemute tribe. Born at Unalakleet and reared in Shaktoolik, she left Alaska in 1919 when she was eleven years old to begin her schooling at Chemawa Indian School in Salem, Oregon. It would be nine years before she would return to Alaska permanently.

Mrs. Brown decided on teaching as a career when she was a sophomore in high school. "I

saw the vastness of education," she says, "and I wanted to help my own people. I had the chance to learn to read and write and I wanted to teach others the same."

Back in Alaska after graduation in 1928, she taught at Kotzebue primary school for two years, managing in that time to save \$1,000 out of her \$115 a month salary. The \$1,000 took Emily to Seattle General Hospital because by this time she had decided her people were in need of instruction in health and sanitation.

Recalling her year at the hospital when she was a probationary nursing student, Mrs. Brown says, "I managed to pass. I tried to prove I was made of good stuff."

Love interfered with her goal to become a nurse. She met and married Robert Brown. "You fall in love and then you forget all your goals," she says with a smile.

The couple spent the next few years with Mrs. Brown's parents in Shaktoolik during which time Emily's three sons were born. It was not until 1938, after her husband's death, that Emily began teaching again. She wouldn't stop until 1968.

A string of mothers clubs for Natives in villages around Alaska owe their existence to Emily, who organized them wherever she went in her 30 years of teaching.

Her first such club was organized in Unalakleet. "The women didn't have anything to do so I tried to give them lessons in homemaking, child care, canning and sewing."

Often times she was the only teacher in her schools. "Those times," she recalls, "I would use the smartest eighth graders as helpers."

In 1943 she was teaching back in Unalakleet but 1948 saw her moved to White Mountain Boarding School. Although dates are more difficult to remember now, Mrs. Brown recalls that in 1954 she moved to Arctic Slope as the teacher. She also recalls that she didn't want to leave her family to go.

"My mother told me, 'Emily, if you go up north and at least teach those children how to blow their noses and be clean you'll be doing your duty as a teacher.'"

"That's a beginning," Emily says, "if you teach them to be clean. Sanitation has always been a problem among my people. Even now when I see a dirty nose I think of what my mother said."

She calls Arctic Slope, "the toughest time I ever had. I had 19 students in grades one through eight. In addition to being the teacher I was the postmistress, radio operator, nurse, and preacher for burials."

But Arctic Slope also saw Emily's writing talent bloom. She had gone out to a summer school in Utah in 1951 where she had been involved in a writing course for Alaska teachers and now in Arctic Slope, she began writing down the Eskimo folk tales her mother had told her.

She did it, she says, because the children in school "were sick of hearing about Dick and Jane."

Wherever Emily Ivanoff Brown has taught, she has left an enduring impression. In Kotzebue

from 1957 to 1961 she organized the first public library by writing a book on Eskimo history, using her own \$350 to have it published and then selling the copies at \$1 each in order to raise money for a library.

She was back in Kotzebue as high school librarian when she had her stroke in 1969.

Her stamina as a teacher is matched only by her stamina as a student. Beginning with 1951 she went to school every summer until 1964 in order to obtain her college degree. In 1964 she was finally graduated from the University of Alaska, just three years before her youngest son was graduated.

Her first summer in Utah inspired her to get her degree, she says. "I didn't like my titles. I was called an instructional aide, not a real teacher and I wanted to be a teacher in name too."

In 1968 Emily came to Fairbanks to work as a counselor for the Bureau of Indian Affairs at the university's College campus. "My job was to welcome Native students, to let them know there were others of their kind on campus."

Now that she is a student and not a counselor, she is still welcoming Native students to campus, that is when she isn't writing.

She is also working on a family history which will center around her father who was not only a BIA U.S. commissioner in Shaktoolik, but an interpreter who spoke all major Eskimo dialects and minister in the Swedish Covenant Church. He was president of the church conference in Alaska for 27 years.

Now that her sons are grown—Leonard is in Unalakleet, Stanley in Seattle and Melvin in Sitka—she says her aim is "to keep going as long as I can. My sons are disgusted. They want me to retire and keep still and enjoy life. But I am enjoying my life because I'm reaching my goals."

"And what are those goals? Education, service to my people, raising my family so they're respected and now, writing my own cultural philosophy of life and being an example to Native students. I want to be the right kind of example. I try to live up to the high ideals of my parents. When you have good parents, as I did, you can't help but be what they are."