

# Despite Tragic Background Grandma Lucy Lives Good Life

By AGNES PETE

Left to die on the tundra between Bethel and Nelson Island over 90 years ago as an infant during a famine, Lucy Link, an Eskimo from Bethel, Alaska, has outlived her sons and brothers and sisters.

A sister who could not bear to see her die had no idea what a great humanitarian act it was when she went back to get her infant sister and stuck a piece of seal blubber in her mouth to keep her alive.

Since that day, Lucy had lived through many good and bad times, fed many visitors from outlying areas, housed pregnant mothers awaiting the birth of a child under care of the doctors in Bethel, counseled distraught persons, and has been "maureluq," or grandmother, to many people.

Lucy, who has lived to see her two great-great grandchildren and maybe more, has been mother to many people who aren't even related to her — and a wonderful great-grandmother to me.

When she used to take care of me as a baby, Lucy lived at our present fish camp site, five miles north of Bethel, on the Kuskowim River. There she and her husband fished during the summer and smoked fish for the long winter, picked berries, and went hunting and trapping.

Today there are five graves at the camp, two of which are my mother's parents and the other two Lucy's sons. The members of my family use the camp during the summer to carry on the tradition of smoking fish for winter. They also pick rhubarb, high bush cranberries and blueberries, gather wild vegetables, and maybe keep a small garden.

The camp is a place of many memories, of the older days when mail was brought by dog team, when my mother's parents had a small store, when at Christmas the freight did not arrive on time, and when my mother's parents gave credit to customers who wanted to buy presents for their kids.

I remember all the good times eating many kinds of Eskimo food at my grandmother's, especially whenever some coastal food was given to her by friends and relatives from Nelson Island — things like dried herring, fish eggs, walrus, seal meat and oil, birds and bird eggs.

The foods we ate from the Bethel area included Eskimo ice cream (made of blueberries, blackberries or salmonberries with sugar, tallow and fish or salmonberries mixed with seal oil), moose meat, dried and smoked salmon, whitefish, blackfish, bear, rabbit, ptarmigan, geese and ducks.

The tastiest food then was rotten salmon heads ("tepa") which had been left in a hole in the ground for about ten days



**LIVED A USEFUL LIFE** — Left to die as a baby because of a terrible famine, Lucy Link was rescued by an older sister and is now living a fine life being a "grandmother" even to youngsters and young people who are not related to her. To the author of this story, she is "a wonderful Great-grandmother to me."

and covered with grass and dirt and left to rot. We used to eat it in Grandma's smokehouse in Bethel, but now health officials say it is bad. Even so, many Eskimos have eaten it, and lived for years on end.

My grandmother used to sew many furs, making beautiful parkas out of squirrels, rabbit, moose, reindeer, mink, muskrat, and decorated with strips of fur

or tassels of yarn and beads. In the olden days she used to make rain coats and boots out of seal intestines before rubber was introduced. She also made pants of fur and mukluks to keep the feet warm and to prevent the danger of frost bite.

Lucy learned the importance of warm clothing. Once, when Bethel was in its developing stage, she had to assist a doctor

cut a woman's frostbitten feet and calves off. Today, people have an easier time surviving, what with more modern methods of keeping body and soul together available.

Since I spent considerable time with Lucy as a child, her industrious nature may have indeed rubbed off on me. She always seemed to be busy sewing something, cleaning house, cooking, making guests comfortable, or caring for people when sick.

She loved people for what they were and helped them in any way possible — traditional of the hospitable Eskimo spirit. In the olden days people had to help each other on matters of survival.

Though Lucy spoke Eskimo, or Yupik, fluently, she understood very little English. For many years, we had a difficult time communicating as I understood only English, mostly because the missionaries had forbidden my parents to speak Eskimo in school.

They had to relearn the language after returning to Bethel and thought it best for the children to speak English.

So, oddly enough, it wasn't

until college that I picked up some of the Eskimo language after taking nine months of Yupik. Upon going back to Bethel, therefore, Lucy and I were able to communicate much better. I understood more of what she said, though I could only speak simple words or sentences in Eskimo.

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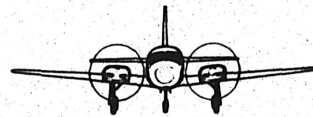
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