

The way it was

By Enid Brown

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The year is late 50's. The setting is in a remote village on the Seward Peninsula.

I can remember waking up to a kerosene lamp burning low, snuggled under a warm, soft, homemade goose down blanket.

"Akuu, Akuu, time to get up", my Dad called out. Reluctantly I got out of bed, turned up the lamp, ran to the woodstove and built a fire. The shavings and kindling had been prepared the night before.

It was back under the fluffy, welcome blanket until you could hear the whistling of the boiling kettle. By then the house with the wooden planks on the floor had warmed up a little, so it wasn't so hard to leave the bed the second time to make coffee, and serve it to my parents.

Shortly, Dad got up to light the Coleman lamp, and Mom started our usual sourdough hotcakes and "mush" for breakfast. The bacon was slab, which was saved for beans.

Fortunately I had other brothers to share this chore, and I had to get up to do this every fifth day or so.

Getting ready for school included doing the dishes. The brothers always got to do them. Mom was busy braiding my hair, I could feel their frustration about my getting out of that particular chore, five

mornings out of the week.

After school it was more helping around the house. Wood to be chopped, water to be packed from the river. Getting water, I thought, was fun. We hitched up two or three dogs to a small sled, tied down the container, and went above the village to fetch the cold, sweet water.

There was no TV, no phones, people visited a lot more often. Telling stories, recounting legends, and history, and family trees.

I remember visiting with my parents, sitting on the floor, watching them drinking coffee, and listening as they talked, more often than not, in the soft tongue of the Inupiaq.

I often wondered what the details of their stories were. I could pick up the main gist, but because I wasn't taught my Native language, I missed out on a lot. Still, the companionship, the closeness made me feel good and warm inside. It gives me the feeling of thankfulness and pride I am part of the Brown family.

Editor's note: The author will write more on growing up and living.
