

'People who know 'Ebie' are fond of a favorite opening line of his, "when I was working for MGM . . ."'

Ebrulik Rock

By MARILYN RICHARDS

This whaling captain does not guide his umiak anymore, but his wheelchair.

The 77 year old hunter had not been home in seven years, since his stroke, and he was looking forward to seeing his village, family and friends. He picked an opportune time. His regional corporation, Arctic Slope, had their annual shareholders' meeting scheduled, which would mean an influx of people from Barrow, Wainwright and other points descending upon Point Hope.

For the whaling captain to attend, it would mean much traveling, and then renewing friendships, visiting, reminiscing and story telling. To make up seven years in a weekend.

Ebrulik Rock has a twinkle in his eye and an easy smile which belies his years. He can simultaneously radiate gentleness, calmness, humor and warmth.

Ebrulik, meaning sod house in Inupiat, is the eldest of the five children born to Sam and Keshorma (Weyahok) Rock in 1903 at Point Hope. Ebrulik proudly remembers his father as a self-educated man with no formal training. But Sam Rock was well known and respected as the reader and interpreter in Point Hope, primarily for the Episcopal missionaries. His mother, Keshorma, is poignantly recalled in a poem traditionally run by Tundra Times for Memorial Day. It was written by Howard Rock, Ebrulik's younger brother. Two other brothers are also deceased. Sister Helen Seveck of Kotzebue survives. Helen and her husband Chester are renowned dancers and hosts of the Arctic Circle community.

Not a rascal or mischievous boy, Ebrulik put the sparetime of his childhood to good use. "As soon as I was able to I would always try to go hunt."

His love of hunting came naturally and his



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father's training came early, "My father first asked me to go out with him when I was seven; to sleep during the day and to watch for whales at night because my eyesight was so good."

Ebrulik still has his whaling gear at Point Hope. Besides whaling, he hunted ugruk, the large bearded seal. Perhaps as it should be, the traditional whaling captain is unaware of the plight of today's subsistence whalers and their quota problems with the International Whaling Commission and the Interior Department. Ebrulik said, "In my hunting days, two whales a year, if we were fortunate to get that, were enough to feed my village," of less than 300.

His own education never went beyond the sixth grade, but that gave him more time to pursue his livelihood and hunt.

He was married to Elizabeth Killigvuk,

also of Point Hope, and they adopted and raised four children. Elizabeth died in 1960 but there are now seven grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren, residing in places from Alaska to Delaware.

Ebrulik made his first trip to Barrow by umiak in 1920. He also made a trip to Kiana, remembering that he traded muktuk for pan-iktak (dried white fish).

When he was 19, he "took a preacher from Point Hope to Shungnak by dogteam. There was hardly any wind. It wasn't cold. I used to lead the dogs all day long. We used to make ten to fifteen miles a day."

Ebrulik also recalled the first airplane arriving in Point Hope. The story sounds familiar and seems to be shared by the generation but some tellages have slightly different versions: "I can't tell you the name of the pilot, but he could have been Joe Crosson." Ebrulik said, "The people were in their sod house, heating water on their small primer stove. Something was getting louder and louder and at first they thought it was the stove. But it wasn't the stove getting louder and louder. They went outside and were watching, and watching and fell straight back after they were watching the plane went over. They got scared. When the plane flew overhead, they fell back watching it!"

Ebrulik said, "every year the Coast Guard came and checked what the Native people were doing." The year was 1921. "The preacher went to Barrow but came back when he heard the white school teacher, he was 19, was living with a Native girl. The teacher was scared of what the preacher would say. The teacher murdered the preacher because they suspected the preacher was angry." That year Ebrulik made his first trip to Nome on the Coast Guard ship, which was taking the teacher there for his preliminary hearing.

Ebrulik does not recall exactly what happened to the teacher, but there were rumors. "People said his uncle was a millionaire so he

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might have got off." He said "the preacher was replaced by William M. Thomas. Then there was Archdeacon Goodman who was very good, too."

People who know 'Ebie' are fond of a favorite opening line of his, "when I was working for MGM. . ." In the winter of 1933-34, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer was filming 'Eskimo' starring Ray (Wise) Mala, a Native ori-

ginally from Kotzebue. Ebrulik happened to be in Nome at the time and "I heard they were looking for people. That is how I got to be in it. We were in the background mostly, whatever they told us to do we act. Sometimes we did close-ups."

"I made a little more than \$105 and we worked like slaves, but in those days the dollar meant quite a bit more compared to today." 'Eskimo' was also filmed in the Cape Lisbourne and Teller areas.

Did he have dreams of stardom? "Sure." He even ventured to Hollywood where an original screen goddess, Jean Harlow, posed with him. The whereabouts of that photograph remain uncertain.

Ebrulik is in a wheelchair and calls himself "a cripple" in a matter of fact tone, not a derogatory one. "I never stayed in Point Hope when I was normal because there was no fuel."

Home now is the Pioneers' Home in Fairbanks, where he had moved to be near Howard. He reads a lot and "we sit around and drink a lot of coffee." And yes, he watches television and movies, not only because he was in one but "I'm in a chair", he shrugs. Visitors and prepared Native food are always welcome there to see him. And they'll be meeting a remarkable gentleman.