

## Yes, We've beeeeen there

When an editor takes a week-long business trip, and leaves the publisher with a rare opportunity to fill some editorial space, instead of the usual scheming with directors and general managers and advisors about how to keep his editor in business, it is a real temptation. It's tempting to take the space and write some scathing comments about some boiling issue like d-2, or Greenpeace and the Aleuts, or the oil companies, or some politician that is vulnerable this week, or just about any hot issue which is bound to raise the blood pressure of a few readers. If our editor is delayed coming back from the East because he can't find an airplane that isn't grounded, and I have to do this same thing come our next deadline, I'll make sure that you fine Tundra Times readers will get the most blood-curdling, editorially-righteous opinion you ever read. But after an editor has dealt with the tough stuff to the extent his hair has a generous sprinkling of gray before he's turned thirty, it's nice to leave the meaty issues to serious young editors. After all, a publisher is supposed to count the ad space up, and let editors figure out how to fill the holes.

So I'd rather write about my favorite subject. But, I can't decide whether my favorite subject is people, or flying, or fishing. I'm pretty much interested in all three this time of year. That would logically mean I should write about someone who is people, and a flier, and who also fishes. I think I know just the subject. Recently, I started to Fairbanks on a business trip. A couple of weeks earlier, I did the same leg of the trip in a sleek, fast little private airplane. This time, I was riding up the highway with a good friend in a well-traveled, green compact that sometimes could manage 30 m.p.h. uphill. But I'm not going to tell you about this friend. I wouldn't know where to begin.

I'll tell you about a friend I went to visit a couple of days later in Fairbanks. My time in Fairbanks was supposed to be brief, but you can't imagine how devious this guy is. He said for me to stay for dinner. That was innocent enough. I should have suspected he was up to something when he asked me to stay on for fresh muktuk his wife got from Barrow. I was fed, relaxed and vulnerable when he took me into his office to look at his big Alaska-Canada map, and then he got me — hook, line and sinker. "I wonder if the trout are biting up north," he said. "My airplane is in fine shape and all gassed up," he added. And then, we were saved for a time, because we found out the weather wasn't so great in the northwest. So I wasn't prepared at all when he asked, "Have you ever been to Tuktoyuktuk?" Tuktoyuktuk is in the Mackenzie Delta area of the Northwest Territories, and a ways from Fairbanks. The next thing I knew we were in Old Crow, Yukon Territory, clearing customs with Brian Merriweather of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, a cordial fellow. I knew we were in Canada when he asked where we had "beeeeen" instead of "bin" like Americans say.

I got you this far. And I'm sorry, but I lied! I am going to talk about politics. Tuktoyuktuk weather was terrible, but we did get to Inuvik and Aklavik. Aklavik is near where my grandmother was born — which indicates that there is something to this circumpolar Inuit thing, since I was born in Kotzebue. There are a lot of Gordons in Inuvik and Aklavik, all fine folks and real Eskimos, and this is where the politics comes in. We spent an evening in Aklavik with Danny and Annie Gordon. It was Election Day in Canada. We were glued to watching the CBN (for "north") coverage of the election in living color. We got caught up in the suspense and the excitement. Then it was over. Trudeau was out, and Joe Clark was the new P.M. We were overwhelmed. History was being made before our eyes, and yesterday we had thought we'd be somewhere up the Noatak River near Kotzebue instead of in this country where they say "beeeeen" instead of "bin."

When it came time for the speeches, I couldn't help myself. I had to laugh, and smile, and laugh again. Danny looked a little surprised and perhaps offended, thinking I might be making fun of his government. I explained, "You're an Eskimo. I'm an Eskimo. And we're all Natives. Right?" "Right!" Then I said, "How come we are sitting in front of the tube, watching politicians speak grandly about national destiny in English and in French, when we're all Eskimos?" Then we all laughed and agreed that somehow the Inupiat language was a little left out of the process. And I thought to myself then I would listen more attentively to Eben Hopson about the Inuit Circumpolar Conference when I got back to Alaska.

In the arctic regions, political lines — like airlines and pipelines — all run north and south, except the Natives run east and west. Just like my friend Johnny Anderson and I when we climbed into his little red and white Citabria and flew west from the Mackenzie Delta through the Rat River Valley Pass in the Richardson Mountains, above the ancient canyons of the Porcupine River and into Fort Yukon, wondering about going through the customs bit (fine folks, though) on a trip to visit your own kind.

Back with my friend John, looking at the big Alaska-Canada-Greenland map in his office, we grinned at each other. He said, "It wouldn't take much to get to Greenland." I replied, "I wonder about gas?" John answered, "No problem, these days, I don't think." My friend Johnny certainly has a winning way about him.

Editor Babb — you get back here and take care of d-2 and the politicians and all the burning issues, because Johnny and I want to get started on a slow, low trip to find some cousins. —T.R.j.