

Bush life isn't "drab, bleak" as reported

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A lot of people come to Nome for a few days and miss most of the show. And there is a show here, as there is in any isolated, out-of-the-way place in America. But these Outside reporters come here and write news stories that very few people in Nome can recognize and this even happens sometimes when big-city reporters from Anchorage come here to do a story.

You probably read about the Wall Street Journal reporter who wrote a front page story for that august New York publication and completely, or almost completely missed the mark. His editors titled his story, "In Alaska, No Roads Lead to Nome" and what was printed looked like nothing more than yellow journalism from a San Francisco-based reporter who did not like Nome at all.

Well, each to his or her own.

There was an Anchorage reporter for the Associated Press who was here to cover the

Iditarod Race and every one of his stories had some funny words in it. For example, he called Nome "a small, drab city."

I notice that many of our urban Alaskans use words like this when they travel to the Bush. In Bethel, an Anchorage radio reporter remarked on the "bleakness" of Bethel. Bleak, drab, desolate, this is how a lot of our city cousins describe the Bush. They see everything with their city eyes and all their value judgments are filtered through those urban eyes.

I was down in Bethel in November and I thought it was beautiful. It wasn't bleak to my eyes at all. I said so to the reporter I was talking about but she didn't seem to understand at all. To her it was indeed a bleak and desolate place. To me, it was full of beautiful images and friendly people.

Nome is hardly drab. Neither is it bleak or desolate or, as an Anchorage reporter recently described it, "the end of the world." There is a beauty here

that is beyond the imagination, an arctic northern beauty that city eyes will not see at first. The lines are different, the colors and the shadings are different, the houses and the skyline are different.

One city reporter recently came to Nome and described Nome's historic and quaint Front Street as being "lined with battered false-front buildings erected around the turn of the century."

Battered? I suppose that if buildings are not made out of glass and steel with marble steps and modern art sculptures then they are, to the city-trained eye, "battered." But in Nome we do not think of Front Street with such city eyes. The buildings are picturesque, rustic, with an atmosphere very different from downtown skyscrapers and glass temple. But battered? No.

Nome residents are often reported to be "staggering" down Front Street, at least according to some newspaper stories you read. It sounds as if the whole town was on some giant drunk, a stagger-

ing drunken mass roaming along the "battered" buildings. No one in Nome can recognize this picture, yet it is one often painted by out-of-town reporters who want to add some local color to their articles.

All this reminds me of those children's stories about the city mouse and the country mouse, except up here in Alaska we might call them the city mouse and the Bush mouse. Sometimes they don't even know how to speak the same language.

Often they are on different "wavelengths." But if they play together long enough they may learn to communicate in ways that are understandable

for both.

"Out here near the end of the world" is really not out there near the end of the world, because the world, no matter where you live, is always with you, and when you've spent enough time in Nome or any other Bush area, you begin to wonder if these city reporters have their glasses on backwards or what.

It's a good life out here, a very good life indeed, but all you ever read about are the disadvantages, the bleakness, the desolation, in these "small, drab" bush towns and villages. Maybe the secrets of Nome should be kept to ourselves, maybe that's the way it's supposed to be.