

Some Sparkle, Some Sad—

Joyousness of Noel Eluded Some Villages

Many weeks after Christmas had passed, the Tundra Times received a Christmas story. It wasn't a happy Christmas story. It ranged from poignancy to sadness, showing some of the tragedy of life in the Arctic.

One week before Christmas, Father Frank Fallert, S.J., the priest who serves most of the villages in the Nelson Island area, sat with Alois and Adeline Lincoln of Toksook while their baby died.

"It was five days before a plane could get into Toksook, and we could have a burial service—three days before Christmas," Father Fallert wrote. The following are excerpts from his post-Christmas newsletter.

"Back to Tununak for the Christmas program Wednesday evening, Santa Claus, and gift giving after the program. Marie's Montessori kiddies sang the Christmas hymns eloquently as

they gathered around their own nativity scene.

Caroline Oscar, age five, was the star since she sang a solo; "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star," her serious little voice right on key easily carrying to every corner of the room.

The next morning, at 2:30 a.m., the Oscar house burned.

"All too soon the uncertain agony was confirmed when the charred bodies of Caroline, her two brothers and baby sister were found. Isabel, the mother, sister to Alois Lincoln, was badly burned on her face, arms and legs. Thomas, the father, not quite so severely.

"It was seven o'clock in the evening before the storm let up enough for a plane to land and get them to the hospital in Bethel. Everyone in the village had haunting memories of Caroline's serious face and eloquent

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little hands,—“Twinkle, Twinkle, little star”.

On Christmas morning, Father Fallert held Midnight Mass in Tununak, Morning Mass in Toksook. Then, later in the day, he left for Newtok.

“Christmas at Newtok was not all joy either. Besides being two days late, no plane had been in for two solid weeks. Three fathers of families were stranded that long in Bethel and did not get back till today, three days after Christmas.

“And none of the students returning home for Christmas had yet arrived. Some on a two week vacation were stranded in Bethel for 10 days. Landing and weather at Newtok was often good.

“The late planes at Tununak and Newtok also meant that gifts and toys sent for the kiddies have not yet arrived. So I came to Newtok, the most remote of villages, the most impoverished, the most neglected, with an empty sled and a heavy heart.

“Other years I always brought the best to Newtok. Even so, the boys and girls were happy with Christmas Mass, a Disney movie, popcorn and candy.

“But the Christmas message is so much more meaningful than toys and Santa Claus. It was easy to remember the Manger. But the essential message gives the meaning of life even to the tragedy of death. Perhaps something of the message of that first Christmas did reach the hearts of our good Eskimo people.”