

# Darcy Finds Quaint A-Frame Shop Native Artists Interesting

By DARCY LEWIS

With my trusty pen and paper plus typewriter, I set forth in the city of Anchorage, located in the state of Alaska, to see what I had to see and do what I had to do!

I saw a lavishly gardenized, beautifully mountained, very well groomed and lovely city. I was enchanted by the breathtaking and hypnotic view from "The Top Of The World" located in the Anchorage Westward Hotel and bewitched by even, gentle lapping of the heavenly waters of Cook Inlet.

I was drunk with beauty and then, I did what any writer would do; I looked for a story. Something to whet the appetites of "TUNDRA TIMES" readers and I found the aperitif!

At 4th and 'D' Sts., in a quaint "A" framed-built shop, I entered the world of Neuvanavik Hoonda Kahit (NEW-VAN-YA-VIC HOON-DA CA-HIT).

It is in this shop that native artists work at their crafts, and it is in this shop that I found two such artists; Harry and Eugene.

Harry Okpik was whittling away at his carvings unaware that I was waiting for the right moment to say, "Harry, tell me about yourself." I say "the right moment" because my dulcet

tones might have caused his whittle knife to unwhittle what he was whittling at that time and I never want to be the cause of "work out the window."

We spoke and although Harry carves and whittles with perfection his people and

animals in wood, ivory and soapstone, he has never studied this craft professionally. He carves away with his natal culture always his teacher and produces exquisite craftsmanship and interesting subjects.

(Continued on page 6)

# A-Frame Artists . . .

(Continued from page 1)

I purchased two wooden Billikens and silently wished he had more to sell of the same. If my memory serves me right, the Chinese Goddess of Fertility is involved in the Billiken statue history. Luckily, Harry did not bless my precious purchase and I am not going to pray to them, not yet.

I noted that a great many figures had pointed heads and that his animals had square ones. Although I questioned Harry about this feature, he never gave me the reason.

He laughed heartily and his twinkling eyes lead me to believe that he works humor into his craft with a clever twist.

Eugene is a very unusual artist. He takes the time and trouble to create a story for each and every painting so that the owner will be informed. He attaches each tale to the back of each frame. I watched him working at his easel and his creation was just starting to take shape.

He, too, uses his native background as his source of draw supply, and stated with great pride that he was named Eugene Killigivuk after his grandfather who was a whaler.

Eugene started drawing when he was hospitalized with tuberculosis for a period of 5 years. He went to the University of Oregon in Eugene, Oregon and thought he might like to become an art teacher. I am pleased he started to paint as an artist and did not become the art teacher he had once wanted.

Eugene paints himself into the faces of many of his works. Unfortunately, I was unable to purchase any of his works because they were promised or already sold.

The young lady who is called "salesgirl" of the "A-FRAME" Shop is named Donna Blatchford and is at the shop through the auspices of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Youth Opportunity Center. She is beautiful, charming and well versed.

A visitor is welcome and

treated most courteously. These were 3 of the people I met personally and I understand that about 60 artists from all parts of Alaska send their work to the "A-FRAME" Shop to be exhibited and sold.

Eighty five per cent of the monies collected from the sales go directly to the artist and the "whale" share of fifteen per cent is retained by the Anchorage Welcome Center, Inc., sponsor of this remarkable shop.

I learned the shop was opened on July 7th of this year with a budget of \$80 (it is now grossing \$100 per day). The rent payable to the Alaska State Housing Dept. is \$1.00 per year 'tis a pity because the lease is up as of December 31st.

It was so pleasant to pick up a piece of native craftsmanship and not find "made in Japan" stamped on the back, front or side. I know I am not alone in this pleasantry and that it would be appreciated by countless other purchasers of "true" native craft.

It would be a great loss to both visitors and residents if the Anchorage "A-FRAME" Shop were to take its "treasure trove of authenticity" and silently fall down like the proverbial "House of Jack."

I left the world of Neuvanavik-Hoonda Kahit and although my eye was on a totem pole, my reach was pre-empted. I returned to my city of Fairbanks, the city that has what I want.

It has "TUNDRA TIMES," the only native newspaper in Alaska that enables me to tell you of all the wonderful discoveries such as the "A-FRAME" Shop. My Fairbanks may not have Cook Inlet, but it has "INNS TO LET" with primitive and rustic beauty unequalled.

PLEASE, CITY OF FAIRBANKS... DON'T EVER CHANGE... AND PLEASE, CITY OF ANCHORAGE... DON'T LET THE "A-FRAME" SHOP BLOW AWAY!