

# Valedictorian at Mtn. Village Talks Change

## CHANGE

Good afternoon honored guests, teachers, ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls and graduating classmates.

Throughout history all people in all times have changed their ideas about themselves and their ways of doing things. Each time something new is learned a better way to live usually results. This then, leaves something new and different for the next generation to learn. We Native people of Alaska have made and are today making many changes. In fact, we have, in the past 50 years made as many changes as the rest of America and Europe took 200 years to make.

No more can we Native people of Alaska let the rest of the world go by. Things that happen in Washington D.C. and even on the other side of the world affect us. Right today, a Mountain Village boy is fighting in a country most of us never heard of 5 years ago—Viet Nam. More and more we are required to know about the rest of the world and what is happening there.

Many of you can remember times when to get along well a young man needed to know how to find game, how to read weather signs, how to make things he needed and how to survive out-of-doors. Then came men from the outside with goods to sell, money, religion, schools and new and different ideas. Then it was no longer enough to be a mighty hunter, and to be able to build or make all needed things. There was now a need to learn a new language and to count and to use

(Continued on page 4)

# Valedictorian on Change . . .

(continued from Page 2)

money in order to get along with the new comers. At first only a few learned the new language and new ways. In time, schools were set up and then most Native children went to school a little. Just a few years back a man with four years of schooling got along well, but today it takes a high school education for most young people to get along as well.

In the old days a good village leader needed to be a fine hunter and be a wise person who could make decisions about village affairs. Now village leaders must be able to read, write and think in two languages. He has to read and write dozens of letters and make important decisions that not only affect the present but the future of our village as well. He must be able to work with other villages, all kinds of state and federal agencies and other people who are working with the people of Alaska. Yet, this same leader must also be able to live off of the land too, because there are few full time jobs in the villages. Today a village leader must know about the outside ways as well as about the Native ways so he can communicate and work with both.

Even those of us who aren't members of the council live and use from two worlds. We hunt spring game as Eskimo people always have—but we use an aluminum canoe instead of a skin kayak.....we hunt larger animals with guns instead of spears and traps. We like dry fish as well as Eskimos of 1,000 years ago but we use nylon nets and Sears Roebuck rubber boots instead of hand-made nets and water boots. And we have in our homes many, many outside made appliances and things that old time Eskimos never even dreamed of.

More and more we find a greater and greater need for the English language and formal education. The main reason for this is that most other Americans, including the Government, knows just one language—English. So we have to learn the language to keep in touch with the rest of the world thru radio, newspapers, magazines, letters and movies.

For our own generation a great deal of knowledge will be necessary. Not only do we need to think in two languages but we will have to act in two languages also. It isn't good to believe all one hears. People often come to our village with ideas, plans, and promises. A responsible person must be able to see whether these are facts or exaggerations. We, and only we, should decide what is good for us and our community.

Thus, our basic reason for being educated is the same today as it has always been—to have and make a better life for ourselves and our children.

Many young people have been so successful with their studies that they have left the village for further education and training. Some have left for good but many have returned. Each person who returns to the village with more knowledge than when he left should do his share to make this community a better place.

Now, I have talked about many reasons and needs for getting a good schooling in the village and then going on to higher schooling and training. But we do not, and shall not, forget our past. We will not jump into the new ways so rapidly that we forget the old ways. To do so would be a sad thing. It would be very sad, indeed, if in a few years we can find no children who can speak the Native language; no young men who can read the waters and set traps; no women who can make sinew and sew hides; and no young adults who can appreciate the Native dances. In other words, we don't want to lose the old Native ways just because we are learning the new ways. To be a good Eskimo means to use the best of both ways and to be able to do things which others cannot do. In knowing and using the best of two worlds we will be twice as great a people.

Thank you and good afternoon.