

A Book Review—

Chas. Edwardson-Human Being

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ETOK: A story of Eskimo Power. By: H.G. Gallagher, G.P. Putnam's Sons. New York. 1974 Price \$7.95

This is a book about Charles Edwardson Jr. — a human being. No book can ever tell us everything about a person, it can only give a few glimpses of his personality. We can, however, begin to see him as a unique person with his hopes and despairs, loves and hates, victories and defeats. In some ways it is a success story, but not of the typical American variety. He doesn't start with 30 cents and become a millionaire. He starts with a stutter. He suffers discrimination as a member of a minority group. He is stereotyped. He suffers from ulcers. Yet with an impassioned drive and dedication to helping his people, he brings about dramatic changes. He goes to the capitol of the richest nation on earth and makes them listen. In a nightclub he raises his arm over his head and brings it down on the table with a bang, shouting, "No! No! No!" and thereby changes the course of events in Alaska.

Those of us who have known Etok, or as we call him, "Charlie," are given a chance to fill in the jigsaw puzzle of his life. At times we have cursed and congratulated him. Other times we found him incomprehensible. Maybe we just never fully understood what he was up to. This book clears up several things about him. Hugh Gallagher does us a real service by telling it like it is with Charlie.

For some people, reading this book may be a shattering experience; it may wipe out the stereotyped picture of Eskimos. All men have a tendency to group people and things in nice, neat little packages, put a tag on them and confuse the tags with reality. Some have pictured Eskimos as smiling, happy primitives lost in the modern world.

Charlie proves this wrong! Not only does he understand the life of hunting, fishing and poverty at Barrow, he knows the modern world so well that he can manipulate it to achieve his goals . . . and he's not always smiling! He is a complex human being with all the emotions and problems that humans have. This book, then, is not so much about "Eskimo power" as it is about human power. It's a book about what one man — with many handicaps — can do if he really wants to. We also see the toll it takes from him.

Most of all, this text prompts us to re-think Charlie Edwardson Jr. Maybe his whole mission in life has been, and is, to make us see Eskimos as true human beings who have been exploited by others. Perhaps he may not realize it, but through his efforts many people are no longer so naive about his people. We are forced to look beyond the name and the stereotype and see there a live, pulsing, vibrant human being. We are forced to look at ourselves.

The text is eminently readable and the expletives are not deleted. It is about a man with feelings, but written by a man with feeling also. Hugh Gallagher feels for and with his subject. Of all the recent books on Eskimo life, this is the finest because it's about a real life and a real human being.