

# Tiulana follows traditional ways

By Bill Hess

Tundra Times

Paul Tuliana's recent trip back to the Nome area was special; not so much because of the seal he shot, but rather for the traditional celebration to honor his 12-year-old grandson. Last spring, Charles Tiulana, then only 11, accompanied his grandfather and some other relatives on a hunting trip some 10 miles offshore in Norton Sound.

"I loaded my gun and handed it to him," Tiulana recalls what happened after they spotted their quarry resting on floating ice. "The first two seals that we approached, they went down before we could get too close. Then we got close, he aimed, and got it with the first shot!"

This was the first seal young Charles had ever taken. Tiulana was determined to make the event special, to commemorate it even as his people had when he was young and growing up on King Island. He passed out candies back at camp. In celebration, the seal would be pre-

sented at church.

"We would also give that seal to the Elders," Tiulana recalls. "It doesn't belong to us." In return, the Elders gave their blessings and advice to young Charles, believing that if he were to consider their wisdom, he would not only be a better hunter in the future, but would have a better life as well.

"The reason we give the first seal to the Elders," Tiulana relates, "is there was a hunter a very long time ago. He takes his first seal, but he doesn't want nobody to have it. He wants to keep it for himself. That was his first seal, and his last seal!"

Still, the ceremony was not complete. Earlier this month, Tiulana journeyed back to Nome from Anchorage. "We held an Eskimo dance," he recalls. "We also released the spirit of the seal, so he could come back next year to the people of the village. They say the seal will vomit more seals for that young man, so he will be sure

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to have many seals to hunt."

When Tiulana was young, it was common to honor first kills in such a manner, but it is not at all common today.

Tiulana, who last month was named AFN Man of the Year at the Alaska Federation of Natives Convention in Anchorage, is concerned that Alaska Natives are slipping away from such cultural values, and are being hurt as a result. The government moved the King Islanders off of their traditional home and into Nome in the late 1960's.

"Since then," Tiulana explains his concern, "about 14 of our people have died in accidents in Nome, mostly related to alcohol. When we stayed at King Island, only six men lost their lives in the Bering Straits," he refers to a period of time dating back from early in the century.

"We tried to find some conveniences in the urban area. You could see more of our people dying searching for those conveniences."

"When I was a young man at King Island, we don't have no jail, we don't have no police, we don't have no divorce, no child abuse, no alcohol or drug problems! We are getting farther away from our cultural values. Slipping away! That's why we are having these problems. We don't listen to our Elders, who can give us guidelines for our future life."

Tiulana feels that after being honored by AFN, he has the right to return the favor by giving the organization a little advice. "AFN should do more to teach our cultural values," he says. "AFN should encourage the 12 corporations to do this, because if we lose our cultural values, we're not gaining anything. Even if we get the riches of the world! If we've lost those values, that's it!"

Tiulana suggests that perhaps AFN could take a stronger lead in getting the values incorporated into the school system, and in organizing potlaches and other cultural activities.

"It's my dream to encourage Native people to learn more about their traditional values," he notes.

In the old days, Tiulana says there were some young people who did not believe they needed to listen to the Elders. They felt the youth and strength in their own bodies, and felt they could follow their own desires.

"The Elders knew that Mother Nature would work for us, and teach these young that we are right," Tiulana remembers one young man who thought he knew better than the old folks and as a result was blown out with the ice into the Bering Sea. Two days later, the wind very kindly blew him back in. "Two nights, I think that's enough for him!" Tiulana chuckles, remembering

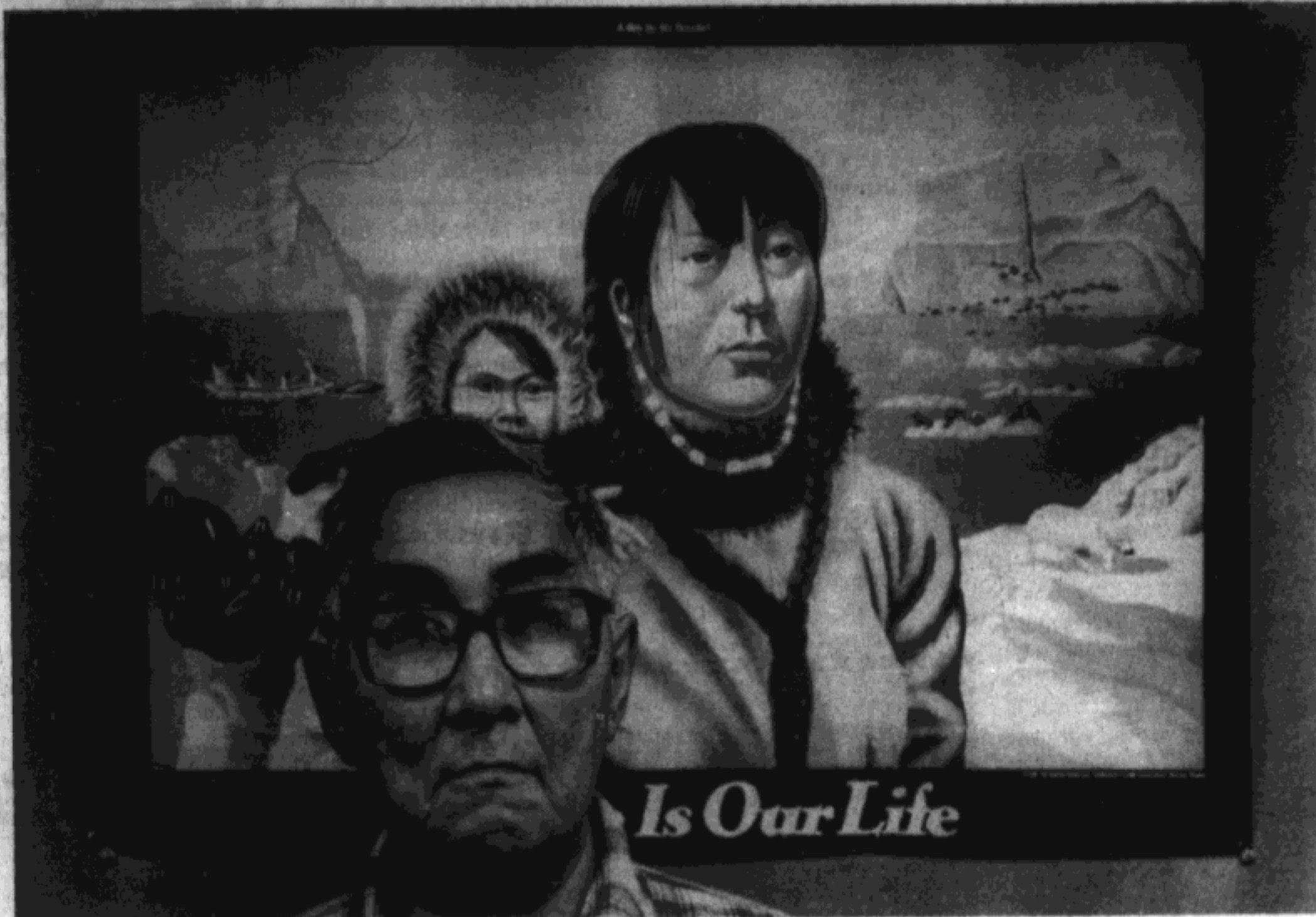


PHOTO BY BILL HESS

Paul Tiulana: his main goal in life is to help preserve and restore the cultural values of his people.

that the young man listened to the Elders after that.

Another young man took an unscheduled trip 500 miles to the North along with two companions when the wind blew them practically to Point Hope. His two friends died. Yet the man, Gregory Ayac, remembered what the Elders had taught him about survival, and how to use the wind to help him find his way across the ice.

Seventeen days after being blown away from King Island he walked ashore on the Northern side of the Seward Peninsula.

Yet, if Mother Nature would help out the Elders in traditional ways, who will help

them with the modern? After his amazing feat of survival, Ayac was later killed by a car in Nome.

In the past years Tiulana has put a tremendous amount of his own effort to reviving old values before they are lost. He was a major force behind organizing the Wolf Dance that the King Island people performed in February of 1982. It was the first time the ancient and elaborate ceremony had taken place since aviator Charles Lindberg visited King Island in 1932.

In 1967, Tiulana performed Eskimo dances during centennial celebrations at the Anchorage International Airport and in other ways educated tourists

about Native people.

After that, he and his wife Clara decided they would see how they could make out in an urban area and they stayed in Anchorage. Tiulana worked at the Anchorage Native Welcome Center, greeting Rural Alaskans coming into the city and helping them to have a safer, more pleasant trip in the big and sometimes dangerous city.

Most recently, Tiulana has worked with the Cook Inlet Native Association teaching children ivory and soapstone carving, other arts and crafts, and traditional song and dance.

The funding for that program has since run out. The Alaska Childrens' Services has

asked Tiulana to teach children about Native life, and he hopes to be working there soon.

Yet, one of the most important goals Tiulana had set for himself once looked like it could never be. His father disappeared on a hunting trip when Tiulana was still young.

"Your dad used to fill a big barrel with seal blubber," my mother used to tell me in a way that would challenge me," Tiulana recalls. "One winter, I almost done it, I almost filled the barrel with blubber." He was determined he yet would.

Then World War II broke out and Tiulana went to work stevedoring for the Army in Nome. His leg was severely broken in a bad accident. The doctors sent him to the hospital at Fort Richardson and then to Barnes General Hospital in Vancouver, WA. There, they amputated his left leg.

"On Christmas day, the doctor came into my room. He said 'We're going to have a Christmas party. Anything you want, you ask for, because we're got everything here!'"

"I was real hungry for Native food. I asked, 'do you have seal liver, frozen, with seal oil?' He said no, He was really surprised."

When Tiulana returned to Alaska, it looked as if his dream of being a successful hunter had ended. "With one leg, I couldn't compete with the other young people I grew up with," he explains.

Tiulana also lacked the white man's education needed to get a job in the labor force. Life looked dismal.

"Then I built myself a little skin boat, with somebody's idea, so it would be powered

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A wolf dance scene from the early days.



# Paul Tiulana

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by an outboard motor. I started going out in the open lead. I would go in winter time, out in the open lead, when the northwest wind was blowing and it was minus 25 and the wind chill factor was at least minus 60.

"I was able to hunt; I was able to kill seals from my skin boat. We even managed to kill a polar bear. My mother was crying with joy, because she thought I'd never be able to kill a polar bear. When I killed that polar bear, I also think I reached my goal to be a hunter."

Tiulana is an active participant in the Catholic Church, and he has been seeking to introduce his own people's traditions in the church. He even involved the church in the ceremony for his grandson.

Still, Tiulana thinks about the hard times which have befallen his people since the introduction of the Western world, including wide acceptance among them of the Christian faith.

"When the explorers, the government and the missionaries, were first getting into Alaska, our ancestors had their traditional values. Even though they didn't know how to read, or speak English, the values worked. How did they form their government to have less problems in the villages than now? How did they do it? Who knew the system? Who gave the system to our ancestors?"

The Christians came, says Tiulana, saying good values come from Christ, bad from the devil. When they found the people of King Island they looked at them as "pagan" — people without God. "They say, 'we have to save these poor souls from the devil!'" Tiulana relates. "Even though we know God now from these Christian people, we have more

problems today! Why is that?"

As a partial answer to his own question, Tiulana points to what the Christians have told him about good values coming from God. If the traditional values of his own people were to be written down, says Tiulana, they would be much like the 10 Commandments.

"They knew God!" he defends his ancestors. "Only they don't know it. Because everything that's good, comes from God."

"They also talk about the medicineman, the Shaman people. They could be a real nice people, or they could be a real bad people also. Sometimes the Shamans would protect the village people from the demons coming into their house. Who gives that power to chase the bad spirit from the village?"

"The answer is God!"

"Sometimes the first missionaries overlooked our cultural values when they tried to teach our ancestors about God. They should have looked into our culture of good values."

Still, despite the onslaught of the outside world, Tiulana feels good about the bond which holds his people together. "These things have tested us, but they have never broken our relationship, our own roots from our ancestors. It's like a case at Nome. One young man hit a woman with a car, and killed her.

"Her husband's friends, they told him 'why don't you sue that driver for money, because he killed your wife?' He said, 'no, I cannot do it.'" remembered Tiulana, explaining that the driver and the victim were related.

"I couldn't let my daughter sorrow for me. I couldn't break the relationship for money." That, says Tiulana, shows the strength his people still have.