

Tundra Times Staffers Address University of Alaska Students

What is a newspaper? How do you get the idea for a story? What is a lead? How do you get it down on paper? How much money do you get paid? What makes a native newspaper different from any other kind of newspaper? Can I write and if I do, will the Tundra Times be interested?

Starting with the last question first, the answer is — Yes! The Tundra Times IS interested in finding writers, especially native

writers — students, villagers, politicians, social workers, grandmothers, or dog mushers.

In search of talent, members of the Tundra Times staff last week addressed four classes of native students at the University of Alaska in Fairbanks. The subject was writing in general and writing for the Tundra Times in particular.

Staffers Frank Murphy and Jacqueline Glasgow assured the students they would NOT get

rich writing for the Tundra Times, but that there were other rewards.

"Ten years ago, the Tundra Times was the only newspaper writing news from the native point of view," Murphy explained. "Today native newspapers are springing up all around the state — Tanana Chiefs region, Barrow, Bristol Bay, Anchorage. All of these papers will need writers."

Murphy cited the example of

Donna John, a young Athabascan student at the University of Alaska. Another Native student told Donna of two dolls he had unearthed on St. Lawrence Island which dated back 2000 years. She asked Murphy if anyone would be interested in a story about the unusual find and was told that Tundra Times would be very interested. Donna took a photo and wrote the story which sold not only to

Tundra Times but to Alaska magazine.

"The things you take as part of your everyday life are extremely interesting to other people," Murphy told the students.

After the class, one of the students brought up a manuscript which described a complete day in the life of a whale hunter, from the time he gets up in the morning until he is on the water in a umiak.

"No one has ever quite told the story of whaling from this viewpoint before," the young writer was told. "Do some more work on it and bring it in to us."

Dorothy Nikolai of Kaltag is writing a history of the fish wheel; going back to its beginnings in China. After class she talked about the paper and her memories of the excitement of going to fish camp when she was a child. "Write it," she was told. "We'd like to see it."

"When you go home from the campus," Glasgow told the students, "the first thing you want to know is what's been happening, what's going on, who's taken a trip, who won the local dog sled races — in other words, the news. That's all the news is. It's what's happening."

"There are no wire services in the bush. The only way the news comes out is through word of mouth, through people telling other people. Each of you runs into a story every single day, whether it's in your home village, here on the campus, or on Second Ave. The chances are if you're interested in it, someone else will be. Write it down."

"A writer writes. If you're in a hurry, you scribble on the back of napkins, you buy a cheap spiral notebook, you write crammed into a small bush plane, or if you're super-lazy, you get hold of a tape recorder and talk your story. But you get it down."

"History is being made in Alaska today. Much of it is your history. You are the people making it and I think you should be the people recording it."

One of the students said, "I sent something to the Tundra Times and it wasn't published."

"Not everything I write gets published either," reporter Glasgow reminded them. "There are a lot of reasons why it doesn't. Sometimes, frankly, it isn't good enough. Other times, it isn't the right subject for that particular editor. And once in a while the editor likes what you've done but there just isn't space in the paper that week."

For every story the Tundra Times does use, the staff promised they could pay ten dollars. "Ten dollars isn't much, but it may pay for the film you use while you're learning how to use a camera, and it is Tundra Times' way of saying — We do want the stories and we do appreciate them."

There are a hundred stories in bush Alaska that need to be told. Tundra Times has only one full-time reporter, but it does have native columnists — Guy Okakok of Barrow, Grace Slwooko of Gambell, our roving columnist Tom Richards, Jr. and from time to time, our two state senators, John Sackett of Galena and Willie Hensley of

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