

"I Have Learned"-

Eskimo People Impress New York Writer

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The New York Times

NEW YORK - Sometime early in April my editor at The New York Times, where I work as a reporter, asked me if I wanted to go to cover a whale hunt in Point Hope, Alaska. It seemed that James Buckley, our senator here in New York, had been invited by the village, and my assignment was to accompany him.

I was tremendously excited. I had never been north of Montreal and I could hardly imagine a landscape of endless ice and a night of constant sun. I made some phone calls and obtained the very kind consent of the Tundra Times, the senator's host, to make the trip.

Now I am back here in New York. The temperature is in the high eighties and the traffic jams are fierce. I have been back a little more than a week and yet in a way I am not back at all. My memories still wander back to the wonderful week I spent camped out on the ice of the Chukchi Sea with Seymour Tuzroyluke, his family and his crew.

Perhaps the readers of the Tundra Times might be interested in my impressions. First off, I ought to confess, with some embarrassment, that before I went I knew next to nothing about the Arctic and the life of the Eskimos.

Like many, if not most of us here in the lower 48, I vaguely assumed Eskimos lived in igloos. In the same vague way I believed the Eskimos were similar in their culture to the Indians of the Southwest with whom I had some minimal contact. I humbly

apologize for my ignorance. I know now that the differences among natives peoples are as great and as significant as those among, say, Frenchmen, Greeks and Englishmen.

Obviously, spending a week among a people does not qualify me as an expert. I am (thank God) not an anthropologist or a sociologist. I was not studying my hosts. I was living with them. But I am a man and as such I do form impressions.

The strongest of these had to do with the cooperative spirit that I observed. Not once was an angry word spoken. At times things were tense and frustrating. In an incredible drama that I was fortunate enough to witness, Mr. Tuzroyluke, harpooned a

bowhead. It was a big one. But as his crew with the help of another tried to paddle the huge beast to shore, the harpoon worked loose and the whale sank to the bottom.

If a similar disaster had beset the people I live and work with, there would have been much cursing and screaming and people would try to blame each other. Out there on the ice there were no recriminations. Instead there was work. I had hoped to be of some help, but I learned quickly that I had none of the skills needed and that the best thing I could do was keep out of the way of those who worked through the night to claim the whale from the

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bottom. Later I did join some of the men in tugging the raised 50-ton whale up on the ice and that made me feel good. I was probably the weakest of the tuggers but my hosts good naturedly cheered my efforts. Then when the cutting and portioning of the whale took place I just sat and marveled at the way the entire village seemed to be involved. The good luck of one crew turned out to be good luck for everyone.

The second observation is probably a cliché. It has to do with the endurance and fortitude of the people. I am 36 years old, and though I smoke a pack a day, I am in reasonably good shape. But the youngest child in Mr. Tuzroyluke's camp, his seven-year-old daughter, Lisa, put me to shame. Where others, who slept less than I did, could run easily, I huffed and puffed, trying to keep up.

I also held the somewhat dubious distinction of being the only one in the party to fall through the ice. That happened just after the whale was harpooned and in my excitement to record the drama on film, I didn't watch where I was stepping. I ended up waist-deep and very embarrassed — also very cold. Later while my clothes were drying I was teased with good humor by the crew. By that time I realized I had escaped frostbite and I joined in the laughter.

And that brings me to another point. Laughter. There was an awful lot of it. Laughter is

the pleasantest human sound I know and it did a great deal to warm my spirits.

One more point. The children. Everywhere I went in the village, they would come and talk and play with me. One boy, Carl Rock, who was four, showed me how he drop kicks cans. Then I kicked. Then we played, just as if we had been friends for years. It came time for him to go. He asked me if he could kiss me. It was a kiss given in beautiful innocence. I will never forget it. The children were unfraid, delightful, shining like candles. They were the way all children should be. Here at home, they are not always like that.

Finally, I'd like to publicly express my gratitude to the Tuzroylukes and their friends. They fed me, kept me warm, humored me, graciously put up with my sometimes stupid questions. They taught me more I think than I have learned in any single week of my life. And probably most important, by their obvious love and devotion for each other, for their neighbors, they rescued me from a severe bout of cynicism. Just when I was thinking that the technology of the twentieth century was erasing all human values, at a time when I could see all about me signs of moral decay and corruption, they lifted my spirits and made me proud to be human. Even though I was just a visitor, their graciousness made me feel welcome in the human race. I thank them for that.