

Other Voices—

'Other Voices' Honors Tundra Times Editor

At first the trail seems very long and almost impossible. Then, as one mushes along, he catches the stride and settles down to the work. Occasionally, he passes a marker and knows that he has a winner!

Twelve years ago, there was a start. There was no Native newspaper, schools had unbelievable problems, there was outright discrimination. There were land claims but no settlement. The job looked almost impossible for those of us who were living in the bush in those days. Sometimes we overheard things like — “Would you believe that Indians actually eat supper at his house?” or “What do those Indians want?”

Then there appeared a new newspaper on the scene called the “Tundra Times.” This writer began a newspaper at the same time, but it eventually folded and went the route of many “good starters”, but poor finishers.

Eskimos have a certain persistence. I have seen them

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sit at a seal breathing-hole for hours, sometimes for days, before they "make it" and come home with food. An Eskimo who had been schooled in art decided to produce a newspaper — this was just another example of how "dumb" they were — trying to get into business without someone giving him credentials or acceptance in the business world! Well, the newspaper made it even though there were many difficult and trying times. Then someone caught fire! It was the Native people seeing that they could do something, they could be heard, they saw it in print! Someone was talking for them for a change!

One by one the markers were passed. First, the financial support was slowly withdrawn. Then challenges to the State and Federal governments were made in print and the publisher-editor had to defend his position. Some of us remember the assault on the Pribilof case, the attacks on the school system, the arguments for the land claims settlements. All of these problems were under fire and for the first time, it was in the press! People were made aware of what was happening and what they could do.

It was, and still is, the dream of Howard Rock to get the Natives into decision-making positions. A few of us know what a battle it has been. It has also been his dream to have Natives express themselves in their own way as they see it.

In the past twelve years a few voices have been heard with an echoing effect. Peter John, Charlie Edwardsen, Jimmy Huntington, Mitch Demientieff, Brenda Itta, Willie Hensley, Emil Notti, John Borbridge, Joe Upickson, Nels Anderson, Frank Ferguson, and just a whole multitude of others have spoken out and destroyed stereotypes. They have been heard! But behind them has been a quiet, dedicated, newspaper publisher. Every week he has gone to print and put them in the public eye. This man is Howard Rock.

In the meantime, the most important resource of Alaska has been touched. Native People — from every place and origin — have poured out their problems to the Tundra Times with editorials or letters-to-the-editor. Fred Stickman has been heard around the world! The journalistic efforts of the newspaper has prompted many People to get into this media. Others have seen that they too can be heard and have tried.

The point of this is — **THEY HAVE TRIED, THEY HAVE DONE IT!** But without the simple, hard-working, persistent effort of a small newspaper, they might have quit. It's easy to quit. I think that Howard would have quit a long time ago if he had not had the persistence that it takes to survive in the north.

This writer has reviewed many books for the Tundra Times over the years. He has watched young people move from a feeling of being lost to "doing something." There are a lot of new biographies on the market for those of us who have had the opportunity to stimulate them and review them. As a New Year's Resolution, this "Gussuk" is asking one thing — to have the hero of our times, the editor-in-chief, to write his life story so that all of us might be inspired to persist in telling it as it is.

The marker has been passed: Tundra Times is a winner! Now let us know how you did it so that all of us, as a community, might follow your lead.

HAPPY NEW YEAR HOWARD ROCK — YOU'RE A WINNER!

— Wally Olson