

## Writer proves untrue that "Girls do not get Seals!"

*Editor's Note: The following story, published in the 1973 THEATA Magazine, describes how the author surprised all, including herself, by taking a seal.*

By TERESA PINGAYAK

It is very unusual for a girl to get a seal in my hometown, Chevak, because girls seldom hunt. I thought it was impossible for a girl to get one until I got one myself when I was about fifteen years old.

My family was at fish

camp on the Kivgliivick River early in the month of August. My father was putting up a new fish rack a little ways from the tent near the smoke house for the salmon. He stopped and came to the tent where my two sisters, Bernie and Cathy, and I were playing a game with cards. My two little brothers, the youngest of the family, were hunting birds with their bow and arrows.

My father said he needed more small pieces of driftwood to complete the fish rack and said he was going

out to find some in our river boat. Since my sisters and I loved to boat ride, we asked him if we could go out and find the wood ourselves. He said, "Yes," right away since he had to tend to the fish nets that kept him busy most of his time.

My sisters and I got in the boat; then my two brothers decided to come along and we were off. We passed our neighbors, the Nanoks, who were also fish camping on the same river. We went about a mile by river away from camp and went up into a fairly large tributary.

We stopped the boat in what seemed to be a good place for finding driftwood. We could see for miles around on the flat tundra as we looked for wood. We had good luck in finding wood for about an hour and started back to camp. We were happy with our haul of wood, for we always wanted to please Father very much and to let him know we were dependable since we had no older brothers to take care of the heavy work.

We had brought a .22 rifle and a few shells with us before we left camp. I had done a bit of hunting before of ducks and geese, but never hunted a seal.

It was late in the afternoon and we were going along the river when we spotted a duck along the river bank. I told Bernie to slow down the motor, got the gun and put a shell in it and aimed at the duck. Just as I was about to pull the trigger, Bernie said she saw a seal. I asked her where;

she said, "It just went underwater." I said, "Let's go after it." She was reluctant at first for we had never gone after a seal before and did not know of any women who had.

We saw the seal come up again about seventy-five feet away from our boat. I stood up and aimed at the seal's head and shot. The seal's head bobbed up once from the water and seemed to disappear. I said, "I got it. Where's the harpoon?" Cathy handed the harpoon to me, and together we tried to untangle the twine and at the same time wind it around the harpoon. I put the jagged spearhead in place while Bernie headed for the spot where the seal had gone down.

We were very lucky when we got to the spot where the seal was, to find it floating on its side instead of finding it sunk already. I was about to harpoon the seal, when Bernie told me the spearhead had fallen off. I dropped the harpoon in the boat and went to take over the motor. I slowed the motor down and went close enough to the seal so that Cathy could grab the seal by the flipper, and we pulled it into the boat. It was a nice, small, spotted seal.

My brothers just watched with great big eyes, and they looked as if they were saying, "Do girls get seals too?" We stood in the boat unbelieving and looking at each other; my brothers and sisters started laughing. I did not realize, after all the excitement, that I was standing there with wide-open eyes, shaking all over. My legs felt like jelly; even my voice was shaky as I tried

to speak. I, too, then started laughing. All the things we did while we were going after the seal seemed so funny that we kept laughing.

We finally calmed down and headed back to camp. We were still excited and full of eagerness to let Father see the seal that I had caught. We reached camp and my father could not believe his eyes for a while. We told him the story, and he, too, started laughing. We cleaned the seal that evening and gave some to our neighbors. We saved the skin for boots (mukluks). The next day we cooked the seal meat and had a very nice meal.

It was a great feeling and experience to be the first girl in Chevak to get a seal. No other girls to this day have gotten a seal, but I hope to get another seal in the summer. When I get a chance to go out and hunt seals, I will certainly go.