

Camp Fire Girls Village Safety Program Accepted with Pleasure

"Oh, the kids is glad," said a very old Eskimo woman in Akiachak, Alaska.

Her comment seemed to reflect the pleasure of the entire village to the coming of Camp Fire Girls counselors Sue Kelly and Sally Deane, who were conducting a recreation and water safety program for all the village children.

At that moment about sixty boys and girls could be heard singing out the chorus of a new song they had just learned.

"This land is your land, this land is my land..."

It was raining so the counselors and VISTA volunteers Merry Ring and Joan Kinzig had gathered the children into a tiny vacant log house nearby. The children then taught the counselors a hymn they knew in Eskimo:

"Tankik kilagta, tankik tilagta, uluglikujum ut-sumama..." "heavenly sunshine, heavenly sunshine..."

The songfest continued for more than an hour as Sally and Sue and the children got acquainted over some old and

new songs.

In Nunapitchuk, 40 air miles across the flat tundra to the west, Camp Fire Girls counselors Sandy Coventry, Ann Williams, Sue Mahlborg and VISTA Volunteer Bonnie Archbold were showing the children how to make crayon etchings.

Dozens of boys and girls covered the floor of the BI A schoolroom which had been borrowed for the occasion. They worked happily but quietly at their crafts project; occasionally they would whisper to each other.

Children from Kasigluk, three miles away, had been brought over by VISTA Volunteers Joli Morgan and Chuck Simmons for the day, so they could share in the activities also.

Aleknagik is a village scattered along the shores of a large inland lake near Bristol Bay on the southern coast of the state. Here Camp Fire Girls counselors Joan Hudson and Gretchen Lovas were firing up the wood stove in the galley of an old grounded fishing barge that had become "camp" headquarters.

Lunch was being prepared for thirty five hungry but patient children who were sitting on piles of fish nets along the walls.

Later that afternoon, they all went down to the beach to the swimming area for water safety lessons. Almost everyone waded into the water eagerly because they wanted to learn to swim better. A few boys stayed on shore. "Too much girls," they claimed — but they stayed to watch anyway.

All of these activities were a part of the Camp Fire Girls 1967 summer recreation project—a program especially designed for Alaskan native children living in villages around the state.

The Camp Fire program

was started in the bush in the spring of 1966 by two VISTA Volunteers living in Nunapitchuk, Bonnie Archbold and Terri Wolfenbarger. The girls responded so enthusiastically to the program that the VISTAs were eager to provide some type of special program during the summer.

The experiment was planned for late August when most of the families would be back from fish camp.

Two members of the Anchorage Camp Fire Girls staff, Joan Fawrup and Nancy Parker volunteered to go to Nunapitchuk to conduct an intensive ten day recreation program for all of the village children. Would such a recreation program work?

Work it did! Fifty to 75 boys and girls, from 3 to 17 years, attended every day and enjoyed a variety of stories, songs, games, arts and crafts.

Games that required little or no equipment were chosen so that the children could continue to enjoy them after the camp was over. An up-turned dog sled became a basketball hoop and empty oil drums were used in obstacle course and relay games.

Because of the experiment's success, the Camp Fire Girls office in Anchorage decided that the program was well worth continuing.