

# Native Poses Why Natives Drink

By REGINALD SOOLOOK

The problem with the outlook of alcoholism by Alaskan natives is that it is not viewed and accepted as "disease of alcohol" but as a superficial entertainment of themselves and their associates. The effects ("hangover," fights, etc.) of it is accepted as the consequence of the consumption of it, which literally it is, but then again it is a sign of the fun (supposedly) and the entertainment that they have or have had. It may be an attempt to escape from reality. It can mean their way of letting loose of pent-up feelings. For those insecure, it's a security. Some others have nothing better to do. There are many reasons.

In most cases, I believe that this is the only real amusement they know of, aside from the old

customs and traditions as native dances, the festive activities of the 'big or successful hunt,' etc. (which are of course, the culture brought down from the generations before them) which I believe are more looked upon and practiced now as tourist attractions than anything else.

For the younger generation who has more to lose, more to gain, and who has more possibilities opened to them than their ancestors, this is a deterrent and possible threat to their eminent success than failure in this very and rapidly changing country. To those who use the liquor, it is a way of letting loose (at the present) than being an addiction. It is a way of rebelling. To others it is an accepted thing passed on from their parents, directly or indirectly. Accepting this they

feel they have entered adulthood (status symbol) without the added responsibilities of adulthood.

In the small and remote villages and towns, there is no recreational facilities to aid them in letting loose without the use of intoxicating liquor. In the generations before us, I believe my ancestors used the traditional Eskimo dances as the faucet for their need to let loose. Rarely, if any, is there any participation by the "now" generation in these dances. They see it as being "too old fashioned" compared to the dances they do now. That's fine if that's the way they let loose, but they don't realize by doing so, they are aiding in the vanishing of our native culture. More emphasis and effort should be made to acquire recreational fac-

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ilities for the small and remote villages and towns.

Alcoholism of natives should be studied because it is evident that there are more alcoholic criminals in Alaska per capita than in each of the other States and it becomes more evident that most of these alcoholic criminals in Alaska are natives. Furthermore, you'll find that the majority of crimes that are committed by the natives were done under the influence of intoxicating liquor. It wouldn't surprise me a bit if these crimes would not have been committed if they had been sober. In fact, I'm sure the majority of them would not have committed them. Why?

Being a native, I see natives as being very conscious of their speech and actions when sober, considerate and helpful when needed, non-aggressive toward fellow man. Because of the very culture which is now vanishing, brought them up that way. Material communism, socialism, group welfare, whatever it was, it worked for them so they passed it on to the next generation. They are tranquil and passive, they are readily influenced by their environment. They had to accept nature as it presented itself to them or vanish. The effect of alcohol has been a devastating one. Once consumed, a new personality arises which at most times is very contrary to their upbringing.

You can never undo the harm done by the introduction of alcohol to the native people. Re-education should be made towards the ill effects of alcohol through lectures by prominent medical people, through A.A. members who have experienced the effects and recovered, through the economic point of view, or what ever means that can be effective and great deal more emphasis on the preservation of the native culture—material and nonmaterial.

I am very much for certain amount of acculturation of the native people. I believe it can be done and still preserve and maintain the native culture. Being the citizens of the United States of America, the most prosperous and powerful nation, and whose English language is in the process of becoming a universal language, we have no choice but to conform to it and still retain our culture. The well being and success of future generations necessitates it. It is going to be difficult and it is going to take time.

This is an opinion of one person, not applying to every native, not binding, made not to offend anyone but in hope someone is listening, in hope that someone will understand. It does not have to be taken literally, but a great deal what I have said is more than opinion—it's true.