

# Saga of the seal

by John F. Pingayak

It's spring season again and man's heart travels to the sea. Sometimes it's a beauty of one's own desire. other times it's the most horrifying dangerous adventure. But all the same, the man goes out to the sea to look for seal and birds to feed his family.

The seal in coastal villages is an important mammal. Most all parts of the seal are used. The skin is used for mukluks or other clothing. The blubber is used by dipping dried fish or other different types of food in it. Without it the daily diet is not right or even foreign. the oil of the seal is a necessity to an Eskimo and no one can take it away.

The meat is rich in dietary minerals. Eskimos cook the meat along with its blood, also with seal oil. Most of the time it is boiled. Oh! It makes hungry Jack's mouth water. Other parts of the seal's organs are eaten cooked and the liver is the delicacy to some elders of every village in Alaska.

Seal hunting season usually starts around the middle part of February until all the sea ice is gone. Before going, one must prepare for it. One must have a kayak, or boat; paddles; ice pick; motor and gas; guns and ammunition; tent; tools for small motor repair; harpoon; food for oneself; axe and shovel; extra rope. In preparing and going out to hunt it would cost about \$50 - \$100. But, if one buys new equipment it would range from \$100 - \$2,000 to hunt.

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THE HUNTER BRINGS HOME HIS SEAL. THE ILLUSTRATION IS FROM A NEW BOOK (SEVUKAKMENT, WAYS OF LIFE ON THE ST. LAWRENCE ISLAND). THE BOOK IS BY HELEN SLWOOKE CARLUS WHO ALSO DID THE DRAWINGS.

## ● Seal hunting saga

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It's been a long-time tradition for men to hunt seals in these coastal areas. Sometimes the men face tragedies or close calls. Sometimes the sea is a pleasant atmosphere to be in—that is when the weather is calm and clear on every part of the horizon. Experiences in good weather are mostly remembered in the hearts of men. They tell of their good experiences to every man they talk to or even exchange stories that haunt them in which the weather condition displayed about the same during each expedition or activity. Sometimes the weather may change suddenly and men experience frightening experiences. For example, three of us were waiting for seals on 2 feet of solid ice in late March. The wind was blowing 40 miles an hour from the southwest with blowing snow. Occasionally the snow flurry would result in the high wind. We had gotten four seals just by shooting them away from the ice, and the dead seals would move toward the solid ice against the wind and this was the result of the strong currents.

We would pick the seals up by grabbing their arms, but one of the seals went under the ice because we

didn't pick it up the right way. Our boat was close to the edge of the solid ice. There were swells, and occasionally the solid ice would break up and move out rapidly to the Bering Sea. One of the swells broke loose our boat along with our seals so I jumped to the ice where our boat and the seals were. My cousin William did the same and our Uncle Louis was left on the solid ice. As we were being drift away Louis gave his advice "Do not panic... Do Not Panic!" His advice was clear as a written word in front of me, but still I was breathless and was numb all over. I was shaking a little. As soon as our seals were in the boat I tried paddling toward the solid ice but the wind blow us the opposite direction.

Our outboard motor had one spark plug working and the other was dead. I took the spark plug off and then poured gasoline into the cylinder. Then put the spark plug in again and tried to start it manually and it almost started. I did the same process again and it finally started. The solid ice was about 200 feet away and we were going to the open sea. The motor finally started taking us to solid ice slowly. It's one spark plug saved us from going out to the

open sea and I know that there would have been big waves a little way out from where we were.

As soon as we docked to the ice we went up to land and went home. This experience really scared me but has not stopped me from going out to sea. The need for the seal drowns out the dangers. The seal is the only meat we can afford in this day of inflation. We can't afford to pay \$10.00 a lb. for meat from the store. Some meat from the store is \$18.00 to \$20.00 for 2 to 3 lbs. Inflation is so high here we can't even complain, there is nothing we can do. Every thing compared to Anchorage is 2 to 3 times higher priced out in these villages.

We, the Alaskan Natives of Alaska, have been struggling and learning to live each day as it comes. We have been having hardships worse than other races because of these harsh environments. Our fore-fathers have starved to death, and today our children are hungry because of these high prices. We do not know what luxury means but we know what survival is. We do not make our own rules but people outside from our lives make them for us. They tell us what to do from their cozy chairs while we struggle to survive. We have survived the hardest of all lives and we will survive for many generations to come. Let us make our own regulations because we can only help ourselves.