

Writer Inspires Another

By ANDREW J. CHIKOYAK

Having read your article on Mr. Tommy Ongtooguk's "Unique Historical Project" in which to preserve his disappearing culture in your September 3 Tundra Times newspaper has inspired me to write this article.

As a Yupik Eskimo and a film maker from the Alaska Village Council Presidents region, I have felt alone many times on my efforts in which to document our cultural heritage and to produce educational and information films and video tapes. However, your article on Mr. Tommy Ongtooguk's efforts has made known to me that I am not alone in climbing the mountain.

Last year in December, 1974, the YUPIK FILMS, INC. was incorporated as a non-profit film corporation with the 501 (C) (3) IRS tax exempt status. It was formed by Andrew J. Chikoyak, John Evan, and Mary Evan, all from Tununuk. It was formed with three goals in which to accomplish:

(1) To produce and provide the rural villages with an educational and information films and video tapes pertaining to the land, corporations, health, education, and both functions of the State and Local Governments.

(2) To document and preserve our rapidly dying cultural heritage and traditional ways for the present and educational reference purposes.

(3) To provide the rural villages with the video tape communication assistance pertaining to the land and subsistence living for hearing purposes.

The finished films and video tape copies will be filed and be made available to the public, educational institutions, and

other organizations. Copies will be made available for both rental and purchase.

The monies received from rental and sales will be used to obtain more needed film and video tape copies and some be released to other non-profit organizations educational funds.

In the rural villages, today is the hardest and critical time of our lives. After the passage of the Alaska Native Land Claims Settlement Act, many city oriented problems have arisen.

In the past, the Eskimos, the true natives of this land, have used the land mainly for the subsistence living. They still use the land for this purpose in the rural villages, for it has been their way for many centuries. In the past, too, the social structure in the villages was simple.

The social structure consisted of a church, a school, a store and a traditional and IRA Council members. These did not require complicated problems, for they were put in the villages packaged from the lower 48 states. However, as the time went on and the native people progressed educationally, base organizations were formed for the group villages on the surface of Alaska.

Through the struggles and efforts of the native leaders under these organizations, the educational system and living standards in the villages improved. As the years went by, the native leaders, having realized the future situation of the people as far as the land was concerned, put their tireless efforts in preparation of the Alaska Native Land Claims Settlement Act Bill, which later on was passed.

The passage of the Alaska Native Land Claims Settlement Act meant one thing: CHANGE.

In terms of the natural law, change is inevitable. However, when a change is imposed upon the people, it is difficult for them to accept over-night.

Here, time is involved. The change in a community depends on the people's mental abilities, strength, willingness, and an understanding of change itself.

As I see it today, the language barrier is a problem in most rural villages. Most Eskimos do not speak English in the rural villages. It is difficult to imagine for them to totally understand the passage of the Alaska Native Land Claims Settlement Act, structures and functions of corporation, both the State and Local Governments, and the use and management of their lands.

This does not mean they have not been informed. Professional people have come into the villages and explained of aforementioned structures, functions, and their rights and responsibilities under them but have been very little understood.

The reason behind this is that it is difficult to totally understand anything that is originated from another culture other than their own. Knowing an existence of this problem, I have been thinking for about five years how this problem could be solved.

Having seen many films by the National Film Board of Canada, and knowing that Mr. Tim Kennedy of Anchorage has been successful in the past with his Skyriver Film Project patterned after the National Film Board of Canada Challenge for Change, I came to conclusion of both the film and video tape.

Because most natives are visually inclined and that both the film and video tape have programmed educational natures, the YUPIK FILMS, INC. was formed hoping to alleviate the lack of understanding due to the language barrier.

In doing these types of films, the subject matter would be done in relation to the native's life-style.

They would also be narrated in their native language, as well as in English. Then the community as a whole or individually can watch the films many times as they please to learn. The result of this would be a better understanding of their organizations, their rights and responsibilities under them.

Having a better understanding, I feel strongly that the people in the rural villages would learn to help make decisions, solve problems, and better assist their representatives in doing a better job.

The sudden transitional period's impact has made many people cease to exercise their cultural heritage and traditional ways. Many older people have died with many invaluable information along with them.

As I see it, the older people are the heart and foundation of our cultural heritage and traditional ways. Just as long as the older people exist, our cultural heritage and traditional ways will exist as well.

Once they die out, our cultural heritage and traditional ways will die as well. Knowing that our cultural heritage and traditional ways are our identity as a living human race, I am attempting to have them recorded on film for the present and future educational reference purposes. This is one of the goals of the YUPIK FILMS, INC.

For nine months now, I have put all my time and efforts to the

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Yupik Films

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YUPIK FILMS, INC. To this date, however, I have not been successful in getting operational and equipment funding for it.

Although the nine-months period is such a short time in which to get discouraged, to this date, my efforts have had a lot of discouraging results. I have felt like giving up many times, but knowing that to slide back down is too simple of a task, I refuse to give up. I refuse to put my efforts and the money which I have used out of my own pocket to waste.

Because the Tundra Times is widely read, I am hoping this article will reach the proper organizations that might help the **YUPIK FILMS, INC.** in which to get additional funding.

— **YUPIK FILMS, INC.**
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