

# Arctic Village potlatch honors deceased

By Peter Stern

The family of Martha James held a Potlatch in Arctic Village last weekend in memory of Brian James, son of Gideon James and for Nena Russell, daughter of Martha James. The two passed away in a fire a year earlier in Fort Yukon.

Nena was born at Arctic Village January 5, 1931, and raised in Salmon Village, along the Yukon, Arctic Village and Birch Creek. She was taught English by Katherine Peter and Ellen Tritt. She was mostly self-taught by reading on her own, whatever books she found.

Throughout her childhood, her family lifestyle was subsistence, which kept her away from formal education. She was bright for learning and very much interested in

Her family did everything to let her do just that during her spare time, even though her chores were so important to the subsistence lifestyle.

During that time tragedy struck the family, her oldest

brother died when he was 17 years old and that really broke her heart.

She was the oldest of the family; next came Dorothy, so both learned to hunt, trap muskrats and to travel cross country with dog sled and dog packs, mostly with their father. They handled dog teams for wood and water into their teenage years and up until their marriages.

All during this time Nena always carried her books and Bible to read. She also carried a camera and a harmonica which she played during her chores.

In 1950 Nena got admitted to Hudson Stuck Hospital in Fort Yukon as a TB patient. That was the year her sister Marion passed away.

Nena was married in May, 1953. She and her husband went to Salmon Village and lived there for one year, then returned to Arctic Village. They moved to Fairbanks in 1958 and Nena worked on Discovery Boat as tourist guide for one year.

Nena went to Guam May 17, 1961 to join her husband who had a job as a construction worker. From there she went to Hawaii for vacation.

They came back from Guam in Arctic Village. While in Arctic Village between 1961-63, she did volunteer work such as conducting church service, Sunday school, village secretary, village health aide, interpreter, guide, Christmas pageant, organizer and singing group.

She had the love for nature

and the Native lifestyle. She walked and climbed mountains and country all around. She liked to form a crew to go into the mountains where the mountain sheep are. On these trips she liked to collect rocks and take pictures or just see the country and learn its name. The crew usually took sheep.

Her marriage ended June 1961 and she worked for a summer in Fort Yukon as a tourist guide for Wien Airlines. September 30, 1963 she

went to Chicago, Illinois for chef training and completed the two years course with high recognition.

She was called back by her father Ezias James, a man very active in village leadership, when he needed her help.

In 1965 she adopted Dorothy and Abraham John's girl, Martha (Marty) John as a single parent. Marty was only three months old.

Nena also worked as the Postmaster of Arctic Village in  
(Continued on Page Twenty-Three)

# Potlatch honors Russell, James

(Continued from Page Fourteen)

1968.

She worked as the Village Health Aide for Tanana Chief Conference and also did work for the health education in the village. She was active in the health field for Natives, was once president of health aide program, was Tanana Chief Conference Health Board member, and also was one of the outstanding Regional Village Health Aides.

Nena worked as manager of Village Native Store, Midnight Sun Native Store, operated under Anica Incorporated,

and a lot of her time on work into Village Lodge.

In January, 1981 she adopted her second girl, Mabel Christian, daughter of Jim and Cora Christian (Cora was her niece). Nena took Mabel when she was 9 months old.

She was always very active in education, serving as a Regional School Board Member for Yukon Flats School District. She was one who helped get a school built and opened at Arctic Village in 1955, then on to building the high school.

Her love for children is shown by the fact that she is godmother to many children. She respected elders, and tried to be there when she was needed. She also respected holidays, such as Christmas, New Year, Easter and birthdays. The extra work Nena put in during holidays made that time much more enjoyable for everyone.

Nena's ambitions were to better the education for our children and the district. She lost her life while she was on one of the trips for the school.