

Winter — with its carnival — melted into Spring and life back on the river

*Come out and play,
let's join the carnival;
Come out and play,
we're pleasure bound;
Winter's gone, spring is on its way;
One and all we will shout, hey, hey;
Say farewell to blues;
Spread the news all around the town...
Come out and play,
let's join the carnival.*

by Theresa Demientieff Devlin
for the Tundra Times

I always did get caught up in a loop, so I just hummed my way out. That song foretold the coming of the Fairbanks Winter Carnival.

I enjoyed the excitement during that time. People rushing around town, actually singing, or some just kinda humming. But, everyone was happy!

There was a big bridge that joined the banks of the Chena River. It was the focal point of all activity. People gathered all around the bridge, some on the bridge, some beneath and some off in the distance.

We all enjoyed the fireworks which set off a brilliant splash of colors that silhouetted the bridge against the cold dark sky.

The first thing that impressed me so much was the throne for the queen. It was made from ice blocks. Each of the blocks had a colored light set inside, so when the throne was lit, it looked as though the Northern Lights were frozen in time.

The midway was set up on Second Avenue. The ends of the street were blocked off, and we had a great time, just spen-n-nding money. We ran back and forth between the penny toss, fishing pond and Mom's purse. I guess it was the partaking that made us feel like we were something, *really* something.

Then there were the races. They were held on the Chena River just a little upriver from the bridge. One of the races was the "Alaska Pup Championship." Mannie and Lolly decided to enter Corky and me.

I remember getting dressed that day. I was wearing my special jacket, my trusty scarf, boots, snow pants and a big smile, then off to the races. I remember the scary feeling I got when I saw the sled. It was a flyer. Mannie and Lolly gave me all of my instructions: "Don't be scared. Hang on. And whatever, don't let go!"

I had complete faith in them. I climbed on to the sled and the sound from a gun signaled that the race was on. With a sudden jolt we were off. We were moving along real nice; Corky seemed to really enjoy the run. All I had to do was hang on.

Then, in the distance, I heard a whistle. Corky heard it, and we started flying.

I flipped over on to my back, but I managed to hang on. I closed my eyes real tight, and all I could see and hear was Mannie saying, "Don't let go no matter what." I was on my back for a brief time, but it seemed like forever.

I flipped back over and everything was upright. Just when I was getting into the race, it was over!

It was simply amazing the fuss that was made. Some man picked me up and gave me a trophy, \$15 and a painting of a pup with its head tilted to the side. I had experienced the sweet taste of victory.

Then Mom had her own ideas. She entered me into the *mutt* parade. We had three pups. She dressed them in harnesses with tassels and me in a parka that belonged to Donna, a cousin of mine.

I walked with the pups in the parade.



A big bridge that joined the banks of the Chena River was the focal point of activity during the Fairbanks Winter Carnival.

I wasn't sure if this was a privilege or an insult. Anyway, we won.

Winter melted into Spring, and with the awakening earth the frozen river slowly let go of its icy shroud.

With spring in the air we knew that it would bring the annual tasks of packing the boat. I would lie awake and think about the excitement. I felt comfortable as long as I knew someone else was awake.

I would think about how neat our family is. We routinely said prayers at night. Sugar, Tootie and I would give Dad and Mom a kiss on the cheek and climb into bed. Then, we would start off with the good nights. There was no routine to it. Some would

simply say, "Nite, Mom." She would respond, "Good Night." "Nite, Dad." He would respond, "Good Night."

And that's all it took. We would be saying good night for quite awhile. It would be unheard of to leave anyone out!

After everyone settled down, I would pull up my blankets and close my eyes. Sometimes it was really difficult to fall asleep, especially when something exciting was just around the corner. I just couldn't shut off my brain.

My thoughts would recount the day's events over and over. To distract my thoughts, I would open my eyes,

look around and listen. It was so-o-o-quiet. So quiet that I was sure that I was the only one alive.

The light of the moon would pour in through the windows. Dad and Mom had a place where they hung their coats and Dad's cap. The light skipped over the folds on the clothes, and the contrasting darkness created the image of monsters! I knew they were monsters. I kept my eyes on them for as long as I could stand it. Fear kept me awake.

If I couldn't trust myself to keep an eye on them any longer, I would call out to Mom. I would tell her of something awful standing by her bed. I didn't know what it was but I knew

Dad didn't allow drinking on the boats while we were traveling. This fellow told us he brought one can of beer with him. He talked about that one beer like it was the only one he'd ever have.

it was something awful.

She would turn on the light, and they would disappear. Nothing! Well, whatever it was it was pretty sneaky, too!

Somehow, as a child, it was easy getting up early. (As the years slipped by it seemed to be harder and harder.) After we loaded the boat with all of our pots, pans and clothes, we were off. This particular trip, we only took the *Beaver*. I don't know why. Perhaps it was a quick trip. The *Beaver* was a small and powerful boat.

We would sit out in front of the pilot house and look at all of the houses as we traveled down the Chena River. The Chena is the river flowing through Fairbanks, into the Tanana River.

When we would move out into the strong currents of the Tanana, I felt like we reached a point of no return. Our first stop was Nenana. There, the freight was loaded on to the barge, and Dad would buy the supplies at Coghill's.

Sugar, Toot and I were right by his side. We kept a close eye on how he bought all of the supplies with no money exchanged. We didn't quite figure it out 'til we heard him exercise the power of the words, "Charge it."

We waited 'til he was well on his way back to the boat, then we went back into the store, picked out some candy, argued about who was the oldest, who was the youngest, and finally I don't remember just who did it, but we charged the candy to Dad's account. It worked!

With all the freight and supplies on-board we were on our way down river. We were kept busy with little errands. I guess it was a way to keep us from the eternal questions, like, "When are we getting to the next place? What is the name of the next place? How many more bends before we get there?"

I don't know how many trips it took before we memorized the names of all of the villages and who lived where.

Well, with the *Beaver*, it was true we really made good time. What I liked about the boat was that it had sliding doors on both sides! I liked to see Irene or Lumpy slide open the door, scoop water from the river and give it to Mom for whatever reason she needed it.

I figured that it must be a sign of being grown up. I was testing out myself, looking for my boundaries. When no one was around, I got Mom's dish

Sure enough, the guy waited until the day's work was done, then he went and fetched the beer.

He loved the drama of it all, so he fussed and showed each one of us the precious can.

Birdie had seen this coming, and he told us all to sit around and watch, "Nobody move, just watch."

The fellow asked Birdie to get a can opener. Birdie said, no, he'd have to get it himself.

village, taking note of everyone's house, making sure that each one was accounted for.

It was so good to be back amongst my buddies. We once again took to the sandbars and playing. I learned resourcefulness in the village.

If we grew tired of our toys we made our own. We would ask Mom for the lid from a can and bend it in half to make our Indian Knife. Others called them ulus, but we were Indians,



The fuss that was made over the "Alaska Pup Championship" race was simply amazing.

pan, opened the sliding door, and there was the river. It was pretty scary, fast and powerful. I touched it. Yup, it was fast.

I braced myself, leaned out as far as I could and slowly lowered the pan. It was gone! Before I knew it, the river just pulled it from my hands. Well, I learned my boundaries; I wasn't grown up yet.

We had a crew of men that Mom cooked for, and we always talked with them. I think it made them feel like they were a part of the family.

One of them really liked to spend time talking, joking and laughing with us. He was a happy-go-lucky kind of guy. He must have felt safe with us kids.

Dad didn't allow drinking on the boats while we were traveling. This fellow told us he brought one can of beer with him. He talked about that one beer like it was the only one he'd ever have.

The heat of summer must have made him enjoy the cool, tangy taste of that one beer every time he talked of it.

By the time we got to our destination, Birdie knew this guy was going to pull out that beer and sip it as slowly as he could to enjoy every drop. Well, Birdie told the rest of us to gather round on the deck.

The fellow tried to get any one of us to get the opener, but we followed Birdie's cue and nobody moved. Finally, he went into the boat.

He *actually* left the beer on the deck right in the middle of all of us.

As soon as he was out of sight, Birdie grabbed the beer and shook it up. We all took turns shaking it up *real* good.

He came back and we were like total innocence. We kept from even the slightest smile.

He barely punctured the lid, and the thing almost exploded. It *poured* beer.

All I remember is how we all immediately were off and running. He chased us all over the place. He never got really mad. I think it turned more into a game of wits.

As we continued on our way down river, we would sit in front of the barge and glide silently over the eddies.

The familiar hills of Holy Cross brought forth images of the village, the mission, the nuns, friends and opening up our house. It was all there, safe and just waiting for our invasion!

The house was always an adventure in itself — the cool air and settled dust. I would run upstairs, checking out every corner to find things I left behind the year before. We would open the upstairs window and look over the

so they were Indian Knives!

Well, once we had our Indian Knives, we set forth to make a fish camp. First, we would gather four sticks and trim away the small branches to leave a nice Y. Then, we would cut willows, skin them and size them up for the fish racks.

Then, it was time to go "fishing." We would walk among the willows and gather leaves. The different sizes and types of leaves were to indicate the different types of fish. Some were Kings, and some were Dogs.

After the "catch" we would come back to our camp and start cutting the "fish." We would cut each down the middle and trim the fish to look like "dry fish."

After we cut a good amount, we would hang them on the rack to dry. We learned to enjoy the simple things and loved the free feeling of mud between our toes — and just being!

The smoking? Well, that's a different story!

Editor's Note: Theresa Demientieff Devlin, 44, is a student at Alaska Pacific University in Anchorage. Her family of 12 includes her parents, Nellie Mae Demientieff, Nick E. Demientieff; and her brothers and sisters, nicknamed, Irene, Birdie, Lolly, Bing, Lumpy, Eva, Mannie, Tootie and Sugar.



It was hard to tell whether entering the mutt parade was a privilege or an insult.