

"I may not agree with a word you say but I will defend unto death your right to say it." — Voltaire



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Lost VISTA Volunteer And an Old Eskimo Strange Encounter Leads Into Extensive Analysis of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act

Land's End Village
State of Alaska
March 30, 1973

Dear Howard,

I have been living in this village for many years all alone except for Mr. Wally Morton, who was an old VISTA volunteer who got lost up here in 1970 and never got evacuated. We didn't use to have much to do in the evenings until one day when the mail plane dropped a bundle of magazines which all turned out to be the same — AN ACT (Public Law 92-203). Wally read one copy and then told me that it had a lot to do with my life and my future here in Alaska, so we read it together in the evenings to practice our lessons. You see he is teaching me English and I am teaching him Eskimo and we use AN ACT as the text. So far it has been pretty one-sided because AN ACT doesn't have any Eskimo language in it. In fact, as Wally explains what AN ACT says to me this seems pretty logical, because as far as Alaska Natives (that is what we Eskimos, Aleuts, Tlingits, Haidas, Athabaskans, etc. are called in AN ACT) are concerned it does seem to pretty one-sided. He says that there is alot of money (\$\$\$\$) involved but then Wally always has been a bit more interested in dollars than in land, water, animals, and such-like. To hear him explain it they all involve buying, selling, and world markets, and I am just an old Eskimo man who does not know much about these complicated things.

But there are a few things that one man can say to another old man which I'll try to pass on to you to see what you think. As there were many new and difficult words in AN ACT we read Section 3 on DEFINITIONS first. The very first word defined in AN ACT is "Secretary" which does not mean a woman who operated a typewriter and makes decisions for the Boss in an office as I had always been told. This "Secretary" is the Boss of the Interior Department. I wonder who writes his letters and makes decisions for him like all the other Bosses? Anyway this "Secretary" seems to be extremely important since he is the first person defined in AN ACT and apparently gets to make most of the important decisions. For example, in Section 3 of AN ACT it says that a Native is someone who has ¼ Native blood or if not that then someone who is recognized by other Natives as a Native and who has one parent that is also recognized as a Native. Then it says in Sec. 3 (b): Any decision of the Secretary regarding eligibility for enrollment shall be final; "so Wally was wondering if he was a friend of the Secretary could he be enrolled as a Native. As for me, I was wondering if the Secretary didn't like me could he prevent me from being enrolled as a Native? Then I got to wondering what about someone with ¼ Native blood that other Natives did not recognize as a Native? I mean is a Native a Native or is Native someone the "Secretary" says is a Native? How much Native blood does the "Secretary" need to be able to decide who is a Native? And who were the Natives who decided that the "Secretary" could decide who Natives were?

This is all very difficult to me, Howard, so I will be writing down some more of the questions about AN ACT that are bothering me and sending them on to you. Many thanks and I hope all is well with you.

Your Native friend,
Naugga Ciunerput

Tom Richards, Jr.'s Column-- Author Recalls Poignant Grandparental Relationships

(c) 1973 by
THOMAS RICHARDS, JR.

OLONGAPO CITY — Every man must meet some individual during his lifetime with whom he develops a very special relationship, one which is of great value at first and one which provides memories which are cherished even more each time they are recalled. Some people must wait an entire lifetime to discover such a relationship.

I was very fortunate to find three of my best friends among my memories of my grandparents, and to have known them very well until they were gone. Many people like to remember those they have loved who are now dead. In this column, I want to include recollections of my grandparents from a book which is now in preparation. The first, "Attatah" is excerpted from one chapter. The second, "Ahnah" is from a collection of poetry.

ATTATAH

Events in my life have rarely occurred as I planned. Three weeks before Christmas, my Attatah (grandfather) dies in the Fairbanks hospital. He was Dad's father and the last of my grandparents to die. His body was returned to Kotzebue for the funeral.

The flight home was the longest of my life. I am reminded of it every time I hear Sioux singer Floyd Westerman's song about the return of his mother's body home for burial. "Only thirty-five more miles and you'll be free," sings Floyd. I knew that I would not return to school. I knew I did not want to be a lawyer.

Attatah's body rested in the newly-built Friends Church near the center of the village. Outside, the ground was brown and grassy. Kotzebue did not get much snow that winter. The wind blew cold and dry air from the Chukchi Sea across the village. It was refreshing, but the reason for my return spoiled my homecoming.

I was disappointed that the funeral could not take place in the old church where Attatah had played his violin during services for most of his adult life. He looked completely at rest, as if ready for death. I remember admiring that distinguished crop of white hair

and his hands.

My earliest memories are of his hands. He would call me to him with them, to his rocking chair. With his big hands, he would lift me to his knee. And with his hands, he would see how much I had grown. When he saw that I was still growing, he would grin and laugh. When he laughed, his hands would laugh too on my shoulders.

His hands were those of a netmaker. Skilled and strong, they appeared ready to stitch another sturdy knot. Attatah became blind as a young man. His hands were very important to him. And, to me, they were like his grin or his voice. I watched his hands like other people watched eyes.

Toward the end of his life, after his wife died, many of his friends were gone. When he found an old friend, they talked about the way of life in the north. Few were left who knew stories of the days of Kotzebue Eskimos.

I can hardly remember what sounds came from that house before Effie died. After she died, and he was alone much of the time, the only sounds were of his rocking chair, and the chimes from his clock, or the wind if it was blowing.

Attatah's was the most peaceful house in the village toward the end. Sometimes, he liked to play his violin. He would play a jig or a hymn that some old trader taught him many years ago. It always sounded good. As he played, his fingers danced and his head nodded and his face would grimace.

When he finished, he would grin and laugh, and I would ask him to play some more. I always loved to ask him to play for me.

He stopped when he got tired, and rocked in his chair, and sometimes he would fall asleep. When I was small, I would shake him awake to ask for the money he always gave me for cracker jacks.

Actually, I never really did shake him. I just made a noise and he would tell me to wait while he opened his coin purse to give me a quarter. When I got older, I let him sleep. I would sneak out and fix the wooden latch. Now his house is boarded up.

Sometimes, as I stop while

passing, I try to fool myself into thinking that I could hear the violin or the chair or chimes of the clock. But I always stop as I pass. I wish that I had asked him more about the old times in Kotzebue, and I wish that I knew how to sing his songs.

His death was more than the loss of a relative. He had a very special wisdom which I shall spend the rest of my life trying to define. The gravel and dirt of beautiful Kotzebue earth was lead in my hand when I threw it on his coffin. From him, I have something that must always be a great part of my life. Kotzebue villagers knew him as Johnny Richards. To me, he is Attatah.

AHNAH

No sacred song
or pretty sunset
ever soothed my soul
as much as watching
Ahnah comb her hair.

No skin
many decades younger
ever felt so soft and warm
as from the firm
gentle grasp
from Ahnah's hands.
No laughter
was such love and truth,
heard abundantly
as Ahnah's mirth.

No smile
was ever so generous
from eyes, lips, and wrinkles
and so easy to return
as Ahnah's smile.

No life
was ever as beautifully
summed
in such a peaceful visage
as Ahnah's death.

When in sorrow
I remember her laughter
and her smile
in spite of tears.

Thank you for your life,
Ahnah,
for none can live as
you did ever again.

Thank you for your love
My Ahnah, my grandmother.
I remember you
and love you
always.

Letters from Here and There

'When You Answer Back, You Get a Good Licking'

Nulato, Alaska
March 29, 1973

Dear Friend, Mr. Howard Rock,
the Editor:

Well, as long as you want me to write, I'll write. The first thing I learned before I could write my name was Catechism; who made the world; also the ten commandments. The fifth was, "Thou shalt not steal." but the fourth was, "Honor thy father and mother."

We had two different teachers for Catechism. One day the Sisters, one day the priest. We prayed four to six times a day. the first thing they taught us was never to answer back, if we did, we got a good licking.

My Mom and Dad also told

me, help the old people, and listen to them. So as I was growing up I started to help people build boats, sleds, canoes or boats, and I watch and measured everything they were doing. That's how I learned everything I know. I hunted with them when I was ten years old in the fall for bear — that is, bear in the den. Camping for days, a month. The youngest one had to build a campfire, and I was the one.

The first snowfall in the fall, or rain, I was the one to get up to build a fire. Sometimes I had a hard time to build a fire while 12 older people were sleeping, waiting for coffee and dried fish. That was all we carried or had left. That was when we didn't get the bear.

Nowadays I build a canoe, sled, boat in front of my house. The high school kids come back from school don't even stop to say hello or nothing, they just pass by hanging on to the girl. Is that what they are building schools for? This is why I don't like schools.

I was down at Kaltag for Christmas, also New Years at Huslia, also here. There are ten graders here and there. They can't even haul a load of wood to keep warm in their houses. Now that's what their parents told me. That's why I'm writing to you about the school buildings.

I went to school four hours a day. That was too much for me. I had to hook up my

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