

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 a 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

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

(Continued on page 8)

Letters . . .

(Continued from page 2)

dogs 4:00 o'clock in the morning to go fishing and sometimes to get wood for the store for \$4.00 a cord and come to school at 9:00 o'clock then take off after 3:00 o'clock to make money or get grayling for the winter.

Six hours a day for kids to go to school now is too long. I noticed that in Fairbanks.

My relatives don't know what to do. Pretty soon they get bored and lonesome. I'm getting the same way down here. I have no job after working all my life. I'm going crazy and I want to lay down and read, sleep want to lay down and read, sleep and die — but I can't die yet. The doctor told me I was ready to die in 1965. That's not only the doctor, one at Elmendorf hospital and one at Alaska Native Hospital at Anchorage. That's seven years ago.

I think this schooling is too much for some kids. How would you like it if you stay in school for six hours a day and you don't know what you're in there for? That's the way I was when I was young when I had the pep, energy, stamina. I just had to drive dogs, haul wood, look at fish traps, play football and cut wood for the house to keep warm.

The first thing I learned when I was nine years old was to cut wood for the house. And my sisters to pack water, wash dishes and cook dog food. We had 29 dogs for 12 years. We fish all summer for them. That was our way. That's the kind of schooling I had and I think it's the best — for me anyway.

Well, the deadline is March 30 and my birthday is 31st, 1907, Easter Sunday. I celebrate 31st and Easter Sunday. I have three birthdays. How about that. I'm talking about the March 30 enrollment. I'm still waiting for my land settlement. I would like to have it so I can enjoy the money what I been fighting and writing for for years.