

# Our Christmas Tree

by Jim Benedetto

Tundra Times Editor

We divided up the duties, as is customary for our annual office Christmas Party. The paste-up artist and typesetter drew decorations and refreshments assignments, appropriately enough, for their names are *Holly* and *Candy*, respectively.

Invitations went to another staffer, with music selection and stereo-setup going to yet another.

The problem of selecting a tree (nearly always a thankless task, but then you can't please everybody) fell to Ron, an appropriate duty that always seems to depend on who has a truck.

And so it was that he and a longstanding *compadre* drove his little pickup into the mountains, navigating the treacherous dirt roads, by this time covered with enough snow to disguise the many ruts, bottom-scraping rocks, limbs, and monster potholes which can swallow little Japanese imports as easily as your average party guest inhales *hors d'oeuvres*.

Those perils notwithstanding, the two men completed their chore and delivered our Christmas tree to the office that very evening. All this was accomplished in the Alaska winter darkness, with only the dim glare of twin Chevy headlamps to guide the fall of the ax. And somehow the holiday cheer, which seems so elusive before one devotes oneself to such a task, descended quietly over the two sometime during the course of their labor.

So it was that they dragged the tree into our workplace, whistling Christmas carols a touch off-key, and laughing riotously as they first tried to drag the tree through the door top end first.

The tree stretched all the way to the ceiling, and then some. But with some deft pruning, they soon had it mounted in the stand, and we all stood around their offering, and surveyed their work.

*It certainly is a bit scruffy*, we all thought to ourselves, *Maybe it will look better when it's decorated*, though it never diminished our appreciation to those who had risked life and limb to procure this.....*interesting* tree.

In the days to come, though we still hadn't gotten around to decorating it, the tree itself seemed to take on a new stature in our eyes.

Most of the trees bought commercially, someone pointed out, are not Alaskan trees at all, but instead come from foreign countries like Washington and Oregon.

Sure, our tree is a bit scruffy, but it has *survived*. Like a scruffy, bandy-legged old prospector, it's not very pleasing to the eye, but it's hardy; it knows when to grow, and when to hole up for the winter. If it had put out a lot of lush boughs, it would long ago have been buried by the heavy mountain snows.

If it had grown more symmetrically, more compactly, it would have been a far more attractive meal for the moose in its area, who would then have nibbled it down to nothing. Let those prissy Washington trees try to weather a few Alaskan winters, and then see what they look like.

And it does look just fine with the decorations on it; it's even beautiful, in a lean sort of way. Stop by and see it, and you'll know what I mean.

It's *our Christmas tree*, after all, and we're proud of it.