

Work is never done for Paragohn Parka

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I'm just alone, no sister, no brother," the elderly man said quietly as he stood near the salmon smokehouse early one morning two weeks ago.

Paragohn Parka, of Napaskiak was an orphan as he grew up. He remembers the past.

"I'm seventy plus something," Paragohn said. "I had no mother and no father. They died when I was very young. I saw my father for a little while, but I didn't see my mother.

"I'm just alone, no sister, no brother."

In his youth, Paragohn attended school, and worked for the reindeer herders and has spent his life as a subsistence hunter and fisherman.

"I didn't go to school too much," Paragohn said. "Just three years. I went to the school at Bethel at the orphanage."

As a young man, Paragohn trapped mink, foxes and otter to supplement his subsistence hunting and fishing. He remembers the changes as the white men, preachers, gold miners and others moved into the lands in which he grew up. Quietly in his

own way he remembers and accepts what had happened.

"I worked with the Lapplanders when they came here with reindeer," Paragohn said. He looked to the horizon seeing in his minds eye the herds of reindeer. "I can see then now." I worked for 20 years with the reindeer herders as a young man."

The reindeer he remembers stayed at the hills to the south. "The reindeer were killed by wolves and some by disease," Paragohn said sadly.

As Paragohn talked quietly, the king and chum salmon he had caught using his drift net in the Kuskokwim River were being prepared for storage. The king salmon were being air dried or smoked for eating during the long and cold winter months. The chum or dog salmon were being dried also for winter but for his dog team.

Paragohn said he was also saving the salmon eggs, drying them for his dog team to eat during the winter months. "They need the food, bones and eggs to keep them healthy," he said.

A delicacy was being fermented in a shallow pit near by. "This is stink heads in a pit about two feet deep and around," Paragohn said. "We put them in there and cover them with a few inches of mud on top to keep the blue flies out of them. Sometimes," Paragohn said, "the flies will lay their eggs in there and ruin the stink heads." The stink heads will be ready in two to three weeks.

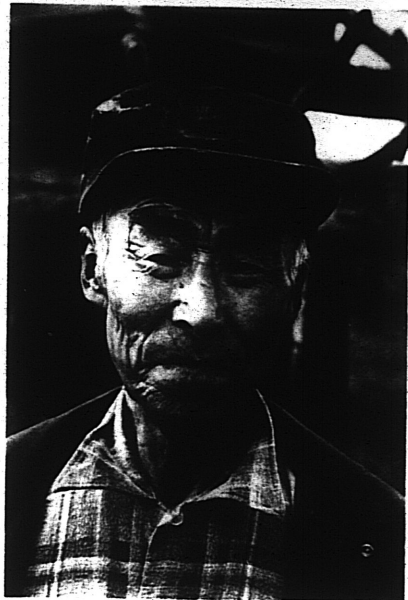
Today, Paragohn says he is '70 something plus.' He is still strong physically and makes his living much as he has in the past. Now he has a wife and two daughters and one son.

His weathered face shows the hard working life he has led throughout the years.

The years of living are catching up to Paragohn. Last year he had traveled Outside to see a doctor. This year he must also. "After the fishing season, I'll be flying to see a doctor. It's a five-hour flight from Anchorage, somewhere out there," Paragohn said.

Work is never done however.

And he returned to work seeing his smoked salmon needed more willows in the smoldering fire in the smoke shed.



Paragohn Parka, who says he is 70 something plus stands quietly one morning two weeks ago at Napaskiak where he has lived much of his life as a subsistence hunter and fisherman and trapper.



Parka still uses a dog team in the winter months, and he catches 'dog' or chum salmon to be dried for his dog team's food during the long winter months. Shown some of the tails of salmon also dried for dog food.



Like many of the residents of the Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers, Parka drift nets for king salmon which is air dried or smoked. The salmon is eaten throughout the year, hopefully with a little left over by the time the next year's fishing season comes.