



## Seals prompt big celebration

*Editor's Note: Katie Moses from Tooksook Bay wrote the following account of a seal party, an event that takes place when the first seal of the season is taken, for the 1975 edition of Theata.*

By KATIE MOSES

"Seal party at our house!" From house to house I used to stick my head in and invite all the women at Tooksook Bay. All excited, the women would jump and leave whatever they're doing and rush to the seal

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party, hoping they'll get there first so they'll get the best position. Children, as soon as they find out about the seal party, get more excited than their mothers, and spread the word around, and go to the seal party.

During springtime, the village of Tooksook Bay, located at the southwest part of Alaska, comes alive with seal parties. The surrounding area comes alive with living sounds, for instance the flocks of geese flying over the village, the ptarmigan in the distance, children playing and the men with their ski-doo's taking off hunting. The bright sun beats down, reflecting on the white snow, blinding the people at the same time and tanning anybody who's enjoying the springtime.

About this time of the year, the men return home from hunting muktuk (seal). The women who have been waiting at home for this chance of celebrating the first muktuk of the springtime, lose no time sitting around. The women promptly prepare for the seal party.

Seal partying is the tradition.  
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# Seal party attended by everyone

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dition of the southwestern coastal Eskimos. It is a belief that women celebrate the first muktuk of the spring so their husbands and sons who catch their first seal will gain as successful hunters. It also symbolizes the sharing of thankfulness. The seal partying occurs between March and May.

The preparation for the seal party is done with the help of a close relative from the family. The muktuk is cut across the stomach right down to the meat. After it is skinned along with the fat, the fat is cut in two-foot long strips. The meat is cut into pieces to pair off with the fat.

The women go shopping at the co-op store and to any privately-owned small stores. The women spend approximately one hundred dollars on goods such as fabric, pilot bread, cracker jacks, candies, gum, cigarettes, coffee, tea and toys. After the shopping is done, the things are sorted at the house. During the assortment, the children start inviting the women from house to house.

The children spread the good news of the seal party. Like any other party-lovers, the women get all excited and they rush to the house

where the seal party is at. No matter what the women were doing, the party comes first. Some women leave their hot cup of tea unfinished or put down whatever they were sewing.

Rushing to the house where the husband caught muktuk, you'd think the women are racing on the

Fourth of July. Usually the women want to get the best position.

The seal party takes place at the porch entrance. The women form a semi-circle with the elderly women in the front now sitting down, and the younger women standing behind the elderly women. While waiting for

the seal party, the women chatter, gossip or just inform each other about what's been happening.

Once all the women are comfortably in their positions, the seal party begins by distributing the fat and meat in containers the women brought, which are placed in front of the

elderly women. When all the fat and meat are given out, the most exciting part comes. The things the wife of the husband bought from the store are shared among the women. If there's leftovers, the things are thrown in any direction. The women get all excited and  
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# ● Seal party attended by everyone

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try to catch whatever they can reach in the air. Screaming in high-pitched voices, they try to catch whatever comes flying their way. Funny incidents happen sometimes; for example, two women might catch some object at the same time. If this happens, the two women have a little tug-of-war. Or some falling object from the air might hit the women on the head.

The kids outside the semi-circle have fun too, trying to catch goodies like gum, candies, cracker jacks and cookies. Each kid competes with each other to see

if he or she will get the most goodies.

Sometimes when the season is good, the seal parties are continuous day after day. The women never get tired of seal partying because the fat that they get can be used for seal oil and the meat for dinner or they can dry the meat for later food.

Anybody is invited to the seal party because the idea

is sharing the first seal of the spring season. So, if you ever come to Nelson Island during March through May, come and join the seal party! You're welcome.