

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

# Tundra Times



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### Editorial Comment—

## Strange Culmination Of a Difficult Fight

The Alaska Federation of Natives' secretary, Miss Frances Degnan, announced over the public address system at the AFN convention last Saturday that the vote was 511 to 56 giving the President of the United States the greenlight to sign into law the Alaska native land claims bill.

The vote was overwhelming, to be sure, for President Nixon to sign the measure. There was a 40 million acres of land award in the offing, and there was \$962 million—a payment for lands lost. These are almost astronomical figures, but at the end of the voting, they were met with almost a dead silence by some 600 native delegates to the AFN convention. One would think that some measure of elation would be apparent. Instead, something else happened. We do not know exactly what.

The Alaska native people have a profound sense of belonging to their lands, or a profound sense of ownership to lands. The delegates must have sensed that as they voted, they were also voting to relinquish some 300 million acres of land forever—lands they and their ancestors were accustomed to using for their sustenance. Indeed this was what was happening and there were mixed feelings.

"For several times today, I didn't know whether to laugh or cry," said a woman delegate. She was not the only one who said it. There was poignancy that would not quit that day. Great many of the native people there probably experienced a sense of loss much more strongly than a sense of gaining. There were tears that threatened to spill that day. The atmosphere at the convention hall seemed to be pervaded with a special kind of sadness—a strange ending to a great fight for justice.

The native land claims measure is now law. With possible amendments for the better in the future, it is a law that native people will now have to live with. The ingredients for a better economic status seem to be there. The money is adequate, we believe, to sustain a perpetuating economic level, even to achieving an even better economic level.

We believe also that the measure will be the closest to a substitute to the former way of living. It will not do away with subsistence living altogether. It can be a good basis for perpetuating charming cultures and traditions. It will provide food for the table. In order to make it do these good things, the provisions in it must be handled carefully, always with feelings that it is being done for the good of the present generation and for the good of the native people in the future. It can be made to do good things—last things.

## Eskimo Folk Song

A wonderful occupation  
Hunting caribou!  
But all too rarely we  
Excel at it  
So that we stand  
Like a bright flame  
Over the plain.

And yet, there is only  
One great thing,  
The only thing:  
To live;  
To see in huts and on journeys  
The great day that dawns,  
And the light that fills the world.

Eskimo Songs—from SEASONS OF THE ESKIMO  
By FRED BRUEMMER

## A Book Review--

# Seasons of the Eskimo: A Vanishing Way of Life

By MADELYN SHULMAN  
Staff Writer

SEASONS OF THE ESKIMO: A VANISHING WAY OF LIFE—Photography and text by Fred Bruemmer. New York Graphic Society, Greenwich, Connecticut, 1971. \$15.

"Inuit, the people, Eskimos proudly call themselves. Men pre-eminent, the Original Men to whom earth herself gave birth. For Indians and whites their legends postulate a less flattering ancestry. They are descended of an Eskimo girl who mated with a dog, human in appearance but vicious and monstrous inside."

From the folklore and tales of the Eskimo people, the lore

of the north, the beauty of the barren tundra in its many guises, a man named Fred Bruemmer has created a book. As a photographer, Bruemmer lived for months in many Canadian Eskimo "camps"—learning the people, observing their life and their land.

As a writer, Bruemmer has consolidated the lore of the north into five beautiful and striking essays. Four of them cover the seasons of the year. From the mood of the season he proceeds to pictures of the people of the north, their land and their actions.

"Of all the earth's regions, the Eskimos live in the harshest and most forbidding," Bruemmer writes. "Summers are short, cool and mosquito-plagued, winters long, dark and cold. The murderous climate and ever present threat of famine could have turned the Eskimos into a glum and brooding people. Instead they are gay, gregarious, good natured and amazingly contented."

Unlike many books about the Eskimo, Bruemmer idealizes nothing.

"Before the advent of white men and their guns, the Eskimos lived in balance with nature, or as Dr. Ian McTaggart Cswan has put it, "The native people were a dynamic element in the balanced ecosystem."

While this may sound very commendable, in practice it simply meant that the Eskimos periodically starved to death so that the numbers never increased to the point where they could have seriously decimated those game animals upon which they depended for food."

"...For many groups, it was a life of alternating feast and famine and, in some years—the bad years—feasts were short and famines fatally long."

Thus, the tales of the Eskimos are interspersed with instances of starvation, death, cannibalism. While pitied, cannibalism was recognized as sometimes a necessity to survive. Female children, useless in old age, were usually strangled. Old people died of necessity.

The old tales, the good and the horrible, are interspersed through this book a gift from the many Eskimo people the author gleaned them from. Here, he tells how the Eskimo hunted the seal, the great walrus, the caribou.

He tells of the whale and walrus cultures of the shores and the caribou Eskimos who can turn that one animal into everything needed for survival. The hunters lore comes alive in both tales and pictures, many pictures of a vanishing way of life.

Bruemmer's pictures must be the focus of his book. As a writer and photographer, he focuses on the few "camp" Eskimos still following their traditional way of life in the Canadian Arctic. Most Eskimo people in Canada, he admits, live in government housing projects.

For the few who follows the traditional ways, the life is hard—almost as hard as their ancestors. Today, Eskimo hunters use rifles instead of bows and arrows and a steel knife is by no means a rarity.

Yet, the steady turn of the seasons does not change. The arctic plants—long awaiting the warmth and sunshine, still flo-

wer on the tundra in the spring.

In the 20th Century, many writers—Eskimos and white—idealize the way of life of the north. In our roundly padded industrial empire, few people face starvation.

Thus, for the generation raised within a dying culture it is easy to idealize. Their fathers had guns and storebought implements first signs of the death of their culture but enough to have ended the threat of starvation without undermining the hunter's pride.

The white man, Bruemmer points out, destroyed the Eskimo culture in more ways than one. Whalers, hunters, destroyed the food sources of the arctic.

The great thundering herds of caribou are no more. The whale is a disappearing species. It was not the Eskimo—who if he were lucky could kill 70 or 80 animals per year for his family—who destroyed his food sources.

At the same time, the wonders of civilization, of missionary religion, of canned food and storebought rifles undermined the way of life from the other direction.

"The days of the self-reliant Eskimo hunter, living off the land, are nearly over. Only in a few camps are old traditions and lore preserved; families still mould their lives to the ancient rhythm of the seasons; and at least part of the Eskimos' ancient culture, attuned to their harsh land, persists."

There is a vanishing way of life. It was a hard life, but it possessed the harmony and balance that comes when men are free within themselves, secure within their society, and imbued with a feeling of kinship with all nature."

Here, the way of life, the lore, the songs, the tradition of the Eskimo people is preserved for the future.

"Glorious was life,  
Now I am filled with joy,  
For every time a dawn  
Makes white the sky of night  
For every time the sun goes up  
Over the heavens."

## Tax Forms To Be Late

Due to late Congressional action on tax law changes, the Alaska income tax forms will not be available to the public until January 15, 1971 or later, according to an announcement by Alaska Commissioner of Revenue, Eric E. Wohlforth.

At that time the forms will be available at the Department of Revenue field offices and banks and post offices throughout the state.

Written or phone requests will be handled immediately at local field offices.

Additional information is available by writing to the Department of Revenue, Pouch S, Juneau, Alaska 99801.

## CLASSIFIED

Assistant Center Director, Fairbanks Native Community Center. Must be knowledgeable of Federal grants and administration. Must have experience in supervision of Community Service Organization. Salary to \$16,000.00. Closing date January 8, 1972. Send to Sam Kito, Jr., Fairbanks Native Community Center, 102 Lacey Street, Fairbanks, Alaska 99701.

## LETTERS

### 'Bicycle Vern' to Peddle from Fairfield-Fairbanks

Vernon L. Leifheit  
5344 Talawanda Drive  
Fairfield, Ohio 45014

Howard Rock, Editor

Sir:

Please start a one year subscription to your newspaper the Tundra Times and bill me right away and I will pay by return mail.

I am hoping to gain some information about your part of the country that might be helpful in my proposed bicycle trip from Fairfield, Ohio (18 miles north of Cincinnati) to your fair city of Fairbanks, Alaska.

I expect to start the trip either June 17th or June 24 and will make the 4148 mile trip in 38 days or less.

I have been making cross country trips for the past five years and at the age of 53 (April 72) will do my longest one to date.

In 1969 I did a 2929 mile coast to coast trip from San Diego California to Rehoboth Beach.

Delaware in 26 1/2 days and this year 1971 did Mexico to Canada. This 2,302 mile trip from the Mexican border at Brownsville, Texas to the Canadian border at International Falls, Minnesota took 17 days 21 hours and 45 minutes. I did 18 straight century days that ranged from 100.4 miles to 164.2 miles per day.

I started riding at the age of 47 after a 26 year lay off from bicycles and in the past five years (7 month season here) have traveled 31,950 miles. This past season was my best and I did 9,057 miles in '71.

I am not sponsored by anyone and I ride solo and the bicycle you see coming up the Alcan Highway sometime the latter part of July will be Bicycle Vern from Fairfield, Ohio. Don't be surprised by what I look like I am not the lean all American boy but just an old rider that can go the big mileage.

If you wish to publish this letter do not do so until my subscription starts.

Sincerely,  
Bicycle Vern the Alaska rider.