

Children Find Joy in Legend House Puppets

Youngsters Make Their Own Puppets



MAGIC IN THE MAKING — Candy Keith shapes a puppet head for an old Tlingit legend.

—Photo by JACQUELINE GLASGOW

By JACQUELINE GLASGOW
Staff Writer

The legends, folk tales, stories and songs of the major Eskimo and Indian tribes of Alaska were, above all else, a rich source of entertainment for the people.

Once again, they are being used for the sheer fun of it. The Legend House Puppets, originally founded by Sally Latimer and Marilyn Bolles, is now working with a group of children from the Fairbanks Native Association.

The children, ages 8 to 12, listen to the ancient tales, make their own puppets, costume them, and then present them to the delight of other children and adults.

The Fairbanks children will perform during the June 14 University Day for Women at Hess Dining Commons on the University of Alaska campus. Plans are also in the making to present the legends at the Library Story Hour, the Fairbanks Native Center, and possibly in conjunction with Emily Brown at Wood Center.

Sally Latimer, who has also worked with the children of Ft. Yukon and McGrath, would like to expand the program and train assistants who could teach this ancient art of puppetry.

Puppets, she explained, have been used traditionally by the American Indian. The best known are perhaps the puppets of the Hopi Indians, used in the ceremony of the Great Plumed Snake.

On the Queen Charlotte Islands of the northern Pacific coast of Canada, the Haida Indians used puppetry during their ceremonies.

Displayed at the University of Alaska Museum is an ancient seated figure of wood with strings attached to the back part enabling it to nod. This wooden figure is believed to have been used in religious ceremonies by

the Point Hope Eskimos.

Another venerable puppet of undetermined age is located at Point Hope and is still used by the people in a dance ceremony during the annual Christmas celebrations. Both the head and arms of the figure can be moved by strings.

One look at the faces of the children working with the puppets is enough to convince one that the project is worthwhile. History, which can tend to be dull, springs alive in the midst of laughter, wonder, and awe.

Listening to a taped rendition of an ancient Tlingit legend, recited by Dr. Walter Soboleff, about a boy who was darker than anyone else in his tribe, the boy who was making the dark boy of the legend painted his puppet's head a richer, darker shade than all the other children's.

When he finished painting the head, he continued to paint his own hand and then his entire arm, fascinated by the fantasy of being darker than anyone else.

The children participating in the Fairbanks class are: Richie Hayward, Elizabeth Henry, Stephen Henry, Raymond Keith, Lorena Keith, Candy Keith, and Kriste Wirth.

Emma Widmark, the head of the Education Committee of the FNA, has been assisting Sally and will eventually be able to take on a class of her own.

Mrs. Latimer strives for authenticity in all areas. She likes to provide natural, native materials for the children to use in making the puppets, such as fur for the hair and skins for the clothes.

The doors of the classroom keep popping open as adult workers at the center sneak in to take a peek at the proceedings, with a somewhat wistful look and perhaps a slight regret that the class is limited to the under-twelve bracket.

15 Native Students to Embark on Study Tour

FAIRBANKS—Fifteen Native students at the University of Alaska here will take a break from the traditional course of study this fall to embark on a study tour of the western United States.

The tour, sponsored by Student Orientation Services (SOS), is designed to familiarize the students with problems — and solutions — facing American Indians. Each student will earn 12 academic credits during the 14-week trip.

Taking the tour will be Dorothy Napoleon and James Joseph of Hooper Bay; Darlene Wright of Anchorage; Don Komakhuik of Nome; Linda Pete of Eek; Linda Lincoln, Carolyn Fields and Reginald Joule of Kotzebue; Rita Hunter of Marshall; Adelaide Herrmann of Naknek; Lucille Atkinson of Metlakatla; Reginald Joseph of Fairbanks; James Akaran of St. Mary's; and Elmer Jackson of Kiana.

Touring with the students and acting as advisors and instructors will be Helen Atkinson, SOS counselor, and Nancy Crawford, assistant professor of English for SOS.

Mrs. Crawford explained the purpose of the trip is "to show the students what's happening here. Only six of them have ever been outside, and for three it was just a brief trip.

"We're trying to make this segment of the students' education relevant to them," she went on. "By being able to get out of the formal classroom arrangement, we hope this will bring what they're learning closer to home."

The trip schedule plans for stops at universities with Native programs, Indian reservations in western United States, and urban Indian centers.

The group will leave here Sept. 10 for Southeastern Alaska. They will take the ferry to Seattle, and there pick up two vans which they will drive for the remainder of the trip.

They will make a loop of the western states, going through Idaho, Montana, South Dakota, Wyoming, Utah, New Mexico, California and back to Washington. They plan to return to Fairbanks Dec. 15.

During the tour, the students will earn three credits in English, six credits in history through special topics courses in American Indian heritage and Alaska Native heritage, and three credits in individual study, to be arranged before leaving campus with a professor here. Most of the students will do this study in fields such as sociology, anthropology, or education.

During their travels, they will meet with many tribal leaders, youth leaders, and university educators, as well as hold their own group discussions. Each student will be expected to write a term paper for his history credits and independent study credits.

The students involved in the project are enthusiastic. Miss Crawford reports, and have already begun preparatory work. This past semester on campus they have met twice weekly for evening discussions. In addition, they have done much of the planning work themselves.

This summer each student is to return to his village or city and prepare a home study of the community. Thus when discussing Alaska's native situation with Natives and educators outside, he will be adequately prepared.

Miss Crawford explained the students anticipate passing on knowledge about Alaska's natives in addition to learning about other groups. They will share their knowledge of dances and art, as well as information about their own community's educational system, religious customs, government, and so on.

Although efforts are being made to keep the trip at a low budget — students will stay as guests in homes or camp out — such a trip is still costly.

"Each student has put in the money he'd pay for room and board, plus \$200 each, in addition to paying his regular tuition and fees," Miss Crawford said, "but we're still short."

But the group is hopeful that donations between now and September will fill the gap, and invite interested persons to contact them care of SOS, Constitution Hall, University of Alaska, Fairbanks.

Fire Losses Skyrocket

"Fire losses have skyrocketed this year, and there really is no excuse for it as most of these losses stem from pure carelessness," Wally Dawson, State Fire Marshal, said today.

Dawson pointed out that 16 million in damages have accrued to date as against \$8 million for the entire year of 1971.

"The biggest jump we had in past years was from \$2 million to \$5 million in losses in 1962 and 1963," the Fire Marshal said. "This year the loss rate has doubled and we haven't even reached the six months mark," Dawson added.

The Fire Marshal said the death rate was also considerably higher than last year.

"Twenty-one people have been killed in fires so far as against fourteen last year. A total of thirty-three people were killed in 1971, 54 percent of whom were children, ten years old or younger. This loss is irreplaceable in terms of human suffering," said Dawson.

The Fire Marshal revealed that the highest rate of loss occurred as the result of carelessness in respect to electrical appliances and wiring, and overheating of oil and gas furnaces.

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