

COLVILLE UPDATE

Arctic Ploverland News

Spring, 1997

Greetings from the Jim Helmericks Family

Introduction

The days are getting longer and it is always wonderful to have the sun back after enduring the dark days here in the Arctic. Each year the miracle of the returning sun rejuvenates us and gives us delight and hope just as the light of God's grace floods our hearts with peace and joy. ♦Thanks to all of you who have sent greetings and news. Mail days are always special when there are letters from friends and family to counter the bills and junk mail.

Jim & Teena



Commercial fishing, Jim's flying, birding tours and guiding people here in the Arctic continue to keep us busy. We are thankful for continuing good health and strength to keep up with the many duties and responsibilities of running our businesses and maintaining our homesite. ♦We have finally been able to complete a lot of the living space in the upstairs of our big house this year and are really enjoying the great views from the large second story windows and all the extra space. Teena's many house plants can spread out and the museum keeps expanding as well. We never have trouble filling up new space. ♦All the boys were home for much of the summer and for the

Christmas holidays too (plus our new daughter-in-law). It was fun having all the family together.

Derek & Melanie



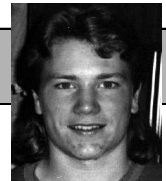
Derek took a giant leap in his life this past winter when he and his girlfriend Melanie were married on December 13th in Fairbanks. Melanie is from Germany and has been studying geology at the University of Alaska Fairbanks where Derek is nearing completion of his mining engineering studies. The couple reside in a little cabin outside Fairbanks with their new sled-dog puppy, Xena.

Jay



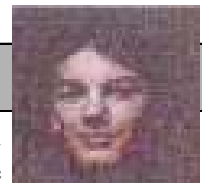
Jay is finishing his third year at the University of Alaska in electrical engineering. He continues in the Honors Program and excels in all his studies. His computer skills continue to grow and he makes good use of them in school besides coaching all of us less adept computer nuts. He plans to attend summer school, and hopes to graduate in May, 1998. We will certainly miss his competent help here at home over the coming summer months. Thank goodness for two remaining sons at home.

Isaac



Being the only son home this winter, Isaac has had to shoulder the brunt of the heavy chores which include woodcutting and water-hauling. Despite the burden of being the sole "chore-boy", his muscles certainly benefit; no weight lifting or work-outs needed here. ♦Isaac, with his mother along for the adventure, had a successful musk-ox hunt last March, and now is eagerly awaiting his full-head rug mount made from the beautiful hide and horns. We have been enjoying the abundance of the exceptional muskox meat also. ♦Isaac bought himself a new snowmachine this winter which has added a lot of fun to his winter travels and activities such as trapping

Aaron



School has been a new adventure for Aaron for his Ninth grade. He is attending West Valley High School in Fairbanks and living with Teena's brother Eldon and wife Debbie. (All the boys have had one or two years experience in public schools over their primary years of schooling.) He is doing well academically, gaining lots of new experiences which include involvement in his

church youth group, his first downhill skiing adventure, and wrestling on his school team. We have heard nothing but words of praise about how well-mannered, and helpful Aaron is.

Travel

No extended trips were made by any of the family, but we have made many short forays into the wilderness around us just to enjoy the beautiful outdoors. Isaac and Teena's trip to hunt muskox was by snowmachine with winter camping. Temperatures stayed around 0°F. but the sun was brilliant and they returned with sunburned faces. Other day-trips by snowmachine have been a lot of fun, and summer boating trips were squeezed in whenever time allowed.

Highlights



We have acquired a pet caribou this winter quite unexpectedly. Last July when a large caribou herd came across our island, a calf became lost and left behind. The little bull hung around and gradually became quite friendly. He began accepting a handful of alfalfa pellets we would leave out for him and soon was eating a daily treat right from our hands. He continues to graze and roam the island like a wild caribou, but

always returns "home" to lie down and chew his cud or just socialize. He follows us like a dog and noses into anything we're doing outdoors whether its sacking frozen fish or cutting wood. Occasionally he has followed us right up the stairs of the porch into the house and had to be shoed away. He runs along beside the snowmachine when one of us is out driving. We've had lots of comical episodes with him, and it has been fun watching him grow up. He has had opportunities to join other caribou but so far has always returned "home". Perhaps we'll have more of the saga of Clyde in the future. ♦As you might recall, birds occupy a lot of our time during the summer months. We continue to have amazing results with our rearing and releasing program of eider ducks and other waterfowl. We love to see these wild birds return each year after they have migrated thousands of miles. Last summer we had numerous exotic king eider males gracing our lake by the house - ones who had paired up with some of our returning females. These females usually bring their broods to meet us later in the summer. Such fun. ♦The annals of our one female brant raised nine years ago continues. She has now returned every summer for eight years and has raised (with her mate) dozens of young, many of whom also nest nearby, making our extensive yard host to a brant colony of many families.

Closing

We have witnessed a lot of changes over the years here on the Colville River at the edge of the Arctic Ocean. In the early days, we were the only permanent residents

between Barrow and Barter Island - a distance of over 300 miles. We were truly isolated and totally dependent upon each other. Then we watched the oil industry grow up in the Prudhoe Bay and Kuparuk areas. We now see oil rigs, power lines, buildings, and vast numbers of lights off to the east which look like a huge city on the horizon. A newly constructed Eskimo village about 22 miles upriver from us grows bigger every year. Planes and helicopters can be heard or seen every day of the year. A new oil field is being developed right here in the delta not ten miles from our place. All of these changes have been both beneficial and detrimental. Mail and supplies are easier to get home, help is nearer in case of an emergency, the pleasure of company dropping by for a visit has increased, and other vestiges of civilization make life less harsh. On the other hand, we have seen our environment suffer from the increased numbers of people and industry that have come to this area. Civilization intrudes more each year, and isolation no longer means "far away from everything" for us. But we still live a very independent life, in a land we truly love, and have a wonderful, supportive extended family. We are blessed to live in an extraordinary place. You are all welcome to come visit any time; we love company.

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LOVE FROM ALL OF US :

Jim and Teena,
Derek and Melanie,
Jay, Isaac, Aaron