



The Alaskan Shepherd



Volume 44 Number 7

September 2006

Some give by going to the Missions

Some go by giving to the Missions

Without both there are no Missions

RUBY, ALASKA: PART II THE CROWNING TOUCH

*Editor's Note: We would like to thank Phil Bridge and Ali Hassannia of Journal Graphics for making possible this color issue.
--Patty Walter*

A truly good story often owes its success to the appeal of its hero. This story is abundant in heroic value. I hope the following portrayal will become a story both written and oral: a story told at bedtimes and around campfires and sung by elders to children throughout time.

Once upon a time, not so very long ago, a young boy of Koyukon Athabascan Indian ancestry was born on the south bank of the Yukon River, in a woodcutting camp, 11 miles above Kaltag, on October 6, 1930. Harold, as he came to be called, was adopted by Peter and Martha Esmailka and trained in "the old way" of hunting, fishing, trapping, and gathering. When not attending hunting, fishing, or trapping camp, Harold attended a day school in Nulato run by Sisters of St. Ann. Harold also spent 8 years in Holy Cross attending the Mission school, where under the guidance of Brother Feltes, he became an expert mechanic.

Even at a young age, Harold's determination and hard work were well known to all. Harold was the ultimate "nice guy" and soon built a solid reputation based on kindness and generosity.

Though baptized and raised Catholic, Harold often felt "conflicted" about his religion and culture. Early missionaries had called some of his beliefs superstitious.

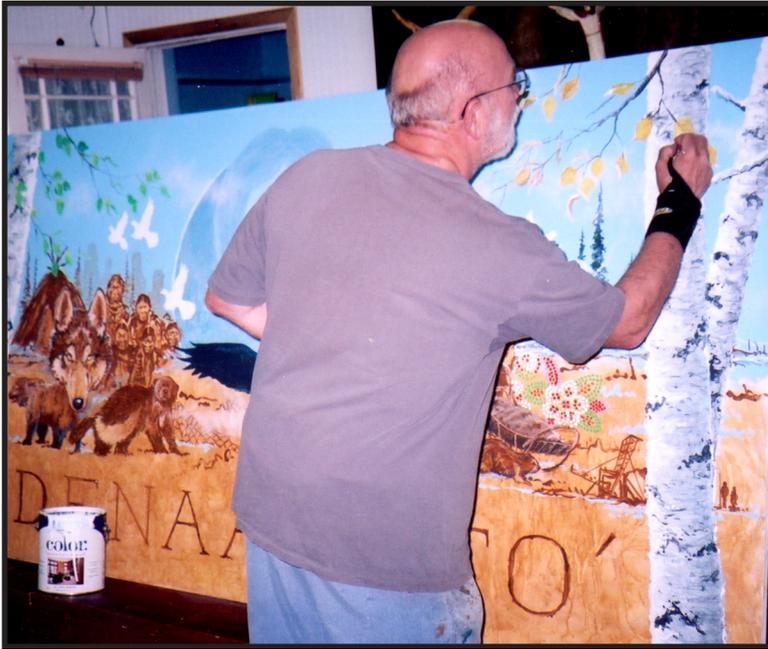


The above painting, an inspiration of Harold Esmailka, was created by Jon Van Zyle in St. Peter in Chains Church, on the banks of the Yukon River, June 21-24, 2006. The painting was dedicated on June 25, 2006, by Father Joseph Hemmer, O.F.M. Shown above left to right: Jona Van Zyle, Fr. Joseph Hemmer, O.F.M., Jon Van Zyle, Harold Esmailka, and Florence Esmailka. --All Photos by Patty Walter

He knew others were "conflicted" as many practiced their new found Catholic faith but adhered also to their Native culture and beliefs. As Harold grew he began to realize that his culture and his faith had much in common and the realization of one true God put an end to the conflict. Still, he longed to help others arrive at the same peace. Harold envisioned a painting that would

CATHOLIC BISHOP OF NORTHERN ALASKA
1312 PEGER ROAD, FAIRBANKS, ALASKA 99709
Phone: 907-374-9532 <http://www.cbna.info>
Please see our list of current Parish Needs on our website.

Special Masses are offered throughout the year for you and your intentions by our Missionary Priests. Please pray that God may bless us and our work.



Jon Van Zyle, reknowned Alaskan artist, paints a few finishing touches on the birch trees of his gift to St. Peter in Chains Church in Ruby, Alaska.

help illustrate, especially to the people of his generation, the transition from the “old ways” to the “new ways.” He wanted to remove the impression that the “old ways” were somehow bad and instead that they were important and valuable, a key step in the path to the “new ways.”

Harold kept all this in his heart, as he searched for the person who would understand and interpret his vision. He found that gifted soul in renowned Alaskan artist, Jon Van Zyle. He “got up the courage” to call Mr. Van Zyle. He was intrigued by Harold’s request, and promised to give the matter some thought. Harold thought it was taking a long time for the famous artist to get back to him. Then, one day, the opportunity came for Jon Van Zyle to make a visit to Ruby, Alaska! He was participating in the Iditarod race, when, while traveling through Tanana, his dogs became ill. Harold asked Jon if he would be interested in coming to Ruby to further discuss the project. Jon agreed and Harold arranged the flight. Later in Ruby—Jon, Harold, Fr. Joseph Hemmer, OFM, Harold’s wife Florence, and their daughter Ginger—met to discuss the painting. Jon Van Zyle agreed to do the painting. Furthermore, he wanted to come back to Ruby to paint it and insisted on not being compensated. His

painting would be a gift to the village of Ruby.

In 1979, Jon was made the official Iditarod artist. He was inducted into the Iditarod Hall of Fame in 2004. He has won many awards for his children’s art and has several published books. On June 21, 2006, Jon Van Zyle and his wife, Jona, arrived in Ruby to make Harold’s dream a reality.

Jon was supplied with a 4’x8’ piece of smooth-finish plywood and a broad selection of latex paint—very different from his usual medium, acrylic paint. Wednesday was spent priming the board. On Thursday, Jon got to work on what would eventually take a full three days to complete.

Jon asked the elders of Ruby to paint a portion of the background, the earthen part of the painting—resembling moose hide. Harold’s daughters, Ginger and Cynthia, painted a few strokes to a birch tree that frames the painting—giggling all the while, as sisters are wont to do.

Over the three days, Jon had many interruptions from curious Rubyites, among them small children—and, perhaps, the most challenging of all, mosquitoes. He chatted with adults and listened quietly to their thoughts and interpretations. With the children, he joked and teased. With the mosquitoes? He simply put up. While he painted indoors, Jona generously painted outdoors with the children of the village. They created a beautiful sign with ravens—the children’s handprints becoming the feathers. The sign, touched up by Jon and Jona, would be used to welcome people to Ruby.

On Saturday evening at about 7 p.m., Jon finished his gift to Ruby. Later that evening he was Florence and Harold Esmailka’s guest at a dinner held in the Van Zyles’ honor at Ginger and Jay DeLimas’ home. The DeLima’s house sits high above Ruby on a cliff overlooking the Yukon and Melotzi Rivers. Ginger served a variety of dishes including salmon and sheefish and many wonderful desserts with fresh salmonberries and blueberries. A particularly special part of the evening was provided by elders Poldine Carlo, Minnie Robertson, Florence Keyes, and Pauline Peters, who sang and danced Native Athabascan songs.

Again, we who serve here in the Far North want to express to you, our kind benefactors, our very sincere thanks for all the generous help you have been giving us in our need. It is you who, through your kind donations and prayers, keep us on the trail, and on the wing, and so enable us to bring the Mass and the sacraments and the ministries of the Church to our flocks in towns and villages scattered far and wide throughout this vast 409,849-square-mile missionary diocese.

Where we go, you go; what we do, you do. God bless us everyone!

TO: CATHOLIC BISHOP OF NORTHERN ALASKA

1312 Peger Road, Fairbanks, Alaska 99709

DATE _____ 2006 07 F12

Dear Bishop Kettler:

Enclosed is my special donation of \$ _____ to the *Catholic Schools of Fairbanks Annual Fund*, a fund intended exclusively to help alleviate operational costs at the school.

NAME _____ ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

Please make checks payable to: CATHOLIC BISHOP OF NORTHERN ALASKA/CBNA

CATHOLIC BISHOP OF NORTHERN ALASKA

ALASKAN SHEPHERD 1312 PEGER ROAD FAIRBANKS, ALASKA 99709-5199



Our Catholic schools can be a primary tool for evangelization and catechesis. My goal is to see that this in fact happens here in Fairbanks.” —Bishop Donald Kettler

Dear Friends of the Missionary Diocese of Fairbanks:

Sixty years ago, in September 1946, under the supervision of Father Edmund Anable, S.J., and the Sisters of Providence, fifty-five 1st-4th grade students began classes in the basement of Fairbanks’ historic Immaculate Conception Church. In 1951, six construction camp buildings and the old army officers club were moved to a site on Noyes Slough. These buildings, arranged under a single roof, became the home of Immaculate Conception School and of 115 elementary students. In 1955, the first 9th grade class met at Immaculate Conception Church. In 1956, a \$400,000 high school, named after Father Francis Monroe, S.J., founder of the first Catholic Parish in Fairbanks, was completed and opened. On May 29, 1959, Alaska was celebrating its first year of statehood, as Fairbanks’ Monroe Catholic High School graduated its first senior class, a class of six. By 1978, enough funding had been secured for construction of a two-story elementary school. In 1980, the first parent-funded kindergarten was held. Today, there are 450 students reaping the benefits of a Catholic education in Fairbanks.

Immaculate Conception School and Monroe High School comprise the only K-12 Catholic school system in Alaska. Situated in Fairbanks, just 100 miles south of the Arctic Circle, these schools educate students from a wide variety of backgrounds. Some live within walking distance, others travel 25 miles by bus or car, and still others have left their home villages and towns to board in Fairbanks to attend a Catholic school. The Catholic Schools of Fairbanks provide an educational environment that is rooted in faith, rich in academic excellence, strengthened by service and nurtured by community.

Until the 1980’s, ICS and Monroe employed a large number of Religious, both men and women, and members of the Jesuit Volunteer Corps. In the last 20 years, the JVC has turned its resources to other areas and there has been a significant decline in the number of Religious. The Religious and the volunteers donated a tremendous amount of time and energy at a very low cost. The increases in educational costs have gone largely to paying teachers and staff.

That is why we find ourselves knocking at your door. Contributing to the Catholic Schools of Fairbanks will ensure that the schools will be able to pay for textbooks, computer supplies, salaries, maintenance costs, and other costs associated with running a school. Additionally, your donation will help keep tuitions at affordable levels so that more families will be able to have the choice in the education of their children. Finally, you will be part of a tradition of giving--dating back to 1946, when the schools opened in the basement of Immaculate Conception Church.

With all sincere, grateful, best wishes,

Donald J. Kettler,
Bishop of Fairbanks

+ Donald J. Kettler



ST. THERESE NOVENA

*To the friends and benefactors of the
Missionary Diocese of Fairbanks:*

In September we begin our annual novena to the patroness of the missions of Alaska, St. Therese, "The Little Flower." **The Novena will begin on September 23 and will end on the Feast of St. Therese, October 1.** On each of these days a Mass will be offered for our friends and for their needs and petitions.

You are invited to submit petitions to be remembered during the novena. No offering is necessary. Any received will be used to support our ministries here in Northern Alaska.

You are also invited to join us on the novena days (September 23-October 1), by praying the following prayer:

"O Lord, Who said, "Unless you become as little children you shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven," GRANT US, WE BESEECH YOU, to so follow in the way of Blessed Therese in humility and simplicity that through her intercession these petitions and those of all our members may be granted as part of the shower of roses she promised to send upon this earth.

Please detach and send intention portion. Use prayer above for the Novena.

TO: CATHOLIC BISHOP OF NORTHERN ALASKA/CBNA
*1312 Peger Road * Fairbanks, AK * 99709-5199*

Please remember the following petitions during the Novena to St. Therese:

Name _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

At one point during the performance all gathered to wave at a barge making its way up the Yukon. The arrival of a barge is the announcement of supplies for the village—and greatly anticipated, in fact celebrated, by all.

Later, gifts were given to the Van Zyles from the Esmailkas and from the people of Ruby. They received, as a thank-you for the painting, a beautiful set of snowshoes made by George Albert, an equally well crafted sled made by Billy McCarty, hand-beaded Moccasins made by Poldine Carlo, and a birch bark basket made by Daisy Demientieff. Jon and Jona were overwhelmed and Jon offered to personalize and autograph a selection of mini prints he had brought as gifts for the people of Ruby. The official dedication and unveiling of the painting would take place the next morning at Mass.

Harold, realizing the importance of the event invited the following to be present to represent their village communities: Fr. Joe Hemmer, OFM—(Kaltag), Pauline Peters—(Nulato), Eliza Jones—(Koyukuk), Darlene Billings—(Galena), Rose Ambrose—(Huslia), Sharon Strick—(McGrath), Lois Huntington and Cynthia Erickson—(Tanana). Representing Ruby—Florence Esmailka, Katie Kangas, and Holly Koyukuk.

On Sunday, the 25th, the church was filled and buzzing with excitement. Fr. Hemmer began by saying, “*We thank God in a special way today for the gift of a beautiful painting and pray it will continue to bring unity to our community.*” The 2nd reading was particularly meaningful to the dedication at hand when 2 Corinthians 5:17 was read, “*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*”

Immediately after the closing song, the painting was brought in and hung by Dale Erickson and Jay DeLima. Harold proceeded to tell the congregation how he came to ask Jon Van Zyle to capture the lifestyle and beliefs that were now portrayed in the painting. After he expressed his sincere thanks to Jon, Fr. Joe Hemmer asked if anyone would like to speak about the painting.

Many elders, including Rose Ambrose, Pauline Peters, Eliza Jones, Nora Kangas, Carol Lowe, Darlene Billings, and Martha Wright rose to thank Harold and Jon and express similar feelings of confusion and conflict over their traditional Native be-



Top Photo:

Pauline Peters, Poldine Carlo, Florence Keyes and Minnie Robertson provide entertainment Saturday evening at the home of Ginger and Jay DeLima. The elders sang and danced to traditional Athabascan songs.

Middle Photo:

On a hill overlooking the Mighty Yukon, Rubyites stop briefly to gleefully welcome a freight laden barge.

Bottom Photo:

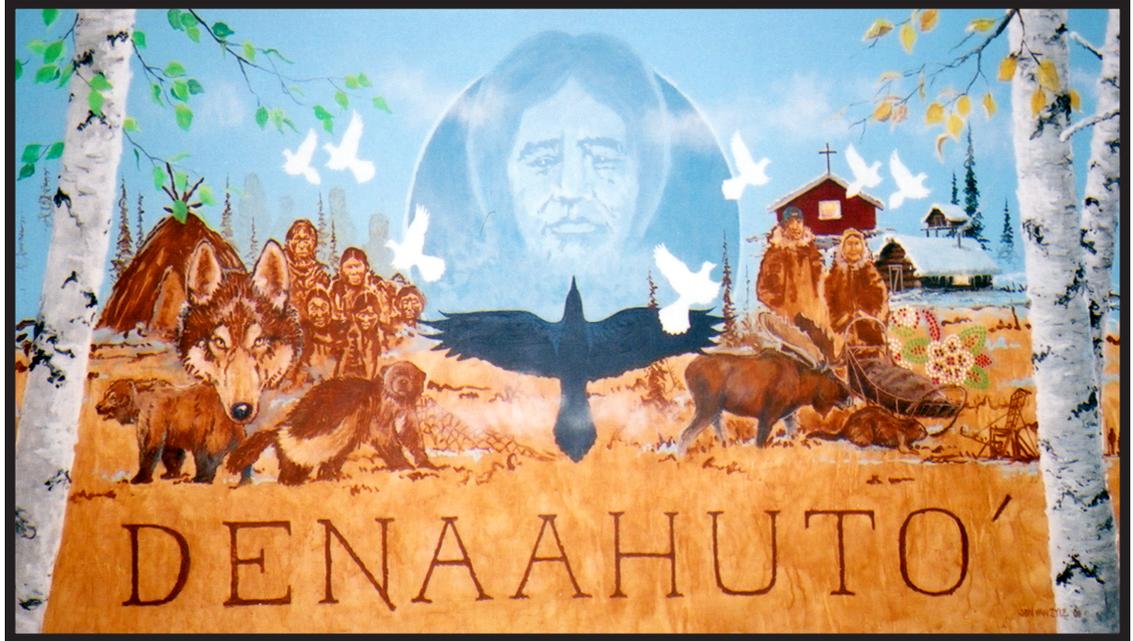
Harold Esmailka (middle) presents snowshoes made by George Albert to Jon and Jona Van Zyle in appreciation.

liefs and their Catholic faith. All expressed a deep love for God and a thanksgiving in discovering that others felt the same way. Eliza Jones thanked Jon and Harold for helping to paint a picture of what she felt in her heart and for helping to heal the pain felt by the Native people in the past. She urged all to look forward and not dwell in the past.

Jon Van Zyle rose to address the Ruby congregation but found himself quite unable to do so because he was so overwhelmed. Jona expressed his deep thanks and later his good friend Donald Honea spoke for Van Zyle and also thanked the parish for their kind and welcoming words.

Following the thanks and reflections Katie Kangas read of “a new heaven and a new earth” of “a New Jerusalem” and of “the old order passing away.” Florence Esmailka read the blessing for the dedication of the painting while Fr. Hemmer blessed the painting by a sprinkling of holy water. A wonderful reception followed in the parish hall—the old St. Peter in Chains church. Another merging of old and new. A meeting of two heroes, two storytellers, two cultures—and of one God. A historical day that will be long remembered by all.

--Patty Walter



Description of Symbols

Birch trees represent the Spring/Birth of Athabascan Native cultural beliefs and the Fall/Transformation of those beliefs with the arrival of Catholic Missionaries in Alaska in Jon Van Zyle’s painting. On the left—symbols of ancient Athabascan culture are represented by an **Indian dwelling**; **ancestors**—a tie to the old ways; a **wolf**—symbolic of hunters and protection; a **bear**—protector of the animal kingdom; and a **wolverine**—valued as a fur resource and respected for their fierce reputation. Much Native folklore includes the wolverine. In the center of the painting you find the symbolic **Raven**—the Creator. The raven is known in Native culture as the one who released the sun, moon, and stars; discovered man in a clam shell; brought the salmon and the water; and taught man how to fish and hunt. An image of God in the likeness of an **Athabascan Indian** represents Jesus. Seven **doves** encircle the image and represent the infusion of Christianity. To the right the artist has depicted the “new ways.” The original **St. Peter in Chains Catholic Church** stands behind a representation of both the **missionary** and **modern Native people**. A snow covered **cabin** represents a modern dwelling. A **moose**—not a native Alaskan animal, but important in modern culture for both its meat and hide—is situated next to the **beaver**. The beaver is known as the carpenter of the animal kingdom and valued also as a fur resource. The **dog sled** is pictured as perhaps the most used and valuable vehicle of the merging of cultures. A beautiful **beadwork flower** has been painted to represent the value of beadwork, and has been modeled after Mary Vent’s artwork. Mary was Harold Esmailka’s aunt. Finally, a **fish wheel** completes the painting—a symbol of the Native people’s ability and perseverance to live their subsistence life-style and the value of fish in both their life-style and culture.

Denaahuto means “Our Father” in Athabascan.

Again we assure you that we never, under any circumstances, sell, exchange, or give out the names of our benefactors. This has been and continues to be our sacred pledge.

Special thanks to those of you who have sent stamps! These 39¢ first class gifts are of great use to the Alaskan Shepherd.