

The Changing North

By Ellen Binder

Reprinted from *The Inuvik Drum*

Editor's Note: This is the text of an address given at Inuvik high school graduation banquet by Mrs. Ellen Binder. Mrs. Binder is a native of the North West Territories, a woman of Lapland origin, mother of nine children and an active member of the Inuvik community and Inuvik Women's Institute. She chaperoned the girls from the Territories who were special guests at the National 4H Club Conference in Toronto and Ottawa in November. The gracious style of this address and the sound and beautiful philosophy give us some idea of what the North country can produce in leaders from among its own people.

WHEN I WAS FIRST ASKED to give this little talk I had more than a few qualms and was strongly tempted to refuse. Maybe I'll wish I had before these few minutes are over.

"What could I possibly say to young people like yourselves? What would you like to hear? So many questions arose in my mind and even now I'm not sure I can answer them to my own satisfaction.

"But when I was told that the theme would be "The Changing North," how could I refuse? I could speak of what I love most — the country we live in and how it has changed, of the people I know best — the people of the country and the problems we all faced in this period of change — this period of transition.

"You see the outward changes all around you here in Inuvik — the new houses, the roads, the airplane that bridges quickly and easily the miles that stretch between the North and South, the telephone line that will soon link us with all parts of our country and make communications so very easy, even the cars that take us so quickly everywhere and probably will make us all a sedentary people. The hospital and its accessibility to everyone, the modern school that is now giving to many of our young people the education they need to equip themselves for a new way of life.

"Things were not always this way. Several decades past, we were a nomadic people — trappers, hunters, fishermen and reindeer herders. We all shared a common life of hardship, isolation and loneliness *but* we had pride in ourselves and in our ability to live off the country.

"Your ancestors knew this country intimate-

ly. They had names for every landmark, lake or river. They knew the caribou migratory routes, the best fishing locations, the best trapping grounds. Young boys aspired to be as good hunters, fishermen, trappers or herders as their fathers — they were trained for this. Young girls looked to their mothers for the training they needed to be good sewers, good workers — their chances for marriage depended on whether they would be an asset as helpers to the men.

"The changes that came were inevitable and the beginnings go far back to the early whalers, traders and missionaries. As our dependence on the products of civilization **rose**, so did our own independence **lessen**.

"The early schools were boarding schools. To attend these children had to leave home. Maybe home was only a tent on a hillside or a shack in the delta, but we loved it, loved our parents, and parting came hard. The first problem in school was one of communication — how to speak English — how to make ourselves understood and this was not easy. Since our parents spoke little English, we sometimes could barely make ourselves understood.

"The teachers that staffed these early schools were a dedicated people — they had to be. In time, we all learned basic English, reading and arithmetic. Most of us left school at 14, 16 or earlier and this was the extent of our formal education. I myself have had two and a half years at school.

"I had two teachers that I will always remember. One was in the Anglican residential school, the other a Grey Nun at the Roman Catholic residential school. One teacher taught health and as I listened to her speaking so clearly, expressing herself so beautifully as she taught us the proper terms for each part of our anatomy — she made me feel proud to be a human. The Grey Nun was a tall, rather homely person, not at all good looking but as she read poetry and taught us literature, she would be overcome with emotion at the beauty of the thoughts she expressed.

"Many of our people of the North made the change from nomadic living to living in a settlement. For many it was hard and painful and came at a great cost to their pride. As a result, these people live less than admirable lives. Many others became self-supporting citizens and are doing their best to give