

**PEOPLE FROM OUR SIDE: A LIFE STORY WITH PHOTOGRAPHS.** BY PETER PITSEOLAK. ORAL BIOGRAPHY BY DOROTHY EBER. *Edmonton, Alberta: Hurtig, 1975. 8½ x 10 inches, 166 pages, 128 original photographs, etc. \$12.50 and \$8.95.*

Peter Pitseolak was an Eskimo who lived in the area of Cape Dorset, Baffin Island, from just after the turn of this century until his death in 1973. His lifetime spanned a period of dramatic and rapid change for the Inuit people, and his personal experience, through relatives of his parents and grandparents, extended well back into the nineteenth century.

As a member of the group which became the Cape Dorset community, he lived in the midst of that flowering of visual art forms which has had such a great impact on our society and which seems likely to become one of the foundation stones of the future development of Inuit culture. He was, in fact, one of the early Cape Dorset artists (a print included in this book is of a water colour commissioned by Lord Tweedsmuir in the late nineteen thirties) but his talents extended from the brush, pen, charcoal and engraving tools of most Inuit artists to the medium of photography. Peter Pitseolak accumulated a collection of about 1000 photographs, most of them composed, taken, developed and printed by himself. The book contains a selection from that collection to illustrate a translation of Peter Pitseolak's taped autobiography and his comments on past and present Inuit life. The photographs extend from the early forties to the early sixties, with direct personal experiences extending from shortly before Peter's birth to the early seventies, and the less personal experiences going back to the middle of the nineteenth century or to an even earlier date, according to interpretation.

The whole work is intensely personal. Many of the photographs, for example, are talented snapshots and are the more interesting for being so. Similarly, many of the observations and comments are of a type most often heard within a family group or between very close, long-time friends. Despite a beautiful and most sympathetic translation and presentation of the original work, the reader is left with a deep regret that he could not have heard the words actually spoken, or have been able to read the written autobiographical parts in the original syllabics, and with the benefit of a close personal knowledge of the writer, his family and his way of life.

Although Cape Dorset was his home for the last many years of his life, Peter Pitseolak's

story is also the story of a people whose home was a generally narrow strip of land surrounded by water. That area is formed by what we now conceive of as the junction of Foxe Channel, Hudson Bay and Hudson Strait, with adjacent lands including Baffin, Southampton, Mansel Island and northern Quebec, with Nottingham and Salisbury islands as notable central points. The graves of many of the principal characters in the story are scattered along the coast mentioned, while those of Peter Pitseolak and others who came during his lifetime to occupy Cape Dorset are, no doubt, close to that settlement. In spatial and social terms there are centralizing themes throughout this book.

In temporal terms, the story easily encompasses the Southampton Island people, the mica-graphite operation on that island, the whaling and fur phases of development in those parts, the arrival of missionaries, of teachers and of 'government'. The narrative includes the names of ships and people to which we can relate easily — the *Nascopie*, the *Active*, the *Pelican*, Fleming, Flaherty, Houston — but although the ships often form a considerable focus for the narrative, these people tend to be secondary characters, secondary to such people as Etidluie, Inukjuarjuk and Kingwatsiak. And there are umiaks and kayaks, especially the former, which receive more attention than all of the ships mentioned except the *Nascopie*.

The appearance of well-known film makers and writers in the story and the not infrequent mention of Inuit who starred in Hollywood-style productions, highlights the special significance of the Cape Dorset people in Inuit-Western relations. It may be small satisfaction for many Inuit, young or old, but the passing of the old way of life ("I know people were happier in the old days") will be more easy to bear if it is succeeded by as creative and confident an existence as that of the more artistic of the Cape Dorset residents today.

There are notable comments and observations on the following in this book: umiak travel; Inuit-Indian relations; Inuit conservation; Inuit Christianity and shamanism; pre-birth consciousness; child adoption; the *Nascopie*; the people of Southampton Island; the migrant Lapps with their reindeer; Canada-Greenland links; whaling; and, above all, the interaction between the Western and Inuit cultures over several generations.

Ms. Eber, the translator Ms. Hanson, the interviewers and all involved in the production and preservation of Peter Pitseolak's work are to be congratulated.

W. P. Adams