

# TIME

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## A letter from the PUBLISHER

Henry Luce III

To experience what Thoreau called "the tonic of wildness" and to prepare for reporting this week's cover story on Alaska, TIME's San Francisco Bureau Chief Jesse Birnbaum spent several days alone in a bush-country cabin twelve miles outside the village of Skwentna (pop. 12). In his wooded retreat, Birnbaum, a city-bred New Jerseyite, was reading by kerosene lamp when "suddenly the entire cabin began shaking. I grabbed the .30-30 Winchester that I had brought along, unlatched the door and peered out. A huge black bear was standing there upright—he must have been six feet tall and weighed 500 lbs.—pounding on the overhang with his front paws. I banged on a pot to scare him away. Nothing doing.

"I let go a blast into the night air with the rifle, but it didn't bother him a bit. I yelled, 'Go away, bear! Beat it! Scat!' I learned that 'scat' does not scare away bears. At last he moved away, so damned casually, following a moose trail into the woods." When the bear returned next evening to pound again on the cabin wall, Birnbaum heeded his *How to Stay Alive in the Woods* handbook, which advised speaking softly instead of shouting at wild creatures. He opened the door and pleaded: "Please go away, bear." The animal ambled off.

Birnbaum kept seeing "evil-looking faces in the patterns of tree bark and in the threatening shadows of matted grass." But during his isolation he discovered that "solitude in a primitive environment awakens lost skills and sensibilities; it is why so many people come to Alaska. Despite my fear, I gradually begin to adapt to the surroundings," he reports. "I spend part of the day splitting firewood; it is satisfying



BIRNBAUM AT ALASKAN BUSH CABIN

work. I keep thinking about that beautiful lake a mile away that my guide has told me about, where I can watch the animals watering and hear the cry of the loon. Finally, I decide to stroll to the lake in the chill clear air of the evening, deliberately leaving my rifle in the cabin.

"Next day, plunging into an icy creek to bathe, I suddenly hear music running through my mind for the first time since I arrived. Taking my Melodica, a kind of keyboard mouth organ, I join the song of the bees while I bathe. Tonight I notice that the faces in the tree trunks no longer appear so grotesque. They even seem to be smiling. The more I give to this environment, the more I accept it."

Key reporting for the story was also done by Washington-based John Stacks. Expertise was contributed by Anchorage Reporter Joe Rychetnik, a Chicago-born newsman who left Oregon for Alaska eleven years ago after his big-game haunts were invaded by too many wild-shooting, heavy-drinking riflemen. Now he finds himself crowded again and guesses he will "either have to move out into the bush or get used to people—there are just too many." New York Correspondent Alan Anderson interviewed both U.S. and Canadian ecologists. The story was written by Philip Herrera, researched by Nancy Williams and edited by Robert Shnayerson.

The Cover: Drawing in pencil, ink and mixed-paint media by Stan Zagorski from a design by John Channel.

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