

Who are these patriots?

by Bill Doskoch

As he was leaving *Java Live*, a student stopped, grinned and pointed in recognition of one of the three people seated at a table there.

"Thanks, what you did was really great," he said to the woman before also recognizing the man seated with her.

The compliment was acknowledged with a thank-you and a 'thumbs up' by the woman and as the student left, the man laughed and said, "That's what always happens, they always recognize her before they recognize me!"

The two people receiving the spontaneous congratulations and recognition are David Achtem and Louanne Studer, both students at the U of A and both involved — along with Inuits Eddie Dillon and Roger Gruben — in the Aug. 7 protest and "bombing" of the U.S. Coast Guard Icebreaker *Polar Sea*.

"We didn't do it to embarrass the Canadian government or to express hatred towards the American government," Studer explained, "but it is unfortunate that Canada didn't protest more strongly than it did."

However, Canadians seem to be very grateful for their actions and have been expressing it quite vocally.

"We're still getting letters from across Canada," Studer said, "and we've received an especially good response from Quebec. They really empathize with the North over sovereignty and they thought it was nice to see a western Canadian stand up for it."

For both Achtem and Studer it was their first trip to the Arctic and it left them "blown away."

"It is so beautiful up there," said Studer, "and so clean. When we planted the flag it was almost mid-

night, the air was totally still and the ground was a purply green. It was almost like being on the moon!

"We felt then that the Americans would have thought we (Canadians) were crazy if we didn't protest. It is really something to fight for. I can understand now how the Inuit get the feeling it is a magical place."

They were happy with the press coverage they received and described 95-per cent of it as positive. There were, however, some exceptions.

"The reporter from the *Alberta Report* wanted to know what color ski pants I wore and how much they cost!" snorted Studer.

Achtem wanted to clarify his remark in *Maclean's* magazine where he was quoted as saying, "I think we've just saved Canadian sovereignty!"

"We were just joking!" he said.

An Aug. 10 column by Steve Hume, editor of the *Edmonton Journal* — which described their trip as a "wonderful lark for a couple of feisty students" — left them slightly rankled.

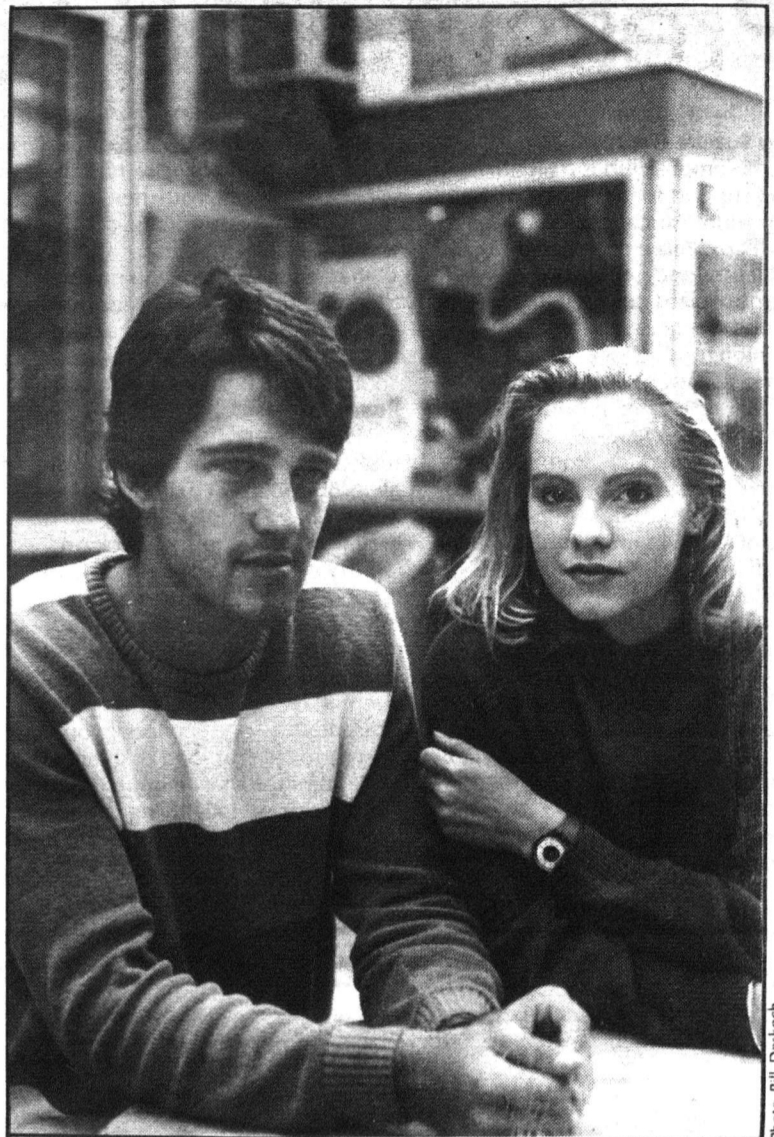
"You tell Steve Hume to go 40 hours without eating or sleeping and land on an island in the arctic where there's no runway," said Studer, "I thought I was going to die!"

While they didn't run into any opposition from northerners — the trip was organized by both the Council of Canadians (headed by Studer's step-father, Mel Hurtig) and Tapirsat (the Inuit Brotherhood) — Achtem said, "There was a small undercurrent of support for the Americans because the Canadian government has ignored the north for so long."

However, Studer heard the resultant publicity might lead to increased patrols in the arctic and that Ronald St. John MacDonald — former Dean of Law at Dalhousie University and an expert in maritime law — said the protest will not give the U.S. the right to claim precedence.

Aside from the legal issues though, both Studer and Achtem felt the environmental aspects were the most important.

It's the only place for Beluga whales to mate, pointed out Achtem and Studer added, "If the Americans start using it all the time for their own purposes, it will just become a big septic tank."



Achtem (l) and Studer: "It (the arctic) really is something to fight for."

Photo: Bill Doskoch

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