

FORUM



**Nuclear Legacies in
Japan and Alaska**

**In the Mountains with
David Pettibone**

**Sharing Our Knowledge
Conference**

**New Women Writers'
Residency**

Connection is the Key

WE LIVE in a very busy world. Too often, I find myself caught up in the day-to-day shuffle, preoccupied with the things I have to get done, juggling family and work commitments, and trying to process the constant newsfeed on my devices. I get so preoccupied by these things that I find at times I lose touch with those around me.

The problem with navigating through life this way is that we lose the essence of what it means to be human, our humanity. Distance and disconnect erode our compassion, empathy, and care for others.

Psychologist Matthew D. Lieberman explains in his book *Social: Why Our Brains are Wired to Connect*, that while different cultures have different beliefs about how important social connection is to our lives, data suggests that our need to connect with other people is even more fundamental, more basic, than our need for food or shelter. We are in fact, he maintains, wired in a way that our well-being depends on our connections with others.

Connection is the key to healing our communities.

In this issue, artist David Pettibone reflects on connection as it relates to the natural world and the intricate, symbiotic ecosystem of our planet. Professor Hiroko Harada, Ph.D., looks for connectedness across the experience and understanding of nuclear war. Erin Coughlin Hollowell, the executive director of a new women writers' retreat in Homer, shares her anticipation of the first cohort of writers sitting down together to share a meal, a critical step in building a network of support and encouragement. And longtime Alaska journalist Joaquin Estus writes about efforts to maintain the vital thread of Tlingit language and traditions through the annual *Sharing our Knowledge* conference.

I hope as you read through the magazine that you will see pieces of your own experiences or perspectives reflected in the articles; that they will challenge your thinking, deepen your understanding, or make you curious to learn more. I invite you to connect with the Forum this winter—attend a workshop or event, suggest a topic or theme for a conversation in your home community, or follow us on social media. I look forward to seeing you.

Warmly,

— Kameron Perez-Verdia,
President and CEO



We are wired in
a way that our
well-being depends
on our connections
with others.

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Young Tlingit dancers perform during the first Sharing our Knowledge Conference, Haines, 1993. See page 10. PHOTO BY PETER METCALFE

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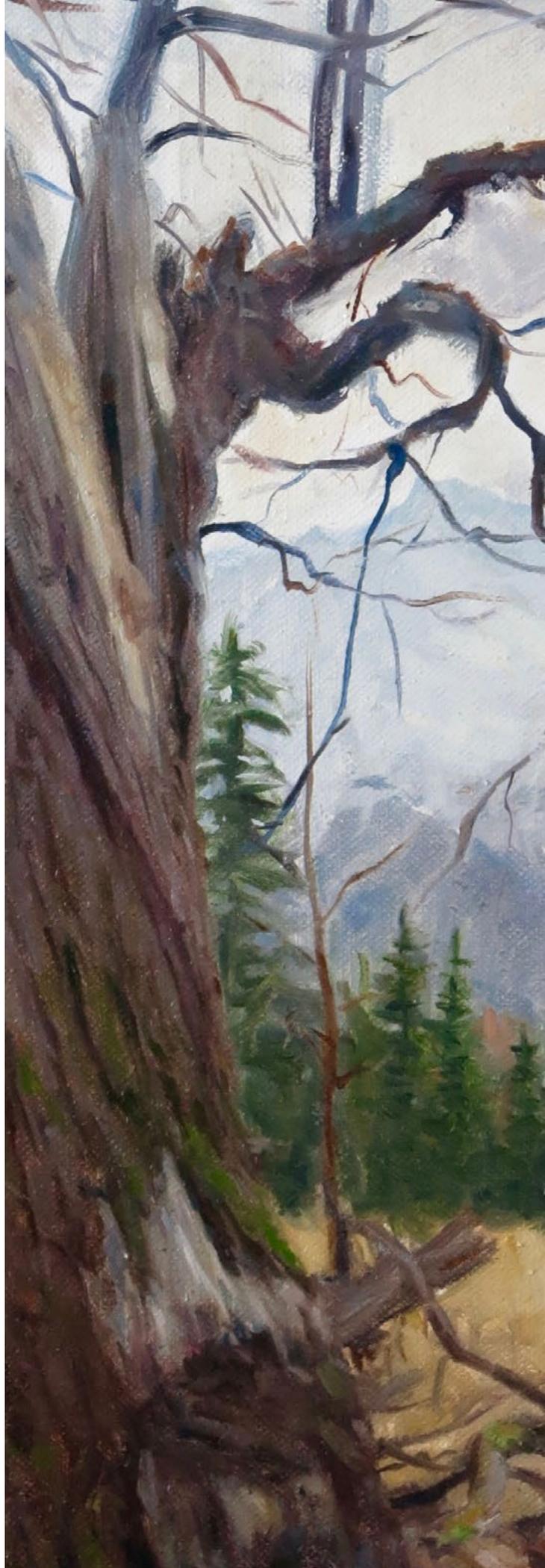
COVER: Hiroko Harada, Ph.D., a professor at the University of Alaska Anchorage, was the project leader of "Hiroshima-Amchitka Legacies: What Future Can We Choose?". The Forum-supported event explored lessons and legacies of nuclear bombing in Japan and nuclear testing in Alaska. See page 28. Photo by Wayde Carroll.

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THE STILL LIFE OF DAVID PETTIBONE



Artist David Pettibone's work enacts a unity of humanity, nature, and art

Text and photographs by Joe Yelverton

A

SMALL FIGURE on a large landscape, David Pettibone ascends a windswept mountainside formed of titanic landforms, contoured by glaciers, sculpted by the powerful forces of nature. He nears the top of a 2,000-foot slope, his journey taking him through boulder fields interspersed with alpine tundra, past diminutive lichens, modest yet powerful enough to break rocks. His path weaves between tiny islands of alpine sedges and mountain avens, creating habitat for denizens of the alpine. Everything he passes, living and dying, shaped by the world it occupies.

Wiping sweat from his forehead, he balances at the angle of repose, a physical place on the mountain where eventually, most everything seems to lose a foothold, giving up space for something else.

As an artist, Pettibone thrives in environments where metaphor runs deep, where decay and renewal are ever-present, part of a constant cycle.

As a witness to change, he explores these ideas in his work, resulting in themes that arise in his larger studies. Like, "A Year With a Tree," when he literally spent an entire year with a large cottonwood in Eagle River Valley, Alaska. Painting through all four seasons, Pettibone immersed himself, struggling through severe weather, endeavoring to experience the same elements as his subject. Two years after he completed his project, in November of 2019, a windstorm took this old matriarch down, now destined to become part of the same forest floor that once supported her stately presence.

"It was around for hundreds of years," Pettibone lamented. "My year was a blip in its existence."

Back in the mountains, high above the forested valleys, the artist scrambles to a rocky outcrop and steadies himself. After catching his breath he turns around, captivated by a scene that awaits him. A nearly 360 degree view of seemingly endless topography. Mountain faces overlap each other, casting monumental shadows, each one imparting a sense of mystery. The farther Pettibone sees, the deeper the intrigue. And even farther in the distance, myriad ridge lines crisscross the sky like an array of gigantic saw-blades.

Despite the obvious rewards for such an intense effort, climbing to rarified places, Pettibone seeks insight more than just great views.

The mountains are his muse.

IN THE SUMMER OF 2019 I joined the Homer-based artist for an exploratory trip into the Alaskan backcountry. With heavy packs and many thousands of feet of climbing and descending, we both enjoyed the solace and the inspiration of the Chugach Mountains.

At the final reaches of the last big climb, the 39-year-old artist stood silent, deeply immersed in analysis, his enigmatic gaze drawn into the depths of the terrain around him, terrain poetically reflected in his physical nature, his full beard, wild red hair, and cerulean eyes.

Often wearing his trademark, tattered and paint covered Carhartts, Pettibone embodies an unpretentious old soul. Humble and intensely stoic, he's a true man of the mountains.

When he speaks he carefully measures his words, as if he's painting sentences on a canvas, leaving just enough space for your imagination. He's articulate, but a man of few words. Understatement speaks volumes.

During our time in the mountains we shared few light-hearted conversations. Between long periods of exertion, and at times while he was painting, we talked about the artistic process, the value of art to society, and the meaning of wilderness.

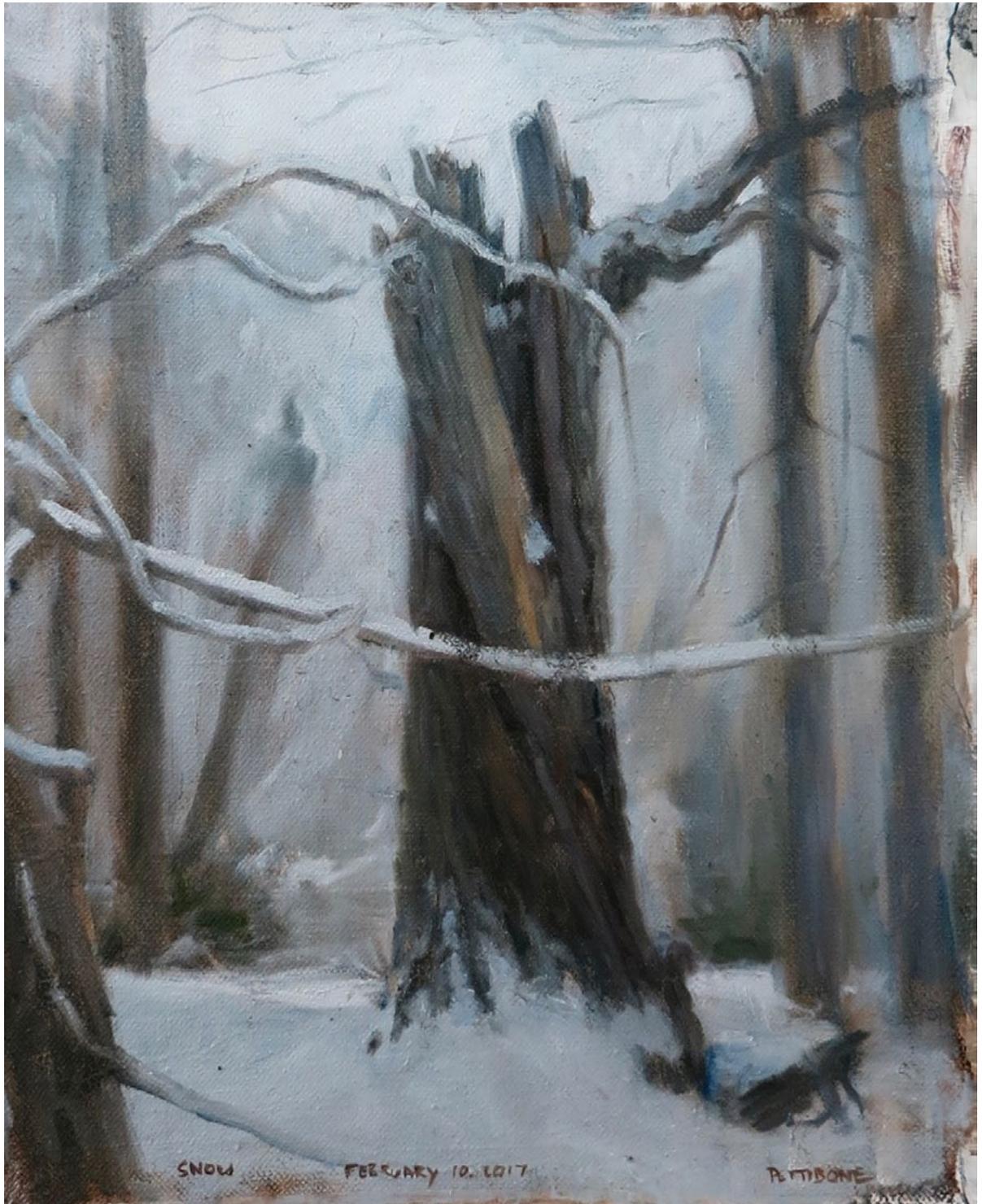
Pettibone contends that our reverence for wilderness is in some ways a misguided notion.

"It's not that wild places aren't sacred," he said. "It's more that we are all a part of the same living organism. When we separate ourselves as distinct from the natural world we fail to realize that we share the same fate as it."

"In simple terms," he added, "we share the same fate as an alder leaf. If we deem the natural world as sacred, but fail to protect it, in the end we are killing ourselves."

After we settled into our new camp, Pettibone began his work at 8 p.m., about three hours before sunset. With the sun dipping down in the western sky, he prepared to capture the anticipated alpenglow, soon casting its light on the mountains all around us.

After erecting his easel, he arranged his paints and began a meditative process. As the night progressed, the sun slowly rested into a low valley, running uninterrupted



"Snow. February 10, 2017." David Pettibone.
Page 5: "November 13, 2016." David Pettibone.

"My year was a blip
in its existence."

to the west. An ephemeral light formed, a crimson but transient glow on the mountaintops and the surrounding clouds. As he painted the dynamic light, he also tried to keep up with the constraint of time.

All the while, mosquitoes began to antagonize him. And yet, he was so focused, he barely noticed the distraction, occasionally swatting at them as he worked.

The irony is, when a winged intruder lands on his painting, getting stuck in wet paint, it becomes a permanent part of the work, integral to the story.

In the world of David Pettibone, honesty is an inextricable part of the process. His work captures accidents as much as manifesting his intentions. Failure and success are interchangeable. Perfection, measured only against the imperfections.

Observing him work left me convinced that his focus could easily be construed for obsession. He was seemingly oblivious to everything but his subject, as if he was part of an elaborate and living diorama. Watching him became an intimate experience, seeing inside the world of the painter, as he explored the different landscapes—the immediate, the emotional internal, and the surrounding environment. In the end, a mood unfolded, reflecting the interplay of all three environments.

Pettibone appeared uniquely vulnerable to the world around him, to the extent that he seemed unaware of my presence. I wondered if that's what art is all about, moments when artists are no longer aware of anything outside the scope of their work, maybe even unaware of their own presence. Self, dissolving into the environment.

On the mountains, an orange and red glow intensified, becoming more magical, and more brilliant, especially in its transience. In contrast, I realized that the actual painting Pettibone was creating seemed secondary to his overall experience, perhaps also because of its transience, illustrating the paradox of preservation and the fluidity of his documentation as an artist.

Despite that he was deeply immersed, I asked him to describe the essence of his experience.

"A series of decisions in an environment where change is constant," he replied, all the while keeping his eyes fixed on his subject, applying brush strokes at the same time.

It was around 11 p.m. when Pettibone finally finished, the lazy sun resting behind the horizon on an Alaska night when it never gets completely dark. I resisted look-



ing at his painting until he was completely done. And it was then when it all made sense, connecting a magnificent impression with the actual artist, a portrait of place as much as the man who created it.

Just like his process of painting, Pettibone methodically broke down his work, first collapsing the legs on his easel. Using a small spatula, he scraped unused paint from his palette and placed it back into compact containers. Next, he carefully cleaned his brushes and his palette. Then he packaged everything in his backpacking kit that he made especially for his plein air sessions.

Everything has its place, and everything he does expresses a level of discipline you'd expect to see with a similar kind of craftsman, such as a woodworker caring for tools.

AFTER PETTIBONE wrapped up, we sat outside next to our tent as twilight continued to deepen the sky above us. The warm night welcomed us and thankfully the bugs moved on. We discussed the broader philosophy of plein air painting, and art in general. Unlike his other work that's more socially influenced, he describes his plein air painting as "more of a recording of the passage of time."

"An accumulation of moments, weaving them all together," he said, "like making a time capsule.

"When life is complicated, it's nice to be able to go out into the mountains with nothing between you and your subject.

"There's something pure about that," he said, "it's all for the sake of documentation."

The discussion evolved into the value of art to society. The role of artists in influencing thought. How the world perceives art, whether it's appreciated, and how it's valued.

Our discussion made me wonder about the role of artists as vicarious stewards, literally providing the opportunity for others—to experience in the imagination



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through feelings and actions of another person.

It occurred to me that now maybe more than ever before, we need artists. Perhaps even more than they need us. We especially need artists like David Pettibone, someone who passionately works behind the scenes. A storyteller, telling important stories.

As a full-time professional artist he seems to have made peace with the practical realities of his craft, dedicating himself to a noble but sometimes thankless pursuit that not only includes working on his projects, but also frequently teaching art as well.

As our evening wound down I was left thinking about all of our conversations, when suddenly I remembered an apt phrase by Oscar Wilde. The famous playwright may not have intended it this way, but his words certainly relate to an unfortunate if not uncommon perspective on artists and their craft, an outlook that seems more prevalent in today’s society.

When Wilde said, “Knowing the price of everything and the value of nothing,” I wonder if he embedded a paradox in his words, describing the sentiment that the things of greatest value to society are actually priceless. Like the experience provided by artists such as David Pettibone. ■

Joe Yelverton is an Anchorage based writer and photographer. www.joeyelverton.com



Wooshteen Kanaxtulaneegí Haa At Wuskóowu

Sharing Our Knowledge conferences bring together Tlingit tradition bearers and academics

By Joaqlin Estus (Tlingit and English-Irish)

WHEN I WAS IN JUNEAU in September 2019 for the *Sharing Our Knowledge* conference, several people, including a few non-Natives, in casual conversation referred to other individuals by their Tlingit name. Over the years I'd seen this a few times before but now it seems to be a growing trend.

This is new. Decades ago, when elders who spoke Tlingit as their first language were more plentiful, I don't recall them using Tlingit names when talking with someone who didn't speak Tlingit. The people using them now are my age and younger. And like me, they didn't grow up speaking Tlingit. They're learning it by taking classes, either online or at the University of Alaska. And some are learning it well enough to converse and give talks in Tlingit.

The language classes are relatively new too. My grandmother and her generation grew up speaking Tlingit. My mother's generation, people born in the 1920s and 30s, were mocked, shamed, and punished for speaking Tlingit. They were told that speaking Tlingit to their children would handicap the child's ability to speak English fluently. So they didn't pass on the language.

For the most part, my generation, baby boomers, learned only a few words and phrases. Some learned Tlingit language songs in a dance group. That use generally didn't transfer to speaking Tlingit.

Kudos to the elders, the Tlingit speakers who persevered in using their language, often in formal settings such as *ku.éex'* (aka potlatches), but also in casual conversation. They taught people how to in-

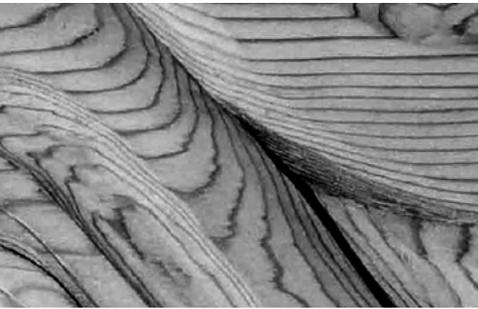
During Eagle Night in May 1993, Richard Jackson, left, pays tribute to Andy Hope III, standing in a Button Blanket, for his work in organizing the conference.

roduce themselves in Tlingit. They translated hymns into Tlingit and taught people how to sing them. And when the University of Alaska and school districts succumbed to years of determined lobbying and started offering classes, elders took on a new role: that of language teacher and professor.

Their drive to keep traditions and the Tlingit language alive are also given expression at the *Sharing Our Knowledge* conferences of Southeast Alaska. The conferences were the result of the vision and hard work of founder Andy Hope III (Xhaastánc̓h), Tlingit, of Juneau (1949-2008), and a couple who were part of the effort from its earliest days: Nora Marks Dauenhauer (Keix̓wné), Tlingit, (1927-2017) and Richard Dauenhauer (Xwaayeenák) (1942-2014), also of Juneau.

In the 1970s, the three founded the nonprofit Tlingit Readers, Inc., to publish instructional and resource materials on the Tlingit language and culture, and to organize conferences. The first was held in 1993. Attendance has steadily grown and the past several gatherings attracted more than 400 participants each.

The conferences are unique due to the mix of people who attend to give talks and to learn. Agendas feature clan leaders and fluent speakers of the Tlingit language from Alaska, Canada, and Lower 48 states. The elders mingle with scholars and scientists, many with advanced degrees, and some from Europe and Russia.



Clan leaders at the 2012 conference in Sitka: left to right, Chatskookoo Éesh (John Nielsen), Chookaneidí, Iceberg House; L'eiwtu.éesh (Herman Davis), L'ooknaxh.ádi, Platform House; Yéif xhaagú (John Hanlon), L'ooknaxh.ádi, Frog House; and Khaa.ítdei du.áxhch (Ed Kunz), L'ooknaxh.ádi, Outwards House.



Like his father and grandfather, Andy Hope had served in tribal governance. He worked to boost funding and give Alaska Natives a greater say in education, social services, and justice. He embraced a belief handed down in his family: to have control over their lives, the Tlingit must learn to use the white man's tools — whether it be the right to vote or education.

In his 40s and 50s, Andy gravitated toward re-

search and writing. He wrote books of poetry and essays. He became president of the national *Before Columbus Foundation*, which promotes literary excellence and recognition of overlooked multicultural authors.

Andy's son Ishmael Hope (Khaagwáask') is Tlingit and Inupiaq, and is now the executive director of the all-volunteer *Sharing Our Knowledge* conference organizing committee. In many ways

he follows in his father's footsteps. He's a poet and author, scholar of Indigenous cultures, storyteller, actor, and playwright who teaches the Tlingit language. Months after Andy's death in August of 2008, Ishmael said of his father, "His heart was in learning."

"Andy was an intellectual; he sought scholarship, knowledge," agreed Andy's close friend and colleague Peter Metcalfe, a writer/publisher and event producer.

Andy earned a Master's degree in cross-cultural studies. He read the works of anthropologists and historians, and explorers' papers. He talked with or read the works of Tlingit leaders such as Louis Shotridge, William Paul, Sr., and Mark Jacobs, Sr. He praised the strength and determination of the Tlingit people in maintaining their language and traditions.

He was struck by the pervasive importance of clans as the foundation of Tlingit social structure. The first conference was called *Conference of Tlingit Tribes and Clans*, or the clan conference.

TLINGIT PEOPLE ARE BORN into a clan in one of two moieties, Raven and Eagle or Wolf. The clan structure expresses itself in "almost inviolable ties to family," said linguist Alice Taff, PhD. "The extent of family is the huge clan system knit together. Look how people regard their challenged family members. They're not shuffled off to asylums. It's just a different way of thinking about family and life. I *am* my brother's keeper," said Taff.

It's important the two moieties are in balance. For instance, gifts might be given to restore balance after conflict or to recognize support and assistance given during hard times. When one side speaks, the other side is given time to reply.

"When we talk about clans, when the clans are strong, when people speak in the [Tlingit] language, they know how we own the land. They feel the ownership of the land," said Ishmael.

Tlingit elder David Katzeek (Kingeisti), who has attended all of the *Sharing Our Knowledge* conferences, agrees. He said, "We realize how we were rooted together as a people, but not only that as a people, but how we were also rooted together with the earth."

In the mid-1980s, Andy set out to list all the clans. He raised funds to publish the first graphic compilation of more than 100 Tlingit clans and clan houses; the poster "Traditional Tlingit Country."

"Thanks to Andy's relentless research, we're able to look at a simple layout and see how Tlingit culture is organized," said Metcalfe, who produced the map, now in its seventh printing.

Ishmael said his father's realizations came during a time when little to no recent research was based on Tlingit language recordings and writings or interviews with Tlingit elders.

Nora and Richard Dauenhauer wanted more people to learn the Tlingit language so they could appreciate its beauty, complexity, and power. Nora said of some authors, "They didn't know Tlingit so they made mistakes. To explain in English what the Tlingit were saying, it [the meaning] was just lost."

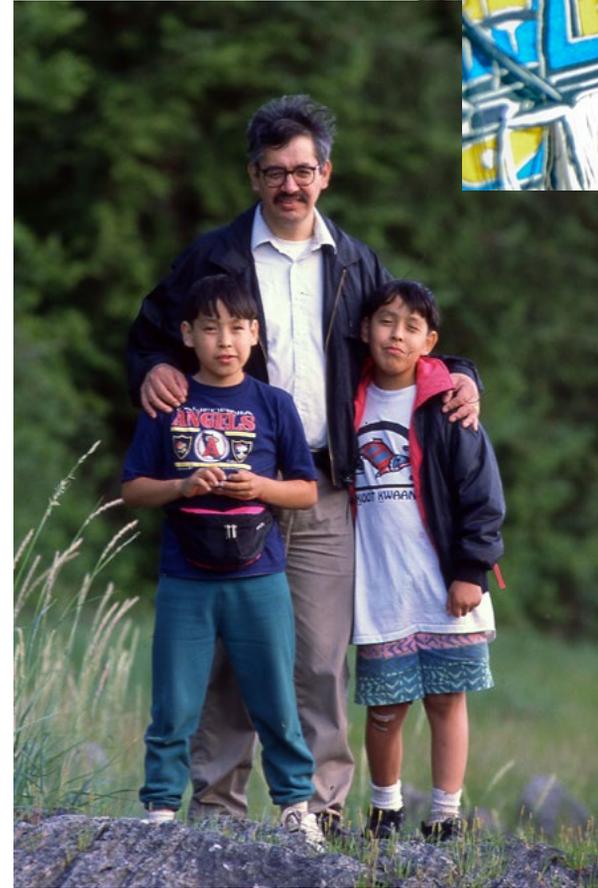
Like Andy, the Dauenhauers witnessed a larger society that did not appreciate the wisdom and intellectual depth they saw in Tlingit and other Alaska Native cultures. Richard said that in the 1970s, language teachers objected strenuously to his suggestion Alaska Native languages be taught in school, and even in the 1990s, one Southeast Alaska school administrator said he just didn't see how Tlingit could fit into his school's curriculum. Richard and Nora said Tlingit and Native American lore was trivialized and sometimes misperceived as children's literature.

It was not just Native languages that were looked down upon. As recently as 1992, a minister in the predominantly Tlingit village of Kake told church members to burn non-Christian Tlingit items, including precious regalia and at.óow (sacred objects). Some did.

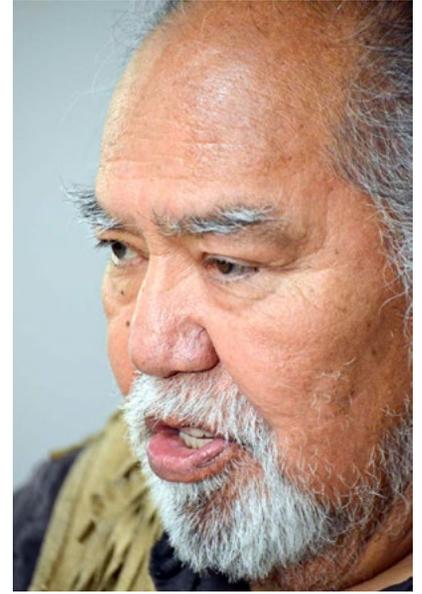
RIGHT: Lily Hudson Hope and her daughter Elizabeth weaving a Chilkat robe during a demonstration at the Walter Soboleff Building in summer 2017.

FAR RIGHT: Tlingit elder David Katzeek while being interviewed by Joaquin Estus, September 2019 in Juneau.

BELOW: Andrew Hope III with his sons Ishmael and Andrew Hope IV at Taku Harbor, 1994.



"When we talk about clans, when the clans are strong, when people speak in the [Tlingit] language, they know how we own the land. They feel the ownership of the land,"



As for scholars who studied the Tlingit people in those days, “There was an air of condescension on the part of the academics, and there was resentment on the part of the elders. They weren’t always being properly credited for their contributions,” said Metcalfe.

“I’m sure a lot of people would remember [that era]. There was nothing. Nothing. The lack of information, the ignorance, was systemic,” said Ishmael. “That was because of how much non-Native scholars were controlling how the information of our people was disseminated.”

But, according to Metcalfe, “Andy saw a new generation of academics who were coming to the fore out of the sixties and seventies. They were enthusiastic and inspired to learn what they could about this culture in a really positive way,” said Metcalfe. “Andy saw that kind of flowering and he was able to bring us all together.”

Andy wanted to create an environment where people with different kinds of wisdom, elders and scholars, could cordially and equally share their knowledge, Metcalfe said.

THE FIRST CONFERENCE was organized so clan leaders could discuss customary law and clan genealogy, and hold ceremonies and record them on video. Andy raised money to hold it, and brought in partners, including the Dauenhauers.

The Dauenhauers had been on their own journey to explore and document Tlingit knowledge, language, and oratory since the early 1970s.

Their life’s work began when Nora Marks shared recorded speeches for sharing grief, from

a memorial *ku.éex’*, with then professor Richard Dauenhauer at Alaska Methodist University in Anchorage, whom she later married.

“Our lives have been changed by the dignity and power of [the Tlingit orators’] spoken words,” she later stated in one of a series of books on Tlingit oratory she and Richard wrote. Their work ultimately led to more than 600 recordings of spoken Tlingit, and dozens of books, training manuals, and school curricula.

Richard’s insights gained earlier while earning a PhD in comparative literature were helpful as he studied Tlingit. He was fluent in half a dozen languages. He had read epic tales in the original Greek, and studied English poetry and Shakespeare. Tlingit oratory held up well in comparison, he said. It was world-class literature, as “great as anything in English poetry,” said Richard.

The *Sharing Our Knowledge* conferences have brought new understanding of Tlingit culture and oratory to a larger audience.

Sharing Our Knowledge conference sessions in recent years have included presentations and discussions on the effects of language loss on health, intellectual property rights of the Tlingit, and the Smithsonian’s use of 3-D technology for preservation of sacred items (*at.óow* in Tlingit). Time is set aside for cultural and clan leaders to host activities such as memorial and naming ceremonies. In hands-on workshops, people can try beading or target practice with a spear thrower. They can become immersed in a Tlingit language class, or join a museum or boat tour.

Sculpin Hat Revival

For Florence Sheakley (Khaakal.áat), the conferences refresh her knowledge of Tlingit and renew her commitment to pass it on to younger generations.

With her sister Nora and her mother, as well as close friends now passed on, “I struggle to find somebody who can speak Tlingit and have meaningful conversation,” said Sheakley. Going to the conferences and talking with other fluent Tlingit speakers she otherwise rarely sees, “it’s broadened my language.”

Sheakley teaches Tlingit in Juneau schools where she says children pick it up “like sponges.” “Sometimes the children from the school where I teach, they’ll see me and they’ll come running up, hug me and, and then when they’re leaving they turn around and say, ‘Yak’ei yee xhwasatéeni’ [It’s good to see you!] Oh, I’m just thrilled to pieces when I hear that,” said Sheakley.

Kenny Grant (Káaxhkhaatuklaghé), Tlingit, of Hoonah, an elder and president of the Hoonah Indian Association, appreciates the participation of Canadian Tlingit. He said, “I like to see the interior Tlingit have come down here. It’s really good to hear them speak their language, and I can understand them.”

The organizing committee is working toward more involvement by the Haida and Tsimshian neighbors of the Tlingit as well.

While Alaska Natives are immersed in the non-Native world, a smaller percentage of non-Natives become as engaged in Native cultural events. For those who do, Taff said, it can be an eye-opening experience.

“I think the conferences open the lines [between cultures] and the hearts of non-Natives who see, ‘Hey, we’ve got proud people here. We’ve got knowledgeable people. We have important people. We have this huge history,’” said Taff.

In at least one instance, the conferences changed the direction of academic research. Aldona Jonaitis, PhD, is a retired anthropology professor, former director of the University of Alaska Museum of the North in Fairbanks, and the author of several groundbreaking books on historical Tlingit art. *Sharing Our Knowledge* conferences changed her focus.

“So I’ve been... interviewing contemporary artists, gathering information and getting pictures” said Jonaitis. “I’ll eventually write a book about contemporary artists.” She also appreciates that people affirm her work. “The philosophy behind the clan conference that is so valuable to me, from a non-Native perspective, is the acceptance of my work,” said Jonaitis.

Dartmouth anthropology and Native American studies professor Sergei Kan, PhD, a frequent speaker and organizer of the conferences, says they have given him hope. As he saw the number of fluent Tlingit speakers declining in the 1980s, he became worried about what was being lost. Decades later, after watching young people learn Tlingit, become scholars, earn advanced degrees, and begin teaching, “I’m much more optimistic now,” said Kan.

THE TLINGIT OF YESTERYEAR passed down a rich, complex culture, including “at.óowu,” or clan property, that embodies the spirits of past, present, and future generations.

Ceremonies were held in collaboration with the 2019 *Sharing Our Knowledge* conference in Juneau, during which the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of Natural History gifted a near exact replica of the fragile Sculpin (bullhead fish) Hat that, through the ritual of a *ku.éex’* (potlatch), became at.óowu of the Sitka’s Tlingit Kiks.ádi clan of the Raven moiety.

The project took seven years and involved several trips by Tlingit artists and Kiks.ádi clan leaders to Washington, DC, where they guided and approved the making of two replicas, one for the clan and the other to remain with the institution. To maintain balance between the Eagle and Raven moieties, the Kiks.ádi asked that Smithsonian staff adopted into the Eagle moiety make the new hats. NMNH Repatriation Office Tribal Liaison Eric Hollinger (Angoon Dakl’aweidi clan) coordinated the project and worked on attachments and Smithsonian Exhibits Model Maker Chris Hollshwander (Sitka Kaagwaantaan clan) milled and painted the hats.

The hat was taken from Sitka in 1884, and until 2012, when Harold Jacobs of CCTHITA identified it as a Kiks.ádi crest object, it was held in storage at the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History. It is deeply cracked, missing a large rim section, and is adorned with toxic mercury paint, making it unsafe to use in ceremonies.

However, it’s vitally important that the ancestors’ spirits participate in formal ceremonies such as memorial potlatches. To help, the Smithsonian Institution created two replicas of the Sculpin Hat. One replica now belongs to the Kiks.ádi clan and will be used in ceremonies. The second replica will be used at the National Museum of Natural History to tell the story of this collaboration. The carefully



Joe Zuboff, a Deisheetaan clan leader from Angoon, assists Smithsonian Exhibits Specialist Chris Hollshwander with attaching the cape.

protected original will remain with the Smithsonian.

The Smithsonian went to great lengths to study the Sculpin hat, using CT-scans and chemical and microscopic analyses to identify the materials that it was made of and to learn how it was decorated. The intensive inspection found that the hat was made with wood, paint, deer and walrus hide, ermine, operculum shell, swan down, spruce root lashings, sea lion whiskers, and ermine. Traces of mountain goat and deer hair, and even evidence of an eagle, were also found.

A 3D scanner was used to capture the exact dimensions of the hat. It then had to be digitally repaired. A computer-aided wood mill was used to carve the alder and yellow cedar sections collected in Southeast Alaska. Then the replicas were painted and adorned with the same kinds of details as the original.

“It’s like seeing an old friend come around the corner when you thought you’d never see them again,” said clan leader Ray Aayaandx Wilson in an interview with the *Juneau Empire*.

Cyril “Joe” Zuboff, a Tlingit elder, is caretaker for Angoon’s Raven house at *at.6owu*, or sacred clan objects. He said it’s a joyful occasion when a replica is welcomed back. “Whenever I see such things on display, there’s that feeling, that connection of love and respect.” said Zuboff.



Lillian Petershoare (L’egandoo.u), Tlingit, of Juneau, is a retired U.S. Forest Service tribal relations program manager. She said 2019 was a year of unusually hot weather in Juneau so that year’s conference theme, “Indigenous Perspectives on Climate Change,” was a timely call to action.

She said one session that hit home for her was a talk by Tom Thornton, PhD, University of Alaska Southeast dean of arts and sciences, on “The Great Flood, Sacred Mountains, Climate Change.” Petershoare said, “His message was all about finding resiliency within one’s own stories. And I think we all have to feel empowered to find those avenues of resiliency because we are experiencing change at a fast rate.”

FOR LILY HOPE (Wooshkhindeinda.aat), Tlingit, of Juneau, the connection with others she experiences at the conferences is important. She and Ishmael are raising five young children. At the 2017 and 2019 conferences, Lily organized weaving demonstrations, as had her mother, Clarissa Rizal, the famed weaver and artist who passed away in 2016.

Carrying on that tradition, Lily and her colleagues demonstrate and teach the painstaking hand-weaving techniques that go into making Chilkat and Ravenstail robes. Lily said she enjoys “the camaraderie of getting together as weavers, having a space together and sharing knowledge, really like sharing ideas, ‘How do you do interlocking?’ or, ‘Gee, is it always over fours with this particular pattern or can we shrink that pattern this way?’”

Metcalfe recalls that at the 2007 *Sharing Our Knowledge* conference in Sitka, Andy said, “People are hungry for this sort of thing.’ We were standing in the hallway of the convention center, and people were bustling about, heading to the workshops,” Metcalfe said. “It was like being in a busy school corridor between classes.



ABOVE: The audience enjoys a Tlingit language presentation at the 2013 conference.

LEFT: An audience at the 1993 conference enjoys a cultural night. In the first row are Alaska State Museum curator Steve Henrikson, left, sitting next to Ethel Lund, founder of the Native-owned health consortium, SEARHC.

“Andy said, ‘People are hungry for this sort of thing.’ We were standing in the hallway of the convention center, and people were bustling about, heading to the workshops.”

“After the conference, I remember Andy expressing astonishment that there had been an overflow crowd assembled for an evening of storytelling and poetry... ‘Standing ovations for poetry? It was incredible,’” Hope exclaimed to Metcalfe.

One reason for the success is the interest in learning about the Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian peoples from the perspective of those who live it. The Tlingit say they have owned and lived in Southeast Alaska “since time immemorial.” And archeological records show their history in the area goes back at least 10,000 years. The temperate forests were full of game and the coastal waters teemed with seafood, a bounty that supported the development of a complex, multi-layered society renowned for its sophisticated art.

The Hopes, the Dauenhauers, fluent language speakers, advocates, and others have aided a transformation in attitudes toward Native languages and traditional cultural practices. These days speakers of the Tlingit language are given a platform to speak and teach both at the conferences and in classrooms. And a few parents are raising their children with Tlingit as the main language spoken in the home. Katzeek said, “I’m glad that I’ve lived long enough to watch what’s happening with *Sharing Our Knowledge* and how it’s evolving.”

The conferences are in line with a Tlingit value, “to take pride in family, clan, and tradition.” Still, the number of people who speak Tlingit as their first language continues to decline. Now an estimated 120 people speak Tlingit.

X’unei Lance Twitchell, PhD, University of Alaska Southeast associate professor of Alaska Native Studies, is a leader in the revitalization of the Tlingit language. He’s developed a 30-year plan to increase the number of

people who speak Tlingit from dozens to hundreds or thousands. In his 2018 dissertation for a doctoral degree in Hawaiian and Indigenous Language and Culture Revitalization, he proposed a series of interconnected methods that, with a lot of hard work and determination, would result in language revitalization.

In the last pages of his dissertation, Twitchell included a 2013 quote by a 91-year-old elder from the Southeast Alaska village of Angoon. Kaalkáawu Cyril George closed his comments to a class of Tlingit language students as follows:

Ax̣ x̣’agáaxi áwé
yéi kgwatée:
ch’u tleix̣,
kugaagastee:
Lingít.

*My prayer is going to be
this:
forever,
let it exist:
Tlingit. ■*

Videotaped interviews for this article were supported by conference funders, which include the National Science Foundation and Goldbelt Heritage Foundation. Sealaska Heritage Institute administered the NSF grant. Conference videos are available at the website www.sharingourknowledge.org. For their thoughtful reading of earlier drafts of this article, a special thanks goes to Peter Metcalfe of Metcalfe Communications, Larry Goldin of Aurora Films, Laurie Cropley, and Dr. Alice Taff. Except as noted, all photos by Peter Metcalfe.

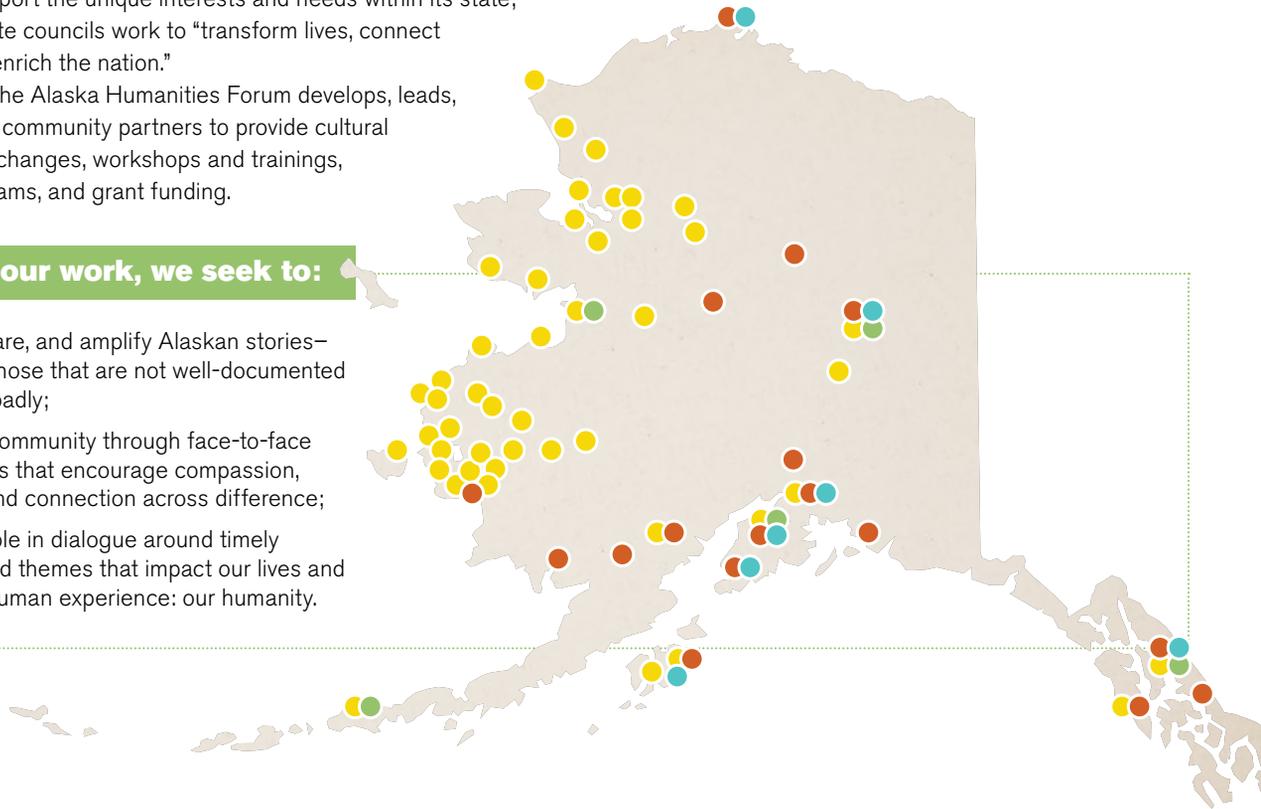
Serving Alaska, Connecting Alaskans

THE ALASKA HUMANITIES FORUM serves as Alaska's state humanities council—one of 56 state and jurisdictional humanities councils across the country. Each functions as an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization to support the unique interests and needs within its state; collectively, the state councils work to “transform lives, connect communities, and enrich the nation.”

Here in Alaska, the Alaska Humanities Forum develops, leads, and works through community partners to provide cultural immersions and exchanges, workshops and trainings, conversation programs, and grant funding.

Through our work, we seek to:

- Preserve, share, and amplify Alaskan stories—particularly those that are not well-documented or known broadly;
- Strengthen community through face-to-face conversations that encourage compassion, belonging, and connection across difference;
- Engage people in dialogue around timely questions and themes that impact our lives and the shared human experience: our humanity.



● GRANTS

The Forum invests in Alaska artists, writers, historians, filmmakers, and community conveners. This funding fuels creative projects that share and preserve the stories of people across the state and explore what it means to be Alaskan.

FY19: 14 grants, \$100,000

● CROSS-CULTURAL IMMERSIONS FOR EDUCATORS AND YOUTH

The Forum's programming for educators and youth uses cultural immersion, reflective learning, and exploration to better prepare and connect educators and youth in rural and urban communities across Alaska.

Sister School Exchange, Educator Cross-Cultural Immersion, Creating Cultural Competence, Take Wing Alaska, AK | Next, Alaska History Day

FY19: 1,031 students served, 42 communities

● PUBLIC PROGRAMMING

The Forum leads, hosts, and funds public events, programs, and community discussions that bring people together to share their stories, ideas, and experiences so they may better understand themselves, one another, and the human experience.

Kindling Conversation, Facilitation Training, Culture Shift, Community Conversations

FY19: 1,165 people, 44 gatherings, 7 communities

● LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

The Forum's leadership programs build capacity across industries and sectors, backgrounds, and experiences. We emphasize equity, critical thinking, and collaboration in addressing the complex economic, social, and political issues across Alaska's communities.

FY19: Leadership Anchorage: 22 leaders, 4 community impact projects

FY19: Alaska Salmon Fellows: 32 fellows, 19 communities

AK|Next

Keisha Demientieff
Akiuk Memorial School, Kasigluk:

“THE BIGGEST IMPACT of the AK|Next program for me was that it allowed me to get out of my comfort zone. Getting out of my comfort zone then allowed me to meet the other students in the program and get to know them and where they come from.

“The experience I had couldn’t be any better. I loved working with the peers that I now call my friends. It inspired me to visit other places in Alaska, and in the world. It also motivated me to become a better leader in school, life, and home. Getting to know the different types of leadership made me think that I could be a leader anywhere, and that I am a leader with unique skills.

“Participating in this awesome program has definitely changed the way I think and see things, how I should react to them, too. I love how it changed me to become more of a mature leader.”

Aaron B. Partnow
West Valley High School,
Fairbanks:

“AK|NEXT is a tremendous opportunity that helped me understand that there are many people in the state who experience daily life in a fundamentally different way than I do in Fairbanks. AK|Next allows participants to see that despite these differences, we all share a common interest in studying and devoting ourselves to our statewide community. The experience changes your perception of Alaska forever.

The experience changes your perception of Alaska forever.

“Participating in AK|Next starts with seeing names from all over on a giant map of the state, but over the course of the week these names become more. They become friends and partners in the challenge of leading Alaska into the future.”

Facilitation Training and Culture Shift

Alice Qannik Glenn
Anchorage

“THE HUMANITIES FORUM has had one of the biggest impacts on who I am and what I’ve been able to achieve within the last year.

The groundwork they do to build community one person, one conversation, one relationship at a time should be a standard for all organizations.

I feel seen. I feel included. I feel like I’m doing the right thing. It’s one of those feelings that you never knew you needed until it actually happens.”

I feel seen. I feel included. I feel like I’m doing the right thing.

PHOTO BY JOANNE MITCHAK GLENN



Gary Upayaq Beaver and Ryan Conarro (right) in Ping Chong + Company’s *ALAXSXA / ALASKA*, performing at the Unalakleet School gym followed by a community dialogue.

PHOTO BY BRET HANSON

Grants

Ryan Conarro:

“I’VE BEEN FORTUNATE to be a part of several arts, education, and community projects supported by Alaska Humanities Forum—including as an artist with Ping Chong + Company, Generator Theater Company, and Perseverance Theatre, and as an educator with Lower Kuskokwim School District. Spending time in rural and urban Alaska communities for these projects has demonstrated for me firsthand what the Forum proclaims: that sharing our stories matters. That spending time together in conversation

matters. That meeting and getting to know people who have different lived experiences than my own... matters. I’m grateful to the Forum for its support of projects like these—they have certainly changed me for the better, and they create potent opportunities for communities to gather and listen and grow.”



Creating Cultural Competence

Kaymbra Mortensen
Denali Borough School District

“MY C₃ MENTOR helped me to better understand Yup’ik culture. She has been a source of information about subtle aspects of the culture that would be much harder to understand without her insight. She has helped me with creating culturally responsive lesson plans and has shared her love of her culture with me through stories of her youth and her life. It has been such a rewarding relationship.”

A source of information about subtle aspects of the culture

Educator Cross-Cultural Immersion

ECCI participant (educator), Anchorage

“I CONTINUE TO HAVE images in my mind about the way the elders taught the students about their culture, the importance of the place in Alaska geographically, and in their family. Connected in such a strong way, something that’s missing in the greater culture today. There’s a loss of the sense of where students come from and a sense of where their family comes from. I learned how to teach without so much talking, and to observe more, and get the feedback from the students.”

Connected in such a strong way, something that’s missing in the greater culture today

Culture Shift

Adryan Glasgow
Culture Shift Regular (“Shifter”)

“SINCE MOVING BACK to Alaska and leaving an academic career behind, I am always on the look-out for challenging but sincere conversations. Once a month, Culture Shift allows me a chance to really dig in with other members of my community.

No matter the topic, I always learn. I learn that my community is curious and empathetic. I learn that I live among those who are willing to engage contradiction.

Truly listening, entertaining new ideas, welcoming another’s perspective: pretty much a list of my favorite things!”

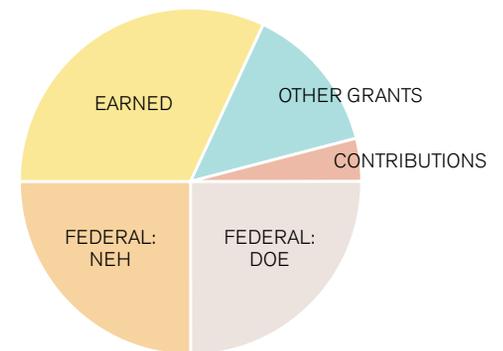
Truly listening, entertaining new ideas, welcoming another’s perspective

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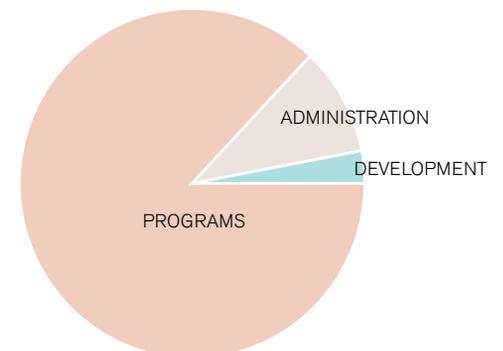
THE ALASKA HUMANITIES FORUM serves Alaska as one of 56 humanities councils, located in all U.S. states and jurisdictions. Each council engages, informs, and connects the people of its home state through unique, localized programming.

The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) provides federal funding each year in support of state humanities councils, renewing its founding commitment to critical, creative, and compassionate thinking and dialogue about the future of our country. This funding requires a 100% match—an investment from partner organizations, corporations, and people throughout Alaska who want to make a real, lasting difference in communities across our state.

Revenue: \$3,196,240



Expenses: \$3,126,884



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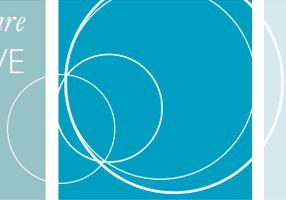
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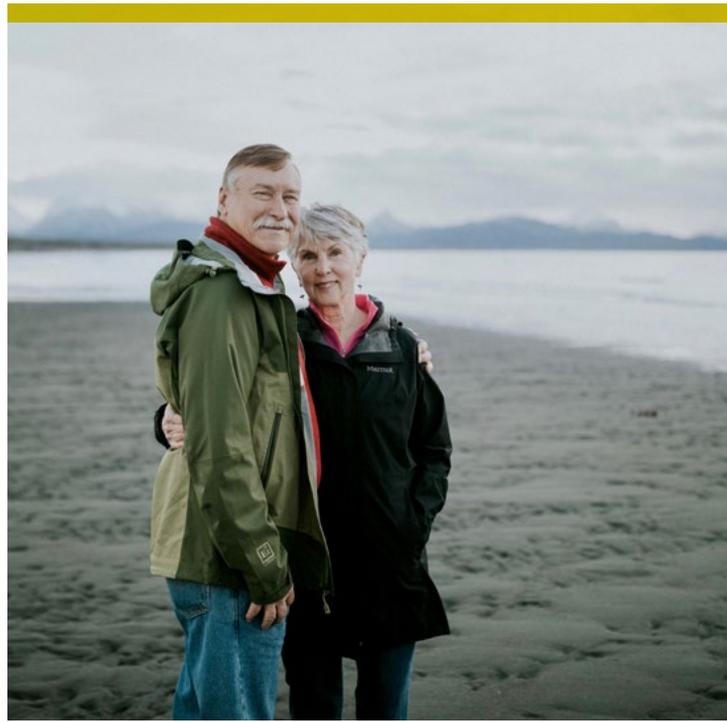
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Janie Leask Receives Inaugural Leadership Anchorage Alumni Award

Self-described “servant-leader” was instrumental in making ANCSA work for a new generation

By Emma Brooks



Janie Leask and her husband Don Reed.

OUTSIDE OF Alaska Native politics, you might not have heard of Janie Leask, and you might not have heard of the 1991 amendments passed during her presidency at the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN).

Partly, you haven't heard of Leask because she's the epitome of Alaska humble. You could meet her at a party and talk to her all night without having the slightest idea how significant her life's work has been for indigenous rights—not just in Alaska, but nationally.

Leask's professional career includes leadership roles across a number of statewide organizations. She worked for fifteen years at AFN, served as the Vice President of Community Development at the National Bank of Alaska, as well as the Manager of Community Relations for Alyeska Pipeline Service Company. She helped found and for four years was sitting president and CEO of First Alaskans Institute.

From 1982 to 1989 Leask served as President at AFN, a time period in which some of the most significant amendments ever made to the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) were passed.

John Shively was the Vice President of AFN when Leask first started working there as a secretary. “She was a sort of hippie-looking young woman with hair down to the middle of her back,” Shively said. “She

would drive around in a VW bus.”

Shively went on to explain that the first time he realized that Leask had leadership ability was when she put together a women's softball team sponsored by AFN. They brought him on as coach, Shively said, and in the team's second year, they won state. He credits Leask for the win.

It was partly with encouragement from Shively that Leask rose through the ranks at AFN—from secretary, to executive secretary, all the way up to president. When asked about Leask's leadership style, Shively didn't hesitate.

“She's a good listener,” he said. He went on to describe Leask as the kind of leader who not only pretends to listen, but really listens, and then takes what she hears to heart and lets it shape her policy. People, he said, respond to that.

BORN to a Haida Tshimshian father and an Irish German mother, Leask has always had a foot in both worlds. Her father grew up in Metlakatla at a time when the highest grade of public school available was 8th, but Leask's grandparents valued education, and he was sent away to boarding school. He later went on to play basketball for the University of Washington, where he met Leask's mother, and they moved together back to Metlakatla to raise their family.

“It was idyllic,” Leask said about growing

up in Metlakatla. “We were let loose and we ran free, beachcombing, having family picnics.” When she was ten years old, Leask's father got a job in Anchorage and she spent her teenage years there.

Leask said her father always wanted all of his children to go to college, but none of them did straight away after high school. For her part, Leask said she didn't have the patience for college, and taken in the context of her accomplishments, her lack of a college degree is perhaps the least interesting thing about her.

TO UNPACK the full import of Leask's work takes real expertise. Enter Paul Ontooguk, the University of Alaska's Director of Alaska Native Studies. Ontooguk remembers that in the early years, during the push to settle, ANCSA was “...sold as a fix-all. But by the time Janie's taken over, all these holes are showing up.”

When ANCSA passed in 1971, there was a provision that protected the sale of shares for twenty years. After that, in 1991, the newly formed corporations were slated to go public, all at once. And it was then, from 1982-1989, under the pressure of that clock, that Leask was in a seat of leadership at AFN.

But this deadline was just one of the hurdles Leask overcame. Ontooguk explains that because of the way ANCSA is



structured, by the 1980s, when Leask was president of AFN, it was clear that most Alaska Natives weren't going to be corporate shareholders.

The way it worked under ANCSA's original passage, he clarifies, was that everybody who enrolled as one-quarter or more Alaska Native on December 18, 1971 was issued stock. And there were all sorts of problems with this, but among the most glaring were that shares were being inherited out of the tribes and that a brother and sister, born either side of December 18, 1971, might have completely different ownership in the corporation: One, born before 1971, might have full stock, and the other, born after, might have none.

This, Leask said, needlessly divided families.

What's more, Ontooguk explains, "...if you don't have any shares, then you have no participation."

He describes Leask as key in getting through a proposal to broaden access to corporate shares as part of the 1991 amendments. The proposal allowed Native corporations, if they chose, to create a new class of stocks. These new stocks, Ontooguk explains, would be 100-shares, but they would be lifetime only—when a shareholder dies, they go back to the corporation. And when you are born into a tribe, under this new proposal, you get one hundred shares.

Along with creating the option for new shares—the kind that go back to the corporation when you die and are inherited at birth—Leask, members of the AFN Board, and their legal teams were also able to re-open enrollment for Vietnam veterans who missed ANCSA's initial enrollment period. Further, they included options for corporations to restrict the sale of stock, offering tribes the option for perpetual ownership, something that did not exist before.

"Janie had it coming from all sides," Ontooguk said. There was the professional side—all the political turmoil that took place during her time at AFN—but then there was the fact that Leask was a woman, leading AFN, at a time when the decision makers of the world were still overwhelmingly male. Nonetheless, Leask, he said, managed to overcome many of the shortcomings—not all of them, but many of them—of ANCSA.

Leask did this despite the fact that it was a contentious time in Alaska Native politics. Some corporations were starting to thrive, buoyed by the oil economy, and others had fallen into a slough of bad leadership. This created a lot of disparity in the benefits the different tribes saw because of ANCSA, and where there is disparity, there is conflict.

Leask describes her role at AFN as a consensus builder. She would travel out to villages and talk to people about issues, so that AFN could accurately represent their voices. "It wasn't always easy," Leask said. She got yelled at, a lot.

ANCSA was amended numerous times under her leadership, but Leask describes the 1991 amendments as the most important by far. "It was incredibly important, and I felt that importance, as did everybody who was involved with it."

Helping pass the 1991 amendments is a click, a pulse, a tiny sampling of the things she's accomplished in her many years of serving Alaska. But the fact that they passed during her presidency at AFN—a package of amendments with sweeping impacts that touched people's financial lives and families and identities—is a testament to her ability to bring together diverse interests and get things done.

At a time "...when it looked the wheels might fall off the bus," Ontooguk says of Leask, "...she just rose to the occasion."

LEASK HAS BLUE EYES. If you saw her on the street, she could easily pass for white. She describes people being surprised when she walked up to the podium the first time she spoke at the Alaska State Chamber of Commerce. She wasn't what her introduction had led them to expect.

"Sometimes it was hard," Leask said, describing traveling to villages and feeling like she stuck out. But people were always incredibly warm to her, she said, and if she ever felt like she didn't belong, it was of her own invention.

It's fitting that Leask received the first Leadership Anchorage Alumni Award, because she comes alive when she talks about leadership. When asked about her time with Leadership Anchorage, she talks about John Gardner, and how deeply she agrees with his belief that you don't confuse leadership with status.

"To me, a leader is a servant-leader, a person who gets behind and helps others succeed."

Leask has had an impressive career of leadership. These days, she's retired and lives in Homer with her husband. For over twenty years, Leask said, she has carried the idea that the good life can be described as "...living in the place you belong with the people you love, doing the right work on purpose."

Leask, it seems, has lived a whole lot of the good life. ■

Emma Brooks is a former English teacher. She likes long walks on the beach, campfires, and old dogs.

"When it looked the wheels might fall off the bus, she just rose to the occasion."

A women writers' residency founded by Dana Stabenow
is taking shape near Homer

RETREAT FORWARD

By Erin Coughlin Hollowell



SOMETIMES A DREAM starts thirty years in the past. In 1989, Dana Stabenow was sending out her first novel to publishers in New York City. Back then, the process was pretty arduous and disheartening, all done by “snail mail” and the wait for acceptance (or rejection) was long. So, when Dana’s friend Katherine Gottlieb saw an article about Hedgebrook, a new retreat for women writers on Whidbey Island in Washington, she encouraged Dana to apply. Even though Dana scoffed at the idea and had to be cajoled, she did finally apply and was accepted.

During those blissful two weeks at Hedgebrook, Dana made some close friends, worked on her novel and a short story, rode the facility bike to the small public library, perhaps drank some wine, and began to believe that she’d be a writer. In fact, she sold her first novel the following year. “There is a direct line from my residency at Hedgebrook to the subsequent publication of the first of my thirty-four novels, to my appearance on the *New York Times* bestseller list,

to my winning an Edgar award, to being named Individual Artist for the Alaska Governor’s Arts Awards in 2007,” Dana wrote on the Hedgebrook blog in 2018.

Now thirty years later and those more than thirty published novels forward, the dream planted deep in Dana’s subconscious is about to blossom. Storyknife Writers Retreat, a women writers’ residency founded by Dana overlooking Mt. Iliamna, Mt. Augustine, and Cook Inlet just outside Homer, is going to open for business. Starting in April 2020, six new women writers will be in residence each month until October. Each weekday, the chef will bring a basket lunch to their cabins, and in the evening the writers will sit down to a prepared meal together. That shared meal is meant to foster community among them so that when they leave Storyknife, they take with them more than just some new writing, they take a support system.

Storyknife Writers Retreat was named by that original small community of two, Dana and her longtime friend Katherine. In 1993, when Dana received an Edgar Award presented by the Mystery Writers of America, Katherine gave her an ivory carved Storyknife pin made by Rick Lonsdale just before Dana went on stage to receive her award. Storyknives are used in the Central Yu’pik tradition of storyknifing. The Storyknife

(yaaruin) is a traditional tool used only by girls for sketching pictures on the ground or in the snow. Katherine is President and CEO of Southcentral Foundation, the non-profit health arm of Cook Inlet Region, Inc., a MacArthur Award recipient, CIRI shareholder, Old Harbor tribal member, and Sel-dovia tribal member. She and Dana thought Storyknife would be a fitting name for a writers’ retreat that will foster women’s stories.

The building of Storyknife, its six cabins and main house, has also been about building a larger community. The capital campaign began in earnest in 2016, when executive director Erin Coughlin Hollowell began working for the organization. Some of the funds came from foundations like the Rasmuson Foundation, the M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust, and the Atwood Founda-



Dana Stabenow and Katherine Gottlieb
celebrate at Storyknife's groundbreaking
ceremony on May 4, 2019.

PHOTO BY ERIN COUGHLIN HOLLOWELL.



tion, but the majority came from over 375 individual donors. People who wanted to honor special women writers, or hometown librarians, or teachers. Some gave funds dedicated to their mothers who encouraged them. Others to honor women community leaders.

The Carol Cabin was named by Arliss Sturgulewski for her daughter-in-law, Carol. The Betty Cabin named by Jeannie Penney for her mother, Betty Rice. Cathryn Rasmuson has honored Diana Tillion with the Diana Cabin, which will also feature Diana's artwork on the walls. The Atwood Foundation has named the Evangeline Cabin after author and incredible community organizer, Evangeline Atwood. The Southcentral Foundation and Old Harbor Native Corporation teamed up to honor Katie Fox Vinberg Kashevarof, an incredible community force in Seldovia and beyond. The last cabin to be named was the Peggy Cabin in honor of former Alaska State Writer Laureate, amazing poet, and teacher, Peggy Shumaker. The funds for the Peggy Cabin have been raised through a grassroots campaign of individual donors.

The main house of Storyknife which contains the kitchen, dining area, library, seat-

"I'd been given a place with no expectations. No deadlines. No responsibilities. No requirements.

But more than that, as the inaugural fellow of the great effort known as Storyknife Writers Retreat, I was given the opportunity to be someone else's dream come true."

ing area, and organizational office is named for Homer poet, writer, teacher, and marine biologist, Eva Saulitis. In one of the first community-building moments of the capital campaign, Peggy Shumaker and Joe Usibelli pledged a two-for-one match to every dollar raised for Eva's House. The campaign went out on social media and within six months, the funding was met by individual donors to assure the match.

Starting in 2016, as the capital campaign truly unfolded, Storyknife began to hold residencies for one woman writer at a time in Dana Stabenow's guest cabin, christened as the Frederica Cabin after anthropologist and novelist, Frederica de Laguna. The first fellow, Kim Steutermann Rogers, understood intuitively the weight of her position. After giving her a tour of the cabin, Dana confided, "You're a dream come true."

Kim wrote after she returned to her home in Hawaii, "I've been home a week now, and I still think about Dana's words. In that moment, I understood the import of my arrival

in Homer, Alaska. Sure, I'd been awarded a place to write; a place to sit and read; a place to photograph, if I chose. I'd been given a place with no expectations. No deadlines. No responsibilities. No requirements. But more than that, as the inaugural fellow of the great effort known as Storyknife Writers Retreat, I was given the opportunity to be someone else's dream come true."

In 2017, Kim was followed by Mairéad Byrne, Megan Donnelly, Bea Chang, and Ruby Hansen Murray. The following year brought Ching-In Chen, Sharbari Ahmed, and Casandra Lopez. Each resident expanded the community of Storyknife, gathering writers of every genre. Each resident was part of that dream come true, a community of women and nonbinary writers who have experienced some of what Dana had dreamed to create. But that dream won't be fully realized until the entire residency is complete and that first cohort of six women writers in residence sit down together at the dining room table.

SINCE STORYKNIFE'S groundbreaking in May 2019, so many people in the Homer community have come forward to help make it a place where women writers feel cherished. Patrice Krant brought the Kachemak Bay Quilters on board to create a custom quilt for each cabin. Annette Bellemy has organized six different women potters to make



an individual set of dishware for each cabin. Rita Jo Shoultz donated her time and her plants to making gorgeous gardens around the facility. Suzanne Singer Alvarez created incredible handmade stepping stones. People have donated artwork, books, and even purchased items from Storyknife's wish lists for each cabin. One of the local book clubs, the Cosmic View Book Club, got together to donate a brand new set of durable pots and pans. As a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, Storyknife will continue to be supported by the community it brings together—donors, benefactors, readers, and writers.

In 2018, the board developed a strategic plan that identified the following core organizational values: cultural and personal validation, support, nurturing, and openness. Storyknife seeks to create an environment of caring and hospitality that will provide the bedrock upon which women writers can feel secure in exploring difficult, experimental, and engaging work. By providing women writers with a place that is beautiful,

thoughtfully constructed, and nurturing, Storyknife fosters a level of respect for each woman and her creative process.

Within the Storyknife Strategic Plan, the long-term goal, and definition of success, is that by 2028, a woman writer would be able to say, "I went to a residency at Storyknife, and my whole life changed."

In 2020, Storyknife begins full programming with 42 writers in residence with the help of many people, including its board and founder. What will it in turn create? A community of women writers who support each other, who help each other write and lift each other up. A diverse community, purposefully emphasizing inclusion of Native Alaskan and indigenous writers, who are there because their stories are impor-

tant, essential. Novels written by women with strong women lead characters. Plays and movies written by women that give us new ways of the seeing the world. Poetry written by women that touches our hearts. Memoirs, essays, short stories, all brought into the world because women writers were told that they deserve the time and space to devote to their craft, that they deserve something beautiful because they and their work are important. ■

Erin Coughlin Hollowell is the executive director of Storyknife. She is also a published poet, with two full-length collections through Boreal Books and one chapbook. She teaches at the Kachemak Bay Writers' Conference and the University of Alaska Anchorage Low-Residency MFA Program.

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GRANT REPORT

Hiroshima-Amchitka project offers perspectives on a world gone nuclear

By Debra McKinney

THERE ARE more pleasant things to ponder on a sunny September afternoon. Still, about 150 people showed up for *Hiroshima-Amchitka Legacies: What Future Can We Choose?*, a presentation and panel discussion held at the Anchorage Museum auditorium.

With the help of a \$3,700 Alaska Humanities Forum mini-grant, the Hiroshima-Amchitka project brought scholars, scientists, historians, activists, and others together to talk about the human and environmental impacts of the bombing of Hiroshima in 1945; and the testing of nuclear bombs on Alaska soil, on the Aleutian island of Amchitka, between 1965 and 1971. The last of three detonations, the largest underground test in U.S. history, was 385 times stronger than the bomb dropped on Hiroshima, and came more than three decades after the United Nations first called for elimination of all nuclear weapons.

Among the speakers was Kathleen Sullivan of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), the coalition that won the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize. Anchorage Mayor Ethan Berkowitz opened the program by declaring Anchorage an ICAN city and signing the ICAN Cities Appeal:

Anchorage is deeply concerned about the grave threat that nuclear weapons pose to communities throughout the world. We firmly believe that our residents have the right to live in a world free from that threat. Any use of nuclear weapons, whether deliberate or accidental, would have catastrophic, far-reaching and long-lasting consequences for people and the environment. Therefore, we support the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and call on the United States government to join in.

Project leader Hiroko Harada, Ph.D., is a professor of Japanese at the University of Alas-

ka Anchorage (UAA) and director of the Montgomery Dickson Center for Japanese Language and Culture. The center was named in honor of her former student, Montgomery “Monty” Dickson, who perished in Japan in 2011 when a magnitude-9 earthquake unleashed a massive tsunami, devastating Rikuzentakata, the city where he was teaching English.

Harada, who earned a doctorate in Comparative Literature from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, wrote her thesis on “Aspects of Post-War German and Japanese Drama: Reflections of War, Guilt and Responsibility” (Edwin Mellen Pr. 2000). It included a chapter, “Dooms Day,” on nuclear holocaust. She first went to Hiroshima in 2015 with a group of students after visiting Rikuzentakata, where Dickson died at 26, to learn about the devastation caused by manmade and natural disasters and the enormous reconstruction efforts. The following year, she again visited Hiroshima, where she met atomic bomb survivors, a “powerful” experience, she said.

“The message of those survivors who experienced the holocaust is clear: Do not repeat! Why do people not listen to them? Why do people forget? Why do they not learn? Forget about politics, money, and greed. Really, what future can we choose?”

Harada, along with event co-organizers Carole Anderson and Hana Willcoxson, designed the Hiroshima-Amchitka project to address these and other questions.

The Amchitka legacy

Aleuts inhabited Amchitka for thousands of years, but a century after the first Russian fur traders arrived in the region, there was no one left. The island became a wildlife refuge in 1913, and since 1980, has been part of the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge. During World War II, when Japanese forces bombed Dutch Harbor and invaded the Aleutian islands of Attu and Kiska, the U.S. military moved in.

The third and largest nuclear test on the Aleutian island of Amchitka inspired the founding of Greenpeace.

Two decades later, the island was chosen as a nuclear test site, sparking national and international protests. The third and largest test, the Cannikin, inspired the founding of Greenpeace. In addition to radioactive contamination, there were fears that detonating a 5-megaton nuclear warhead a mile beneath the surface in a seismically unstable area would trigger an earthquake and tsunami.

Pamela Miller, founder and executive director of Alaska Community Action on Toxics, told the Hiroshima-Amchitka audience of efforts to stop the program and how concerns were ignored, including those of Aleut residents of the Aleutian and Pribilof islands, the most knowledgeable of the region. In addition to human rights and environmental groups, those opposed to the program included the Alaska State Medical Association, which stated that the nuclear blast could “only result in injury and death to present and future generations.” President Richard Nixon, by executive order, suppressed comments from five federal agencies opposing the tests. A legal challenge in the U.S. Supreme Court failed 4-to-3. By then, Nixon had already ordered the Cannikin to proceed.

According to various accounts, the blast blew the ground 20 feet in the air and created massive coastal rockfalls and turf slides that destroyed intertidal marine life. The blast rearranged the island, killed countless fish, birds, and, according to the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, 700–2,000 sea otters. Two days later, the surface above the blast zone collapsed, leaving a crater a mile wide and 40 feet deep that’s since filled with surface runoff and rainwater.

The island is now tested for radioactive leakage every five years, funded by the Department of Energy (DOE). According to the DOE, analysis of the most recent samples collected in 2016 found no leakage, and samples collected in 2011 showed no “excessive risk.”

Miller, an environmental scientist, is skeptical. On a Greenpeace mission in 1996, she and others found evidence of plutonium-23/240 and americium-241 leaking into White Alice Creek, which flows into the Bering Sea.

From the first bomb test in 1965 through the late 1980s, more than 3,000 people worked on Amchitka, doing everything from construction to surface cleanup to cooking and maintenance.

Jim Cannon, a public information officer from the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission’s Nevada headquarters, stands beside a 10-foot diameter drill bit. The tool was used to drill a 6,000-foot deep hole on Amchitka in Sept., 1969, in preparation for the 1971 “Cannikin” nuclear test.

PHOTO BY LYMAN WOODMAN,
UAA-HMC-0353-B8-F17-24



A 2005 data analysis by UAA’s Dr. Mary Ellen Gordian found radiation-related cancers significantly higher among those workers than the general population. Persistence for justice, including Miller’s work and a class action lawsuit, put an end to government stonewalling in the 1990s, and hundreds of Amchitka workers have since received compensation.

Karen Pletnikoff, an environmental scientist with the Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association (APIA), provided an Aleut perspective during the *Hiroshima-Amchitka Legacies: What Future Can We Choose?* seminar, not only regarding Amchitka, but also of the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant disaster, since radioactive materials from Fukushima have shown up in the Bering Sea. State epidemiologists say those levels are thousands of times too low to pose health risks. That’s not particularly comforting for many whose lives and livelihoods are intermingled with the sea.

“We are naturally extra concerned about contaminants in traditional foods where there should be zero,” Pletnikoff said. “There’s no acceptable amount. These are foods with incredible cultural, social, and personal-autonomy importance. We feed them to our children and our elders, those of our society that we most value.

“It’s really important to note that Amchitka can’t be solved. It needs monitoring in perpetuity.”

Marine scientist Bruce Wright, another Hiroshima-Amchitka speaker, has done sampling out there, including on Cannikin Lake above the blast zone and in the Bering Sea.

“We were out there a year and half after Fukushima,” he said in an interview. “In the samples we collected we could see plutonium from Fukushima—super low levels. I mean, you get more radiation flying between Anchorage and Homer. But what I found so fascinating was that we didn’t detect anything looking like



The blast rearranged the island, killed countless fish, birds, and, according to the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, 700–2,000 sea otters.

it came from Amchitka. Seeing the Fukushima plutonium signal, to me, validated our control. We've got some pretty good lab science going on. It seems like nothing's leaking right now."

That could change, he noted. The deepest part of the sea adjacent to the island is less than 1,000 feet. The Cannikin warhead was detonated some 4,000 feet below that.

"Amchitka's on the edge of the Ring of Fire, where the Pacific Plate is overriding the North American Plate," Wright said. "So, you know it's going to fracture."

Underground nuclear blasts create a cavity, he explained. DOE's position is that, with all the melting, the cavity is coated in glass and sealed off.

He doesn't buy it.

"In the case of Cannikin, it did form a cavity, but I don't think it's sealed off. I think it's just a big mess down there, and I hope it stays down there." ■

Debra McKinney, a long-time Alaskan journalist, is author of Beyond the Bear and a frequent contributor to FORUM magazine.

The Alaska Humanities Forum: A Good Pick

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2019 Mini-Grants

The Forum's mini-grant funding provides smaller awards (up to \$2,500) to support independent humanities projects across the state, awarded on a rolling basis each year. In 2020, we are streamlining our grant funding process. Going forward, the Forum will offer annual grants for humanities-based projects that promote scholarship, preservation, and connection throughout Alaska. Details and application materials are available at akhf.org/grants.

Stories of the Wind

Story Works | Unalakleet

Since 2014, Story Works Alaska has been working with youth and communities in the Anchorage and Bering Strait school districts, leading storytelling workshops designed to build resilience and connect across differences.

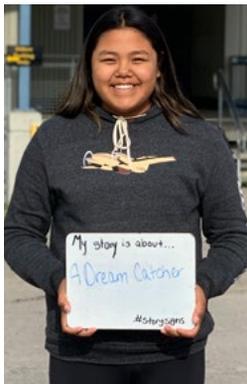
In September 2019, Story Works led a week-long workshop for students in Unalakleet in partnership with Giaana Peterson, English teacher at Frank A. Degnan High School. "Doing this workshop afforded the time and space to get to know my students better," reflects Peterson. "It also brings me back to our Alaska Native roots of storytelling, and that reinvigorates me as a teacher."

To cap off the week, local writer and journalist Laureli Ivanoff, who volunteered as a story coach and sound engineer recording stories for airing on KNSA, co-hosted a community storytelling event. Youth, educators, elders, parents, family and friends gathered for the event, *Stories of the Wind*, where students shared the stories they had crafted throughout the week.

"These storytelling skills will help our young citizens, whether in applying for college, preparing for a first job interview,

or simply connecting to others through the art of telling a story," affirmed Ivanoff. "Unalakleet is a small community located at the heart of the Norton Sound and I am very grateful the Story Works Alaska crew worked to make their program available to a school outside the road system. Our students and our community are simply better for it."

In April, 2020, two students from Unalakleet will travel to Anchorage to tell their stories at *Extra Credit*, Story Works' annual city-wide youth storytelling event. Learn more about Story Works' mission, listen to stories from workshop alumni, and find out how to get involved at storyworksak.org.



Saints of Failure Civic Dialogue and Workshops

Juneau Arts and Humanities Council
Juneau

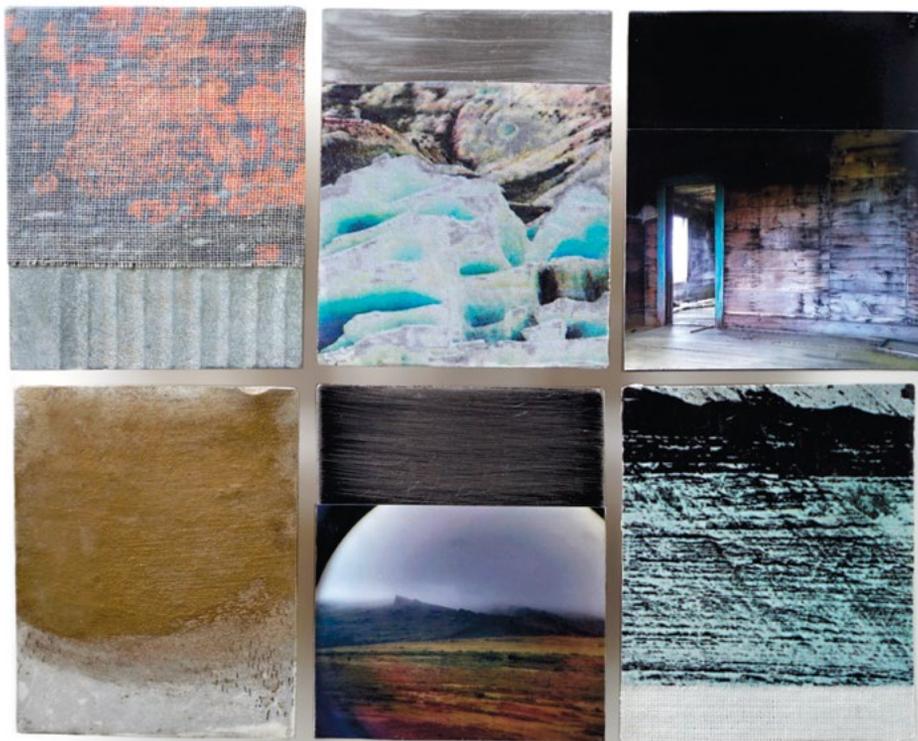
Saints of Failure is a new interdisciplinary work of documentary theatre combining true personal stories, researched histories, and live makeup transformations. The piece, created and performed by Ryan Conarro and produced by Juneau's Generator Theater, is rooted in Conarro's personal stories of coming of age as a gay Catholic American man, including reflection on his life in Alaska communities as he navigates these identities.

A series of community dialogues in collaboration with Southeast Alaska Gay Lesbian Alliance (SEAGLA) and Capital City religious organizations will be held in conjunction with the local *Saints of Failure* production in February 2020 at the Church of the Holy Trinity in Juneau. The discussions will illuminate and challenge prevailing perceptions about what it means to be LGBTQ in Alaska today, by calling attention to the intersectionality of sexual, gender, and religious-cultural identities.



LEFT: Ryan Conarro performs in *Saints of Failure*. PHOTO BY CAROLYN BROWN.

RIGHT: A piece from Katie Craney's exhibit *Landfalls: Dedications to Alaska Women Writers and Storytellers*.



Epic Warrior Trainings

Arctic Resources Center and The Alaska Veterans Foundation | Fairbanks

“Veterans of recent conflicts return home with public appreciation and support not known since the end of WWII,” wrote Jim Wisland in the grant application for *Epic Warrior Training: Odyssey*. “Even so, many of our veterans and their families continue to struggle to find the life they once knew and to fully rejoin their communities.”

Epic Warrior Training: Odyssey is dedicated to supporting veterans in their transition home. Through the program, the Alaska Veterans Foundation, in partnership with the Arctic Research Center for Suicide Prevention, and Fort Wainwright’s suicide prevention office, engage veterans in reading and discussion of Homer’s *Odyssey*, a classic tale of homecoming, to help veterans find new ways to reflect on their experiences and to explore important questions about the nature of duty, heroism, suffering, loyalty, and patriotism.

These workshops in Fairbanks were open to the more than 15,000 veterans in the Fairbanks area and seven outlying villages, and also to service members and their families from the Army’s Fort Wainwright and the Air Force’s Eielson AFB and Clear AFB. Plans are underway for expansion to Anchorage, Juneau, and remote villages with veteran concentrations such as Bethel, Nome, and Utqiagvik.

Annie Boochever Book Tour

Bethel Community Services Statewide

Fighter in Velvet Gloves is the first book on the remarkable life of Alaska Native civil rights leader Elizabeth Peratrovich written for young teens by Annie Boochever in collaboration with Peratrovich’s eldest son, Roy Peratrovich, Jr. A Forum mini-grant helped to support a series of book talks and discussions held across Alaska in conjunction with Alaska Book Week to spark conversation about ongoing issues of race, equality, and social justice in our state and to highlight Peratrovich’s contributions to the Alaska Native civil rights movement.



Boochever’s book tour included stops at both school and community sites in Anchorage, Bethel, Utqiagvik, Kodiak, Valdez, and Dillingham during much of the 2019 Alaska Book Week. She also spoke at the Alaska Native Brotherhood and Alaska Native Sisterhood Grand Camp meeting held in October in Juneau.

Landfalls: Dedications to Our Changing Landscape

Katie Craney | Haines

“In Alaska, the climate crisis is closing in on our front yard and often all I seem to hear is the echo chamber of doom-and-gloom,” reflects artist Katie Craney of Haines. “Almost daily, I read and hear stories of the next species threatened, the next village under threat from raging winter seas, people fleeing for their lives as their towns burn.”

Feeling at a loss for words after reading Eva Saulitis’ final book, *Becoming Earth*, Craney was inspired to create a project using art and literature to share the ways that communities are responding to the daily grind of climate change and how our stories, perspectives, and memories are altered as the landscape dramatically changes around us.

Craney’s project, *Landfalls: Dedications to Our Changing Landscape*, brings together selected authors for events held in connection with Craney’s traveling solo art exhibition, *Landfalls: Dedications to Alaska Women Writers and Storytellers*. Through artist talks, readings, and discussions, participants explore not only what it means to be a woman in an often harsh and changing landscape, but also how our roles adapt with the landscape, and how we embrace the realities of this place through cultural understandings, misgivings, autonomy, and isolation; through story, narrative, and imagery painted with words. ■



IN UNSEASONABLY WARM

August 2019, two NEH colleagues and I traveled some four thousand miles across Alaska by airplane and auto, train and boat, ferry and foot, but barely scratched the mineral-rich surface of the forty-ninth state.

Learning about the history and culture of different states and territories is an honor. It is also a chance to see, for myself, the programs and institutions NEH is supporting.

Our weeklong trip took us first to the state's largest city, Anchorage, to tour vibrant cultural organizations funded by our agency and our state partner, Alaska Humanities Forum (AHF). I cannot overstate the kindness of AHF president Kameron Perez-Verdia and his talented staff and board at their welcome reception and throughout our visit.

ALASKA SOJOURN

A humanities travelog: NEH Chairman Jon Parrish Peede reflects on his visit to Alaska

Jon Parrish Peede | Photographs by Vincent Ricardel

NEH has awarded nearly \$40 million to Alaska over the decades, including a grant to the Anchorage Museum for a forthcoming documentary on the state by Ric Burns. He experienced the 2018 earthquake inside the galleries, but Alaska has a peculiar effect: Hardships seem to draw people nearer, not deter them.

At the Anchorage Museum, National Endowment for the Arts Chairman Mary Anne Carter and I met with museum CEO Julie Decker and U.S. Senator Lisa Murkowski. A vocal supporter of federal funding of cultural organizations, the senator has a thorough knowledge of not only the large institutions, but also small, often overlooked ones. I also met with Congressman Don Young at the AHF offices, where he affirmed our work with Alaska Natives and veterans.

Other stops included the Alaska Native Heritage Center, with its living-history approach to education, staffed by deeply knowledgeable teenage and young adult guides; the three-room Alaska Jewish Museum, led by the ever-cheerful Rabbi Yosef Greenberg (he noted that the city's first mayor, back in 1920, was Jewish); and the impressive University of Alaska, Anchorage, for a meeting with Chancellor Cathy Sandeen.

It was a particularly apt time for a visit to Anchorage because Ed and Cathy Rasmuson had invited major funders from across the country to the state in order to

Cheyenne Jack, an Eagle of the Shangukeidí clan, and Cayenne Boe, an Eagle of the Wooshkeetaan clan, in traditional regalia.



expand outside support. Their eponymous foundation is the state's leading cultural funder. On a train ride from Anchorage to Indian in beautiful dining cars, the funders and potential grantees talked over how to best invest financial resources in a transformative manner.

That night I found myself hurriedly reworking my pending address for Commonwealth North, the state's leading public policy forum, to incorporate the observations of the cultural leaders and educators whom we had met. There is nothing like speaking in a breakfast setting to keep a speaker focused and concise. I was fortunate in having a generous audience who well understood the value of the humanities to their communities.

WE LEFT ANCHORAGE

into a smoky sky from distant forest fires and flew over the interior to the town of Kotzebue, thirty miles above the Arctic Circle. We met with Northwest Arctic Borough School District staff who touted their innovative AHF-funded "culture camps" to help teachers fresh from the Lower 48 adjust to their isolated new environs. The dedicated administrators recommended the memoir *Fifty Miles from Tomorrow* by William Iggiagruk Hensley to give us a better sense of the land and its people. We were soon gifted the book.

We met with Marie Greene, chair of the Aqqaluk Trust, and Elizabeth "Liz" Qaulluq Cravalho, former chair of the AHF board and vice president of lands for NANA Regional Corporation, which is owned by the more than 14,300 Iñupiat shareholders or descendants. They described the unique interlocking structure of state, federal, and tribal resource organizations and how they partner on matters varying from infrastructure to health care to education. Our conversations drove home the importance of the state humanities councils for reaching communities that we frankly can't from Washington, D.C., in an efficient manner.

Next, we journeyed northward over the frigid water with Perez-Verdia and Qaulluq Cravalho in a reliable, handmade, pine-and-plywood boat to a windy out-cropping of Iñupiat land where berries grew tight to the ground and talk was of the muskox that occasionally wandered into the fish camps.

We ate ripe berries by the handful, drank cool yellowish water that percolated up from a small, shallow manmade hole, added a few smooth gray pebbles to our parka pockets as mementos, and waded gingerly into the Arctic waters with bare feet, exiting rather quickly to the wet lip of the beach.

That night we reversed direction, flying to Nome to offload passengers and then some 1,000 miles to the southeast panhandle, where the mist-blanketed capital of Juneau with its narrow historic homes on the hillside looked down into the bay onto the tidy row of



A handmade pine-and-plywood boat carried the team from NEH over frigid waters with (above) Kameron Perez-Verdia, executive director of Alaska Humanities Forum, on board.

cruise ships, each of which sleeps more people than reside in Kotzebue and our next stop combined. We were heading to Hoonah, to be among the Tlingit.

Traveling from Juneau in a light rain via a sturdy two-story catamaran, we made our way for seventy nautical miles past Shelter Island and across Icy Strait to the hillside fishing village of Hoonah, originally Xunniyaa, which in Tlingit means “protected from the North Wind.” It had a welcoming vibe. It looked to be the ideal place to write, paint, read, dream, fish, and take aimless nighttime strolls—but the casual, recurrent warnings about bears brought back reality.

We were there at the invitation of Tlingit tribe member Robert Starbard, a Raven of the T’akdeintaan clan (Seagull), the tribal administrator of the Hoonah Indian Association, which is the federally recognized tribe of Hoonah. Starbard serves as an unofficial one-person tourism bureau for the region. A totem was being raised beside the town center. But first the local government had to vote to remove a long-overlooked ordinance that banned such an organized gathering of Alaska Natives within the town limits. When humanists speak of near and far history, they mean such moments.

We followed the story of how the Tlingit were expelled from Glacier Bay by the Little Ice Age in the 1700s and again when their ancestral land became a national monument in 1925 and a national park in 1980. The story was delivered largely in English

because so many had lost their mother tongue. The totem—carved by Gordon Greenwald, an Eagle of the Chookaneidí clan (Brown Bear)—recited the prehistory in wood.

The elders turned to one another often and said a poetic word that rose with a final *eesh* sound. It was not a chant, but chant-like. A kind bidding. The loose audience of teens and parents returned the word to them. Later, I asked what they were saying with such reverence.

Gunalchéesh. Thank you.

Gunalchéesh. Thank you.

THE HOPE for the Tlingit language is not the elders, the faithful keepers of the tribal traditions. Nor is it Starbard’s post-World War II generation. The hope rests with the energetic young in their red vests and regalia who now are taught their native language and dances and drumming at the island’s elementary and middle school.

Since 1986, NEH awarded hundreds of thousands of dollars to Sealaska Heritage Institute in Juneau for the purpose of preserving and cataloging this very language. For Tlingits and scholars alike, the archive is foundational. Gazing upon the magnificent totem beside the master carver, I felt anew the incredible privilege of witnessing the lasting value of our federal agency’s investment.

Hoonah had built a massive dock for cruise ships and was fast completing a second one. At full capacity, upward of ten thousand tourists may visit daily, seeking entertainment varying from the hillside zip line to whale watching to fine dining and shopping at the repurposed cannery. With limited housing and fewer than nine hundred residents, the town will need to stretch resources to support these guests without compromising its cultural authenticity. If the Tlingit leaders can find sufficient funding, they plan to create a museum and educational center to anchor their story in place. NEH has supported such efforts across the nation.

The morning after the totem raising, we reboarded the crowded catamaran and made our way, accompanied sporadically by whales, to Bartlett Cove, site of the National Park Service (NPS) headquarters in Glacier Bay National Park & Preserve.

We had the rare honor of joining Tlingit families for “Journey to Homeland,” a ceremonial rite held inside Xúnaa Shuká Hít, the new Huna Tribal House dedicated in 2016. As the NPS educational website explains, it is the first permanent Tlingit house built on their ancestral land since the Little Ice Age.



Robert Starbard, a Raven of the T'ak̄deintaan clan and tribal administrator of the Hoonah Indian Association, is a full-time booster of Hoonah.

My NEH colleague Vincent Ricardel's photographs narrate the peace and pleasure of the occasion that brought together not only the four original clans of Glacier Bay but other clans who live in Hoonah today, just as they had united in the construction of the 2,500-square-foot cedar structure in partnership with NPS.

In a few short years, the tribal house has already had the desired effect of establishing better relationships among the tribal members, park visitors, and NPS staff. In addition to the Eagle and Raven totems by the clan house, the Healing Pole, erected in 2018 near the dock, testifies to this positive movement.

"We searched for our mislaid culture in shelved boxes of pilot bread. / Sailor Boy, Tang, Libby's corned beef—traditional foods / of our colonized cupboard." A few lines from the poem "Brand Names" by Ernestine Hayes, the 2017–2018 Alaska State Writer Laureate, who is Tlingit. A journalist and creative writing professor, she won the 2007 American Book Award for *Blonde Indian: An Alaska Native Memoir*. Having returned to Juneau from Glacier Bay, we joined Hayes and other cultural leaders for lunch to discuss the state and the importance of its cultural heritage and how to balance it with tourism. The massive cruise ships within sight in the harbor underscored our discussion.

In addition to a healthy sprinkling of bookstores and artsy shops, the Juneau downtown boasts the aforementioned Sealaska (led by Tlingit tribal member Rosita Worl) and the Alaska State Library, Archives, and Museum, both NEH grantees and vital resources for the region. Because of our 2018 Challenge Grant of \$750,000, the capital city is deep into the planning stage of the new Juneau Arts & Culture Center (the "New JACC"), a gathering place for the performing arts and humanities discussions and other educational programming. Taking a tour with New JACC board chair and former mayor Bruce Botelho and center director Nancy DeCherney, one could not help but share in their enthusiasm for this public-private cultural venture and future economic engine.

ON OUR LAST FULL DAY,

Starbard drove us a dozen miles outside of Juneau to Auke Bay, where we followed the well-worn footpath to the slowly retreating Mendenhall Glacier and the roaring waterfall near its base. He pointed matter-of-factly to the craggy, bare mountainside that, in his childhood, was still covered in ice. Science explains such environmental changes; the humanities, its human impact in ways large and small.

I took in his measured words and the hurried trip itself. In my mind, I replayed my Anchorage speech.

I had explained to the audience that I came before them in solidarity as a native of a rural state and as a fellow citizen who believes that the economic prosperity of our great nation is inseparable from having an informed populace and a healthy culture.

Alaska's unique cultural assets—from educational museums to sports fishing and hunting to hiking in Denali and Glacier Bay National Parks—are an unequalled strength. A continually renewing strength.

When well supported by the community and government and civic leaders, culture is a stable and dynamic and irreplaceable economic engine that enhances the lives of citizens, even as it enriches them financially.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, the arts and culture sector is a \$730 billion industry, which represents 4.2 percent of the nation's GDP—a larger share of the economy than transportation and agriculture. More than 11,000 people are employed in Alaska's cultural industry, which adds \$1.4 billion to the state's economy.

Culture is big business. Culture is good business. The creative economy is not only the future; it is the *present*, and it is in many ways the ongoing historic past.

The question that I put to the Commonwealth North audience—that can only be answered by Alaskans—is: *What is being done to nurture the state's cultural sector, to grow it, to capitalize on it, to promote it far and wide? Are you claiming it? And, if so, how and to what extent? Are you looking to Alaskan Native culture as foundational to the state's culture—not merely your past but your future, too? What are you doing to integrate the cultural sector into the education and lives of the young people who will take over running this state, if they can be retained in their early adulthood years?*

Whatever answers may come from such questions—and from better questions asked by more informed interlocutors—I know that NEH and AHF and our partners will play a vital role in framing and funding the best long-term solutions. I was honored to meet so many of the very people who will lead these efforts.

At the northwestern frontier of our continent, I found the same values as in my own native South: pride of place, a commitment to community, a love of language, and a vibrant urge to not merely "be" but to "belong" forever and always.

Gunalchéesh. ■

Jon Parrish Peede is the Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities. Originally published as "Alaska Sojourn: A humanities travelog" in the Winter 2020 issue of Humanities magazine, a publication of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

IN THE LATEST INSTALLMENT of our Kindling Conversation series, we are exploring the theme of family. From forming our own chosen families to carrying the memory and legacy of our ancestors through to future

FAMILY

generations, who we are and how we conceive of family are often inextricably woven together. Until very recently, most portrayals of families in popular media have failed to reflect the complex and diverse ways we belong to one another as kin. The following interviews and reflections represent just a few of the ways kinship manifest here in Alaska; we invite you to join the conversation and share your own perspective.

Kinship Through Namesakes

THE FOLLOWING CONVERSATION occurred between Yupik elders Frank Andrew, whose Yupik name is Miisaq, and Alice Rearden, whose Yupik name is Cucuaq. The conversation was published as part of the Yuuyaraq (which loosely translates to, “Yup’ik Way of Being”) curricula for the classroom. It was reproduced here with the permission of the Calista Corporation.

Frank Andrew: [...] When they wanted a child to receive the name of the deceased, they were told to do a naming ceremony, kangiliriaraq.

Alice Rearden: Did you ever see anyone give a person a name?

Frank Andrew: That occurs frequently. Even though they are small, when they are newborns, they used to bend down to their ears and name them after their deceased relatives and say, “That person has come and is here now.” After saying their name they would say that the person has come and is here now. That is how I saw people naming others, bending down to their ears and giving them names while they were small. They call it kangilirluku [giving a person a name].

They never gave them just one name, but they gave them names of their deceased relatives. And even though

their relative was already named after him, they would let them become atelgutet [those with namesake and name in common], naming them. Now you know that some have the same name. And there are many people who have the name Miisaq, and there are also many Avegyat who have the same names. These people are said to be ilakutat [relatives]. Even though atelguttellriit [those with the same namesake and name] are living in many different places, they have the same names that came from their ancestors. Yes, through their names.

They would use the term al’aq [older sister] for those who were named after their late older sister, or they would call those who were named after their mother aana [mother]. They called them by their tuqluutet through their namesakes.

Alice Rearden: Even though they are men or women. A woman can have a man’s name, and a man can have a woman’s name. Is it like that?

Frank Andrew: That’s right. They can give her that man’s name, even though she is female. And if that deceased person was the man’s iluraq, he can call her iluraq or ilurapak, even though she is a woman. There are many tuqluutet that exist through people’s names.

Yupik terms:

aana: mother

al’aq: older sister

atelgutet: those with namesake and name in common

atelguttellriit: those with the same namesake and name

ilakutat: relatives

iluraq/iluq: general term for cross-cousin, that is, father’s sister’s son, mother’s brother’s son, parent’s cross-cousin’s child, parents cross cousin’s child’s son (male speaker)

kangilirluku: giving a person a name

kangiliriaraq: naming ceremony

tuqluutet: Yup’ik kinship and relational terms

The Perception ‘Absence’ Plays in Alternative Kinship

By D. C. Mitchell



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ALASKA HUMANITIES FORUM

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Life is conceived of linearly. There are (nearly) universally accepted markers of progress, which we often call life milestones. They go something like this: birth, childhood, marriage, parenthood, grandparenthood, death. Every milestone between birth and death is relational, and more specifically, familial. We are assumed to be birthed into a certain kind of family and are encouraged, through everything from fairytales to religion to media, to make it our life's purpose to replicate that image of family. I cannot overstate how foundational this narrative is to the human experience. Perhaps this is why deviations from what is perceived to be the 'normal' family are considered to be so egregious.

I spend much of my professional, political and personal time considering gender identity, sexual orientation, and race. I work to deconstruct the norm of the nuclear, heterosexual family as the primary social unit and to expel its white, able-bodied and middle-class origins. In my research, I reflect on the structural inequality faced by alternative kinship constellations, a phrase I much prefer to 'nontraditional families'. This beautiful phrase more accurately reflects all of the networks of love which exceed the traditional imaginary of family. Often in alternative kinship constellations, so-called primary members of the traditional family are either physically or mentally absent (extending to two-parent homosexual families where the 'mother' or the 'father' is imagined to be missing), when there are too many members, or not the 'correct' type of family members. Some of these kinship constellations include single parent households, multi-generational families, families separated by the prison industrial complex, families separated by boarders, queer families in all senses, and the intersections of the above.

These constellations of love are fetishized, and by that, I mean they are sub-

ject to an excessive, irrational obsession which evades 'normal' families. My desire to address the fetishization of alternative kinship constellations derives from my early childhood experiences. My birth father was a brilliant writer and artist. He was also an addict who struggled with and against multigenerational trauma. He wasn't a part of my kinship constellation, yet I was perpetually asked about his 'absence' by people who couldn't imagine a family constituted without a male figure; often by complete strangers who felt entitled to explanation of why a person they imagined to be significant was 'missing' from my life.

The same question takes a new guise in my adult life as a lesbian when people cyclically assume that a male partner is missing from my kinship constellation. I am continuously astonished by the way that people who experience privileged protection under the umbrella of familial normalcy are emboldened to demand that those of us on the peripheral explain ourselves and our relationships to them. These probing queries are often poorly masked as care, when really, they are a fetishization of deviance. Why don't you have a mom? Why don't you have a dad? Why aren't you married? Why don't you have kids? Why don't your kids live with you? Why don't you have grandkids? Have you ever been subjected to this deeply personal interrogation? Does it feel like care to you?

We need new, inclusive manners for expressing our interest in one another which doesn't perpetuate harm when we intend care. How can we work through the deeply imbedded prejudices we hold around family and kinship (that we may or may not be fully conscious of) to more thoughtfully express our desire to gain a sense of understanding of each other?

Who Is My Family?

By Sarah Reynolds Westin

My son has a framed photo of family members gathered at his first Thanksgiving. He sits on my lap, wearing khaki corduroys and a brown onesie with a checkered autumn-colored tie sewn on, a gift from his godparents, his long hair slicked down and angled across his face like a cherub disguised as an indie-rock-er. My son is smiling, surrounded by his grandma, uncles, aunts, and cousins, birth-parents and siblings who sit on the laps of and stand beside their own adoptive families – next to my husband and his children, my stepchildren. This is the only picture my son has with most of his family members; just his adoptive grandparents missing.

I met my son in unexpected circumstances when he was one month old. I had known I would need to go through the process of adoption, if I wanted a child, and I wasn't actively taking those steps when our paths crossed. But my maternal instinct to nurture, protect, guide, and equip him kicked in as soon as we met, giving us both what we needed then and still need now. He moved in with me two days later. Six months after that our adoption was finalized. Now he's the closest family I've got.

I promised his biological family that I would maintain an open adoption, which is when an adoptive family commits to some form of interaction with the child's natural relatives. Since most of us live in the Anchorage area, it wouldn't be hard to arrange get-togethers. Our first big event was that Thanksgiving when the picture was taken. In the days leading up to it, though, I considered declining their invitation, but I'm relieved I didn't. Then I had wondered whether I would be the outsider, looking in. I figured my son belonged, but then I worried. Did he really? Was he my family? Or theirs? Or both? Would fostering connections with them pull him away from me—or

I will always navigate these complexities—and I hope, if I do it right, the question won't be as heavy for my son.

enrich us all? All I know is that evening set the stage for more visits. Since then, we've gone to cousins' basketball games, baked dinners for one another when recovering from surgeries, and celebrated graduations and marriages. I joke that I'm the one who is adopted.

I've tried to make sense of what family is over the years, combing through my experiences, testing out my thoughts, trying on labels for size. I still don't know what fits. Who is my family? First, I was a stepmom. Then, I became an adoptive mom. Once I was married. Now I am not.

Who is my family?

Sometimes I wish that question didn't return when I look at that Thanksgiving picture. It stands alone in capturing everyone together—before things changed again and people moved and mistakes were made and unhealthy patterns resurfaced and marriages ended.

Throughout my divorce, I once again faced questions about which people were my family. Could I still claim my former stepchildren? They will always be my son's siblings, and I spent ten years living with and raising and loving them.

I cleaned their scrapes. I snuggled them on the couch. I practiced homework with them. I took them to pick out outfits for school dances. And sometimes, the times they'll never know, some of the moments I hold dearest, I just watched them be them. I saw a video of my oldest give the high school graduation address as the class valedictorian. I wanted to be there, but I knew viewing it from a screen was better for everyone.

I've learned to see and try to be sensitive to different kinds of family units. I've tried to stop and comprehend how complicated—and often extended and unique—every family is. I've forced myself to be conscious about this issue because I will always navigate these complexities—and I hope, if I do it right, the question won't be as heavy for my son. You see, I've got my mom and three, maybe four, other maternal figures still living who I could rightfully call family. Then there's my dad, of course, along with my son's other grandfathers. I share the title "parent" with several people, but I have no doubt that I'm my son's only mom. Plus, I'm directly connected through blood, adoption, or marriage to, so far, about thirteen handfuls of siblings, cousins, and children who I care deeply about and who are spread across our city, state, country, and—I'm not exaggerating—world.

And so now, there it is again, that question always lingering in my mind: Who is my family?

I'm not sure that I need an answer to that question. But here's what I think I do know, what today I hold near as my son and I travel this path together: he and I are bound together, forever, as the closest people we've got, and the more people we have who love us and are looking out for us, the better off we'll be, no matter whether any of us use the label "family" or not. ■

AFTER IMAGE



STUDENTS from Floyd Dryden Middle School in Juneau spent a week in Buckland last spring as part of the Forum's Sister School Exchange (SSE), a program that for almost two decades has built connections between Alaska communities. Funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Alaska Native Education Program, SSE operates throughout the school year, matching a teacher and five students from a rural community with a teacher and five students from urban Alaska. These teams work through a 6-8 week curriculum on cross-cultural understanding, and then take turns visiting and hosting each other. This year, 12 teams are participating in the exchange from communities as widespread as Utqiagvik, Juneau, and Scammon Bay. Visits are scheduled between February and May.

FORUM

THE MAGAZINE OF THE
ALASKA HUMANITIES FORUM
WINTER 2020

Alaska Humanities Forum Calendar

Culture Shift

Last Wednesday of each month,
through June 2020, 6-8 p.m.

Anchorage Brewing Company
148 W. 91st St, Anchorage

Culture Shift is a monthly series hosted by the Forum at Anchorage Brewing Company in South Anchorage. At each event, two featured guests each share a provocative idea and then the audience takes part in a fun, interactive Q-and-A to find connections between them. Tickets are \$15 at akhf.org/culture-shift.

Leading Conversations that Build Community

Feb. 20-21, 8:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m.

Alaska Humanities Forum
421 W. 1st Ave, Anchorage

In this two-day training, participants take part in interactive, reflective discussions in groups, learn techniques to lead them, and then have the opportunity to plan and facilitate a conversation and receive feedback from trainers and other participants. Designed for community leaders, coaches, supervisors, facilitators, and anyone looking to host effective and meaningful conversations and to improve the quality of their relationships. The training fee is \$450. Please visit the akhf.org/facilitation-training for details, registration, and schedule.

2020 Leadership Celebration

May 5, 6-8 p.m.

Anchorage Museum
625 C St, Anchorage

Join us to honor the 2020 Leadership Anchorage Alumni awardee and the graduating cohort of LA23. Celebrate the vital role of leadership across our city and state at this community-wide reception. This event is free and open to the public.

Danger Close: Alaska 2020 | Radical Conversations

March 7

Anchorage Community House
4105 E. Turnagain Blvd., Anchorage

For the last five years, Alaska Humanities Forum and 49Writers have partnered to host *Danger Close: Alaska*, an initiative that brings together military service members and civilians to read, write, and connect over themes that touch all of our lives. This year's workshop will be led by poet, essayist, and lawyer Wendy Willis; and author, do-gooder, and veteran Matthew Komatsu. Participants will explore conversations between people, alive and dead; between people and landscapes; between writers and readers; between leaders and citizens. We'll leave plenty of time to think and write and share and connect. All genres and writing experience welcome. Space is limited, register now at 49writers.org/danger-close.

Get more details about all Alaska Humanities Forum events and opportunities at akhf.org.