

Flying cameras | Words in war | Sowing harmony

# aurora

Spring 2014



The cover features a woman in athletic gear running, carrying a purple backpack. The background is a collage of a map of Alaska and a scenic landscape. The map includes labels for 'MT. HAYES', 'GULKANA', 'VALDEZ', 'CORDOVU', and 'MIDDLETON'. The woman is running towards the right, with her right leg forward and arms in a running motion. The overall theme is outdoor activity and exploration.

## Running Down a Dream

*A daughter's dedication to her father*

For alumni and friends of the University of Alaska Fairbanks



## EDITOR'S NOTE

Birthdays. Children love them, but as we get older some of us wish to deny their existence.

For a university, the older it gets the more we wish to celebrate. UAF is coming up on its 100th — yes, 100th — birthday in 2017. There are milestones to acknowledge along the way, such as the 100th anniversary of the laying of the cornerstone in 2015. An institution's centennial is almost always a drawn-out affair intended to generate lots of excitement and nostalgia. UAF's will be no different.

To start things rolling, we are going to include in *Aurora* more history, more alumni interviews, more archival photos, and more trivia and tidbits about our university's journey to 100.

Some of our alumni and friends are coming to the party bearing gifts — Professor Terrence Cole, '76, '78, is updating his book, *The Cornerstone on College Hill*, with the UA Press. Regent Jo Heckman is planning a book about our collective memories of Wood Center. She would love to include yours. Visit [www.uaf.edu/woodcenterbook/](http://www.uaf.edu/woodcenterbook/) to share. There will be more we'll tell you about soon.

We hope you enjoy reading about UAF's history over the next few years as much as we'll enjoy digging through the archives to find those treasures to share with you.

Celebrate UAF's centennial with us!

*Kim Davis, managing editor*

*since 1917*

**“Margaret Thomas (now Mrs. O. J. Murie), second year graduate, and first girl to have the honor of an Alaska degree.” When the anonymous writer of this caption described the diploma-bearing Mardy Murie in 1924, the “girl” was just embarking on the adventures and environmental activism for which she would receive national awards and an honorary degree from UAF. The new life sciences facility on the Fairbanks campus was named the Margaret Murie Building in 2013 to commemorate her life and work.**

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# aurora

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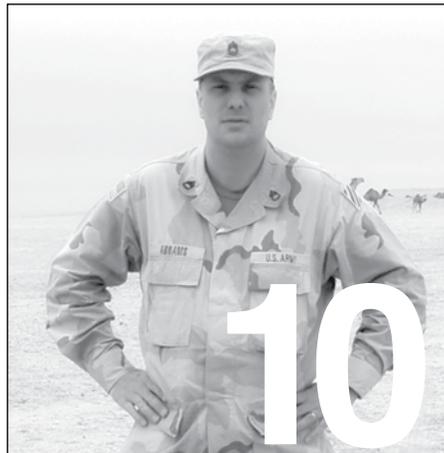
Published twice a year for alumni and friends of the University of Alaska Fairbanks



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Many students take a break from school. Kelly Carr took time off to run halfway across Alaska to raise research funds in honor of her father, diagnosed with terminal cancer.



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Interview with Ed Ruckstuhl, '63. "My first challenge was learning how to walk [on snow] wearing leather shoes. The solution: Throw the leather shoes away."



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## New-found old insect

A strange insect collected by graduate student Jill Stockbridge during her thesis research on Prince of Wales Island is a newly discovered species of snow scorpionfly. Derek Sikes, UA Museum of the North curator of insects, said it belongs to an enigmatic group that might help scientists understand the evolutionary origin of fleas.

Stockbridge got stuck when she tried to identify the tiny, flea-like insects she'd found. She turned to her thesis advisor, Sikes, who was equally baffled. He posted a

The researchers named the species *Caurinus tlagu* for the Tlingit tribes that have lived on the northern half of Prince



Photo by Jill Stockbridge.

of Wales Island for thousands of years. "The word *tlagu* means ancient, which we thought was appropriate since this creature has been around since the Jurassic," Stockbridge said. Fossil evidence indicates the scorpionfly belongs to a group that dates back more than 145 million years.

The 2-millimeter-long animals are members of the insect order Mecoptera, which includes the scorpionflies, hangingflies and snow scorpionflies. Although their

mouthparts look like those of a predator, they feed on a leafy liverwort found in coastal forests rather than sucking blood like fleas. However, they hop like fleas, are the size and color of fleas, and even have the same shape when viewed from the side.



Photo by Jean Slowick.

**Jill Stockbridge and Derek Sikes, on Prince of Wales Island.**

digital photo on Facebook to see if any of his entomologist friends could offer an opinion. Most of the suggestions were wrong, but one scientist, Michael Ivie, recognized that the specimen belonged to the genus *Caurinus*, of which only one species was previously known.

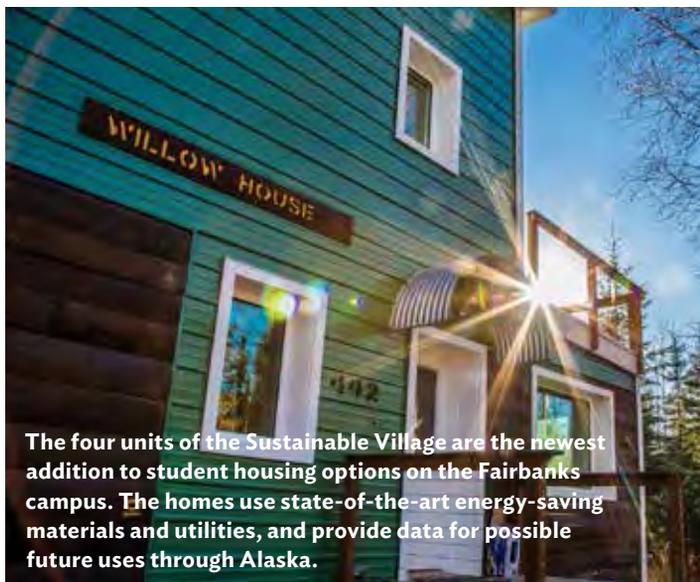


Follow "Arctic Odyssey: Voyages of the R/V *Sikuliaq*,"

## Dinos on the Yukon



**Hind footprint of an ornithomimid. The exact species of this type of herbivorous dinosaur has not yet been determined.**



**The four units of the Sustainable Village are the newest addition to student housing options on the Fairbanks campus. The homes use state-of-the-art energy-saving materials and utilities, and provide data for possible future uses through Alaska.**



If you're ever on the Yukon, keep an eye out for dinosaurs, or at least what they left behind: footprints. A lot of them.

Researchers from the UA Museum of the North found a major new site for dinosaur fossils in Alaska along the Yukon River last summer. About 2,000 pounds of dinosaur footprints were added to the museum's collection, according to earth sciences curator Pat Druckenmiller.

"There aren't many places left in the world where paleontologists can just go out and find thousands of dinosaur footprints," Druckenmiller said. "This is the

kind of discovery you would have expected in the Lower 48 a hundred years ago."

The specimens date to about 90–100 million years ago, the middle of the Cretaceous Period, making them about 35 million years older than those from other well-known sites around Alaska.

The footprints are natural casts, formed when sand filled in the footprint after the dinosaur stepped in mud.

"These are not negative impressions," Druckenmiller said. "Rather they stick out from the rock and sometimes look like blobs with toes."

Those blobs were left by dinosaurs big and small, meat-eaters and plant-eaters.

"We found a great diversity of dinosaur types,"

Druckenmiller said, "evidence of an extinct ecosystem we never knew existed."

The museum is working with villages and Native corporations along the Yukon River to share information about the discovery with local communities and to coordinate future exploration.



**Katherine Anderson, Meg O'Connor and Julie Rousseau wrap aluminum foil around tracks for safe transport to the museum while Druckenmiller makes field notes about the fossils.**

## Extra helpings

Some students are hungry for more than knowledge. They're hungry for food. Social work major Juan Cruz read a national news story about students not getting the proper nutrition because they were paying bills for school or other things. He started asking questions at student-centered offices at UAF. "Everybody had the same reaction," he said. "They all know somebody who needs food."

The Fairbanks Community Food Bank told him the same thing, that many clients there are UAF students.

"I thought, why not open a pantry right here at the university, so they don't have to go that far for food." The pantry, tucked away by the pool tables in Wood Center, is open two days a week. It fills a gap for students who live off campus and aren't on a meal plan, or during breaks in food service, like the winter holiday closure.

The pantry is overseen by the Student Activities Office but is very much the product of student initiative and perseverance. "It's a pantry," Cruz said, "for students, by students."

## Green houses get good grades

The Sustainable Village, UAF's newest student housing complex, lived up to its name in its first year. The four 1,600-square-foot homes used less than half as much energy as an average new house in Fairbanks and substantially less than an average energy-efficient house during the first year of occupancy, according to an analysis by the Cold Climate Housing Research Center. The best-performing house used the equivalent of 366 gallons of heating oil. In contrast, the average same-size house in Fairbanks uses about 920 gallons, while the average new house meeting

energy-efficiency standards uses about 660 gallons a year. Even the biggest energy user at the village used only 463 gallons.

Each unit is built slightly differently so researchers can study which methods work best for cold climates, but all are superinsulated, with features like heat recovery ventilation, triple-pane windows and low-flow showerheads. The houses are also being monitored for a variety of things, including ground temperature (think permafrost) and indoor air quality.

On the web: <http://bit.ly/SusVill>.



# Running Down a Dream

By Maureen Sullivan

**JOURNEYS START IN DIFFERENT PLACES BUT THEY END THE SAME. A GLACIER RECEDES. A RIVER ERODES A MOUNTAIN. A LIFE ENDS. IT IS THE ENDING WE ALL TRAVEL TOWARD, THOUGH WHAT WE CONSIDER A LONG LIFE FOR A HUMAN IS A FLASH COMPARED TO THE MOTION OF A GLACIER OR THE CREATION OF THE BEDROCK ON WHICH WE LIVE OUR LIVES.**

“I’m a realist. I knew I had limited time with my dad, and I knew I had to make it count.”

It was spitting rain at 4:40 a.m. on July 20, 2013, when I turned right off Peger Road, in Fairbanks, onto the Mitchell Expressway, part of the George A. Parks Highway. I parked my truck at the site of Milepost 360, signifying the distance separating Fairbanks from Anchorage.

Kelly Carr, a 24-year-old biology major at UAF, knows the Parks Highway well, but that drizzly Saturday morning, she was minutes away from what would become a three-week journey where she’d come to know the road even better.

Kelly was going to run from Milepost 360 to Milepost 1 in Anchorage.

“I had to do something,” she explained. “I couldn’t just sit there and wait. That’s not me.”

Journeys start in different places, but they end the same. A glacier recedes. A river erodes a mountain. A life ends. It is the ending we all travel toward, though what we consider a long life for a human is a flash compared to the motion of a glacier or the creation of the bedrock on which we live our lives.

Kelly’s bedrock dissolved when her father, Stephen Carr, was diagnosed with intrahepatic cholangiocarcinoma the previous fall. IC is an insidious liver cancer with no cure. The long-distance run would be a tribute to her father and a fundraiser for the American Cancer Society. Already the event had garnered more than 500 Facebook event invites, with friends and strangers alike providing encouragement.

### Constant change

The Parks Highway, built in 1971 and named in 1975 for one of Alaska’s territorial governors, boasts the most diverse topography and is the most traveled. It

parallels the Alaska Railroad and passes by rolling tundra, muskeg bogs, boreal forests, raging rivers, active glaciers and the snow-capped peaks of the nation’s tallest mountains.

After leaving Fairbanks, the highway climbs into the Tanana Hills, which span from the Minto Flats west of Fairbanks to the Alaska-Canada boundary line. By the time the road crosses the Tanana River bridge at Nenana, the hills have given way to windy lowlands dotted with small lakes formed in glacial till mantled with silt.

Pleistocene sediments make up the vegetated sand dunes along this stretch of road that follows the Nenana River to Cantwell. Large-scale coal mining efforts, with the ensuing scarring of the hills, are notable above Healy. Past Healy, the landscape changes again, giving way to jaw-dropping views, the churning river on the right, high rock walls on the left and a stunning eyeful of the range ahead. Depending on the time of year, small waterfalls tumble down onto the road, relocating bits of rock, slower than the miners do to the north, but the cycle of movement continues all the same. Nothing stays put forever.

Though a lifelong athlete, Kelly had no experience as an endurance runner. She had never run a marathon before; her longest run before beginning training for this was 15 miles.

Kelly had decided to do the fundraising run en route to Seattle, where the entire family spent Thanksgiving while Stephen had a section of his liver removed. After the surgery, the doctors reported that the cancer had

metastasized. Kelly immediately decided to drop her classes at UAF to spend what time was left with her father. Then she ran up and down the hotel’s stairwell for an hour.

### Hidden faults

The theory of plate tectonics postulates that mountains rise where crustal plates meet. One plate dives under the other, and the plate on top thrusts upward, forming a mountain. When plates pass each other laterally — side by side — the result is a major fault.

The Parks crosses a series of thrusts and folds and faults — two of the Alaska Range’s major fault lines are the Hines Creek and Denali faults. Tectonic events from long ago determined the rise of the Alaska Range, including Mount McKinley, or Denali, the iconic landmark of the Athabaskan landscape and Alaska’s most popular tourist attraction.

Describing the geology along the Parks, geology professor Rainer Newberry wrote in an email that of Alaska’s many faults, “some of them are clearly active. Many (the majority) have moved in the past and might move again.” The word “might” underscores the unpredictability many of us never really get used to. Movement of these faults change the shape of our landscape over time, but scientific models can’t make exact predictions. When and how shifts happen remain uncertain.

Intrahepatic cholangiocarcinoma is a rare type of liver cancer in the U.S., but liver flukes, very common in Asia, can infect the bile duct and cause the cancer to form. Mary Jo Carr said that after her



husband died, she found letters from him in Vietnam to his mother, detailing an illness due to a liver fluke. The cancer-causing fluke could have been dormant in him since he was a young man. Gallstones also increase the risk of cholangiocarcinoma, and he had had more than 300 hundred stones out years before.

Whatever the cause, no one had seen this coming.

“Initially,” Kelly said, “the whole family was in denial about the diagnosis,” which gave her father mere months to live. “I’m a realist. I knew I had limited time with my dad, and I knew I had to make it count. I had to do something. We drove that road a million times, so it was significant for me, plus my dad loved to watch me run.”

“It gave me the best little guardian angel a girl could ask for on such an adventure — my dad.”

Kelly and her sister grew up in Fairbanks. Their parents moved from California to Fairbanks in 1974, not long after the highway was completed and before it even had a name. Stephen was a physician assistant, Mary Jo a legal secretary. Like so many Alaskans, the young couple hadn’t meant to stay, but they built a life in Fairbanks and raised their family there.

Throughout her youth, Kelly had played soccer for a competitive traveling

team, and her dad drove her to Anchorage for all her games.

The original plan for the run had been for Stephen and Mary Jo to follow Kelly in an RV, and for Kelly's older sister, Molly Wood, to accompany Kelly on bike.

"It didn't work that way. We didn't have much time."

Surrounded by his family, Stephen passed away in early April.

Kelly posted on her Facebook page: *"Sadly, my father lost his battle with cancer on April 5, 2013. This however didn't sway me or make me want to cancel the event. In fact, it drove the run deeper into my heart. It gave me the best little guardian angel a girl could ask for on such an adventure — my dad."*

## Eons later, the landscape plays both silent spectator and unwitting participant in our human endeavors.

### The sum of their parts

The road runs parallel to the Tanana River for a ways. Late Precambrian to early Paleozoic schist and quartzite make up the bedrock of this area, but "dividing the Parks into logical subdivisions," Newberry wrote, "is an interesting problem." There is no easy way to separate the highway into logical sections in terms of what lies under the surface. Since glaciers have covered half of Alaska at one point or another and the entire state has a rich tectonic record, the Parks runs through a patchwork quilt of materials, including Precambrian schists, Paleozoic sandstone and Mesozoic basalt. This quilt gives rise to astonishing beauty. On geological maps, one can finger the highway as it passes through different terranes,

fragments of Earth's crust that have traveled across vast distances, now bound together by faults.

Kelly has the kind of energy that makes people want to put on their running shoes and join her. Many did, more than a dozen, at different points along the three-week run.

It was not only Kelly's dogged determination that drew people to support the event; it was her unwavering enthusiasm. While people frequently thanked her on Facebook for doing it in honor of everyone affected by cancer, no one posted more words of encouragement and gratitude than the runner herself. She was constantly thanking everyone for the support, their donations, their

goodwill. Her own fundraising efforts were minimal — a few fliers and the Facebook page that an out-of-state friend created. The rest came with little effort. A running store donated shoes, the local Catholic high school held a fundraiser, and a combination of social media and word of mouth solicited the rest.

### Force and resistance

Gulches are V-shaped ravines; fast-moving water moves the sediment and carves into bedrock. The river can only forge when the ground is weak enough to receive it. An interplay between a river's force and the land's resistance determines the time it will take to turn a trickle into a formidable river. At Milepost 174, the bridge crosses a daunting 254 feet over a deep gorge known as Hurricane Gulch. The whitewaters of Hurricane Creek churn beneath before emptying into the Chulitna River.

At Milepost 104, the highway crosses the Susitna, or "Sand River" in Dena'ina. This river is one of the major drainage systems in the Denali region. Beginning at the Susitna Glacier in the Alaska Range, the muddy, silt-laden river continuously carries sediment to the Cook Inlet for more than 300 miles.

The Parks continues through a green tunnel of birch forest until reaching Willow at Milepost 70, the edge of a huge glacial outwash plain formed of sand and gravel deposited by a meltwater glacial stream. Rivers from glaciers in the Alaska Range flow into the Susitna from the west, carrying tons of sediment each day. During the last Ice Age, glacial drift was deposited from a retreating ice



lobe. Sediment-rich kettle ponds dot the area, formed by blocks of ice melting out from within the glacial deposits. What looks so permanent and tranquil at first glance is actually the result of thousands of years of movement.

## “All I keep on my mind is my dad and his milepost, number 1.”

Eons later, the landscape plays both silent spectator and unwitting participant in our human endeavors. Kelly averaged 18 miles a day for the remainder of the 21 days on the road. On a particularly hot day she became hyponatremic after 15 miles, drinking too much water while not taking in enough salts. Medics were called, took care of her and told her to give her a body a rest.

Kelly was driven to run not just to raise funds; she had also offered to run milepost dedications along the route. People requested mileposts for loved ones lost to or living with cancer, and she ran those miles with that person's name tagged to her shirt, sometimes a whole picture. “I don't want to let anyone down,” she said.

### Chance in time

The highway through Wasilla is flanked with box stores, but to the west of the busy town, a swarm of drumlins stands. Drumlins, long mounds formed by glacial deposits, looking like a bit like whale heads gently breaching the water, are ancient, postglacial landscape reminders

of Alaska's geological history aside new suburbia.

The last stretch of the road into Anchorage follows the Knik Arm. On March 27, 1964, an earthquake in Prince William Sound registering a 9.2 magnitude on the Richter scale caused massive landslides. The earthquake stole more than 100 Alaskans' lives and devastated much of Southcentral Alaska.

On the eve of Aug. 8, with just 20 miles left to run, Kelly posted on her Facebook page:

*“Ended at milepost 20. Today was definitely one of the hardest days thus far. The wind was a battle in itself. But we're almost there... Struggling pretty hard at this point, never felt this much pain and exhaustion. But it's definitely all worth it. Our family has grown so much from this. It's affected us permanently in such a positive way. And when I take a step back and see how many people's lives I've affected, it absolutely blows me away. All I keep on my mind is my dad and his milepost, number 1. One of the only things keeping me going at this point, since this is wayyy beyond something physical. It's pretty much all mental now. Not to mention an extremely emotional healing process. Wish us luck on our last day.”*

In a sense, it is luck and chance that get all of us from our respective Point As to Point Bs. It is chance that a rock is moved hundreds of miles by a glacier and then carried hundreds more down a river. Chance that one tectonic plate gets the upper hand and becomes a mountain. Chance that one cell duplicates and keeps on duplicating erroneously, until it forms a cancerous mass.

Kelly started a fundraising page on the American Cancer Society's website, <http://bit.ly/CarrDream>, initially hoping



Photo courtesy of Kelly Carr.

### An emotional end to the run: Kelly with her mother and sister in Anchorage, 360 miles from home.

to raise \$10,000. When this magazine went to print, the amount was more than \$18,500. A popular donation amount is \$360, one dollar for every mile of one family's journey through a constantly changing world.

*Kelly ran down her dream. She's back at UAF and plans to graduate with a degree in biology this spring. Her sister, Molly, is working on her education degree, also at UAF. ■*

Maureen Sullivan, '98, is a writer, health coach and adjunct faculty at UAF/CTC teaching literature, writing and art online. She splits her time between Barrow and Homer, beach combing Alaska's coasts, making art with her finds and training for her next marathon, though she has no plans to run any farther than that.

# Iraq and back again

*A Fobbit's tale*

By Frank Soos



David Abrams (right, in sunglasses) and fellow soldiers ready themselves to leave Baghdad and return to the U.S., in December 2005.

**IN 1992, UAF'S GRADUATE WRITING PROGRAM WAS FULL OF AMBITIOUS AND GIFTED WRITERS. AMONG THEM WAS A GUY WHO RUSHED INTO CLASS EVERY WEEK STILL IN HIS WORK CLOTHES — FATIGUES. THAT WOULD BE SERGEANT ABRAMS, A JOURNALIST ATTACHED TO THE 6TH INFANTRY DIVISION (LIGHT) AT FORT WAINWRIGHT.**

Sgt. Abrams — David — was not a soldier who suddenly took a notion to become a writer. Instead he was a writer who'd chosen the Army as his day job while he pursued a career in literary fiction. He'd already finished an undergraduate degree in English at the University of Oregon, and had written a large chunk of a first novel, a novel he says will remain forever locked in a desk drawer. A person digging around on the Internet can find a picture of a young, newly married David, no GI haircut, a full mop of hair, presenting a check, a payment for an early publication, to the camera. That photograph captures a beginning moment in a life of accomplishments and setbacks.

David began college life in Wyoming, thinking he would be a theater major, an actor. He found parts in locally produced, broadly comic shows where he was often cast in the role of an oafish character. But while he and a friend were making plans to strike out for Denver or even New York to pursue their ambitions on a larger stage, he met a young woman named Jean. He invited her to a play he was in, but she was not especially impressed, so David instead showed her some short stories he'd been working on. "I think you're a better writer than an actor," she told him. He made an abrupt change in direction.

By 1987, David had earned his BA, was married to Jean and was the father of two young boys. And he was working as a cook. The young couple took a chance, pulled up stakes in Oregon and moved to Montana, with no prospects waiting for them there. David got on as a beat reporter for a small paper, *The Madisonian*. He was paid 50 cents per column inch for his words — typical journalists' pay for the time — so David learned how to write a lot of words. From there he moved to *The Livingston Enterprise*, where he climbed up the ladder a few rungs and had the chance to do some feature stories. Sent to cover a photo exhibit, he lucked into an interview with actor Jeff Bridges.

David was writing, but his work didn't pay the bills. Soda pop was a luxury he and Jean couldn't afford.

So he enlisted. Oct. 11, 1988, was his first day of a 20-year career writing press releases and articles for the Army. His third child, a daughter, was born in December of that year. He and his family set out on the typical Army life, moving around the country, including to Fairbanks.

During that time, David caught moments when he could write, at nights or on weekends. That time might have been family time. "I don't really regret writing," David says, "but I regret not having a better balance.

"You're always going to have to take something away from something. We all make choices. It's tough."

On the day the twin towers fell, David, like most of his fellow soldiers, saw a deployment of some sort as inevitable. So 17 years after his enlistment, three years after 9/11, David found himself on a military transport bound for Germany, the first stop on the way to a deployment in Iraq. As a writer going into a war zone, he set in to reading Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*, but as far as his own work was concerned,

he planned to use what free time he had to work on a revision of *Dubble*, his graduate thesis novel, and get it in shape for publication.

When he made the last leg of his trip wearing full body armor and clutching his M16, when he at last touched down in Iraq and the rear cargo ramp opened onto a hot desert landscape, David Abrams adjusted his thinking: This strange new world would be the subject that held his

***"You're always going to have to take something away from something. We all make choices. It's tough."***

attention and would be the focus of his writing and his work for the next six years.

The Forward Operating Base (the FOB) was not what David had expected. If he imagined eating MREs, sleeping in a tent, suffering sand and heat, what he found was a large metal building filled with a cubical jungle. The Fobbits worked in air-conditioned comfort while they created PowerPoint demonstrations, ground fresh coffee beans at their desks, joked around like any group of office workers.

This environment occasioned David's attitude of "surprised irony." He was not in the war he had expected, and as a result the novel he wrote is not the war novel people might expect.

*Fobbit* was published to general acclaim in 2012. Writing in *The New York Times Book Review*, Christian Bauman found *Fobbit* to be "a very funny book, as funny, disturbing, heartbreaking and ridiculous as war itself."

Yes, funny. A number of books, fiction and nonfiction, have come out of the Iraq war, most all of them brutal and harrowing. Few have as much as a moment of accidental humor. With the war and its attendant atrocities and political failures still fresh in people's minds, nothing could be riskier than treating the war humorously — or more specifically,

satirically. Satire, David says, is "poking holes in what we expect something to be ... letting the air out of the tires."

The satire begins with the title. A Fobbit is a member of the Army, but one stationed safely within the perimeter of a Forward Operating Base. In his year of duty in Iraq, David ventured outside the wire only once, for a ceremony. Fobbits,



**David spoke at a writer's craft talk and gave a public reading at UAF in November 2013.**

like all soldiers, carry guns, but their M16s are rather like the umbrellas civilians might carry when there is a slight chance of rain. They are not fully immune from danger — the occasional mortar round does fall inside the FOB. (One such round proves to be a pivotal event in the course of the novel.) Fobbits live in a world of shillyshallying political maneuvering. Fobbits have a health club, hot showers, fast food and movies. Like hobbits, perhaps their distant kin, the Fobbits are "reluctant to go beyond their shire." [See excerpt on page 12.]

Lieutenant Colonel Eustace Harkleroad is the very model of Fobbitry. His bulging excess weight tests the fabric of his uniform. He's given to nosebleeds at times of stress, and he writes long, self-aggrandizing emails home to his mother. Once

## Fobbit will be among those books that, as decades go by, people will turn to in order to place the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in a historical context.

### Excerpt from *Fobbit*:

They were Fobbits because, at the core, they were nothing but marshmallow. Crack open their chests and in the space where their hearts should be beating with a warrior's courage and selfless regard, you'd find a pale, gooey center. They cowered like rabbits in their cubicles, busied themselves with PowerPoint briefings to avoid the hazard of Baghdad's bombs, and steadfastly clung white-knuckled to their desks at Forward Operating Base Triumph. If the FOB was a mother's skirt, then these soldiers were pressed hard against the pleats, too scared to venture beyond her grasp.

Like the shy, hairy-footed hobbits of Tolkien's world, they were reluctant to go beyond their shire, bristling with rolls of concertina wire at the borders of the FOB. After all, there were goblins in turbans out there! Or so they convinced themselves.

Supply clerks, motor pool mechanics, cooks, mail sorters, lawyers, trombone players, logisticians: Fobbits, one and all. They didn't give a shit about appearances. They were all about making it out of Iraq in one piece.

Of all the Fobbits in the U.S. military task force headquarters at the western edge of Baghdad, Staff Sergeant Chance Gooding Jr. was the Fobbitiest. With his neat-pressed uniform, his lavender-vanilla body wash, and the dust collected around the barrel of his M16 rifle, he was the poster child for the stay-back-stay-safe soldier. The smell of something sweet radiated off his skin—as if he bathed in gingerbread.

Gooding worked in the public affairs office of the Seventh Armored Division, headquartered in one of Saddam Hussein's marbled palaces. His PAO days were filled with sifting through reports of Significant Activities and then writing

press releases about what he had found. His job was to turn the bomb attacks, the sniper kills, the sucking chest wounds, and the dismemberments into something palatable—ideally, something patriotic—that the American public could stomach as they browsed the morning newspaper with their toast and eggs. No one wanted to read: "A soldier was vaporized when his patrol hit an Improvised Explosive Device, his flesh thrown into a nearby tree where it draped like Spanish moss." But the generals and colonels of the Seventh Armored Division all agreed that

the folks back home would appreciate hearing: "A soldier paid the ultimate sacrifice while carrying out his duties in Operation Iraqi Freedom." Gooding's weapons were words, his sentences were missiles.

As a Fobbit, Chance Gooding Jr. saw the war through a telescope, the bloody snarl of combat remained at a safe, sanitized distance from his air-conditioned cubicle. And yet, here he was on a FOB at the edge of Baghdad, geographically central to gunfire. To paraphrase the New Testament, he was *in* the war but he was not of the war.

FOBBIT © 2012 by David Abrams; reprinted with the permission of the publisher, Grove/Atlantic, Inc.

the character of Harkleroad came into David's head, the novel began to take shape. David says Harkleroad's many emails almost wrote themselves. The novel was off and running.

Sgt. Chance Gooding Jr. is among the subordinates who must try to do their jobs under Harkleroad's feckless command. Gooding, though, is a different sort of Fobbit. While others play video games, stream ballgames from the States on their computers or watch pornography, Gooding reads Cervantes and Dickens. He is not so different from his creator. David has admitted, with a bow to Flaubert, "Chance Gooding, c'est moi." Gooding keeps a journal, and David has acknowledged that many of Chance Gooding's musings are close variations on his own.

Gooding maintains a cool, ironic distance on all around him. That distance probably began for David himself when he enlisted. "I joined the Army as this guy who was writing short stories. I joined as this guy who was separate from what he was becoming a part of, and that just intensified when I got over to the war zone."

It is through Gooding's eyes that readers see some of the most absurd elements of the press releases he must write for the public affairs office, press releases bland and evasive that still must be vetted by the chain of command before they can be offered to the public.

While Gooding reflects that dead soldiers "are objects to be loaded onto the back of C-130s somewhere and delivered like pizzas to the United States," he cranks out the same boilerplate release: "A soldier paid the ultimate sacrifice while carrying out his duties in Operation Iraqi Freedom."

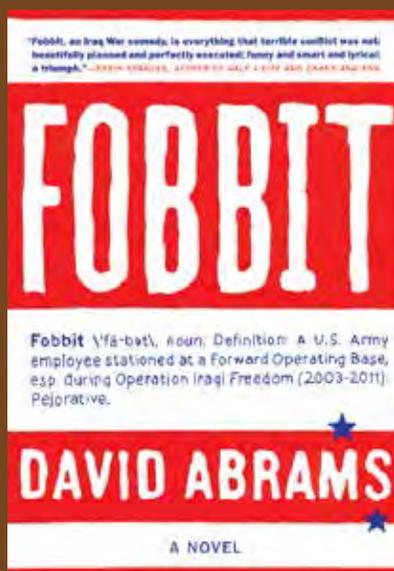




Photo courtesy of David Abrams

**As public affairs officer at Task Force Baghdad headquarters, Abrams was responsible for, among other things, writing press releases, managing a photo library, answering media questions, editing a biweekly internal newspaper and “fixing paper jams in the office printer.”**

When he arrived in Iraq with a stack of empty notebooks to fill, David planned to simply capture the details of what he expected to be a life-changing experience. It was that, to be sure. But at some point, David began to see how the material in his journals could be made into a novel.

His next posting — as it turned out, his last — was at the Pentagon, where he was a “geographic bachelor,” his wife and kids staying in Georgia. Living alone, when he should have had plenty of time to work developing his novel, he found he had let the project lapse. David determined to get up early one morning, 5 o’clock, and spend an hour on the manuscript before doing his physical training and heading for work. He tried it, and he had a productive morning with his manuscript. Energized and reconnected to his project, he got up early the next morning and the next. *Fobbit* was beginning to take shape.

Once he was out of the Army but still working a full-time job, David found he needed to get up earlier still to find working time for the novel. Three-thirty became — and still is — his wake-up time for writing. As he worked along, he began to feel a sense of urgency to get the novel out in the world. His timing was excellent. *Fobbit* entered the literary world alongside other well-regarded Iraq war novels:

Kevin Powers’ *The Yellow Birds*, Ben Fountain’s *Billy Lynn’s Long Halftime Walk*, followed by Lea Carpenter’s *Eleven Days* and Roxana Robinson’s *Sparta*.

When seen in the context of these books offering varying takes on our recent wars, David is one writer in a community of writers. His most immediate

community might be that of his fellow writers of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Another significant audience is the many people in the Army, Navy, Marines and Air Force who served there. David’s satire bites harder on commissioned officers than on enlisted people, but both groups seem to have found *Fobbit* to their liking. Allowing for the hyperbole necessary in satire, even some public affairs staffers told David that he pretty much got it right. His favorite critique, though, came from a soldier in Afghanistan who wrote in an email that he and his buddies were passing *Fobbit* around — while on guard duty — and enjoying it thoroughly.

*Fobbit* will be among those books that, as decades go by, people will turn to in order to place the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in a historical context. After a reading from the novel in Fairbanks last November, David was asked how he wanted it to be read. He replied that his initial intent was to write a book that would be as apolitical as possible. But he had to face facts. “Who am I kidding? I didn’t write an apolitical novel.” His judgment, at least in the short run, is that the war was a mess of politics, bureaucracy and red tape, with those who served doing the best they could.

Beyond the community of fellow soldiers (and perhaps the narrower community of fellow Fobbits), David is an active and activist member of a much larger, continent-size community of writers maintained through his weekly blog, *The Quivering Pen*. Living in Butte, Mont., away from New York — still thought to be the center of the literary universe — David’s solution has been to bring the community to him.

***As he worked along, he began to feel a sense of urgency to get the novel out into the world. His timing was excellent.***

*The Quivering Pen* gives David a chance to explore and celebrate his various reading interests, and has proven to be a vehicle for David to build a network of literary friendships. David is the son of a preacher, and when his father moved the family from the East Coast to Wyoming and a new congregation, he found that the friendships among his classmates were already formed. Besides, he was the preacher’s kid, stuck under a halo whether he wanted it or not. So he accepted his isolation and took to reading. Looking back on those days, David recognizes that he was also learning something important from his father: Each Sunday sermon was

a carefully crafted 20-minute essay.

Through all the hurrah surrounding the publication of *Fobbit* and the accompanying disruptions in his work schedule, David has continued to produce new work. Lately that work has been in the form of short stories. His stories can be found in the Iraq and Afghanistan war anthologies *Home of the Brave: Somewhere in the Sand* and *Fire and Forget: Short Stories from the Long War*, as well as a more broadly conceived volume,

*Visiting Hours*. These stories will lead to his own collection — with luck — soon.

Meanwhile, *Dubble*, that novel project put on hold when David was deployed to Iraq, is back on his desk for another round of revisions. *Dubble* is the story about a star-struck dwarf who sets out to make his mark in Hollywood. He finds work as a stunt double for an obnoxious child actor. Informed by work of the classic Hollywood director Preston Sturgis — a fine satirist himself — *Dubble* is, like *Fobbit*, a serious story wrapped in wildly humorous episodes.

In his graduate student days, David wrote a wonderfully imagined short story, “Providence,” about a freakishly deep fissure in the earth on a Georgia farm, converted to a state park. That story was accepted by *Esquire*, among the most prestigious venues for serious short fiction. That acceptance was a significant mark of distinction for any writer, especially for a guy who had not yet completed his degree.

When he got the call from his agent relaying the happy news, he was at work in his public affairs office. David, not wanting to do personal business on Uncle Sam’s time, hung up and quickly stepped into the hall to call her back on the pay phone. Fifteen years before the publication of *Fobbit*, he thought the appearance in *Esquire* meant his literary star had



Photo courtesy of David Abrams

**Homecoming, with Jean and their daughter, Kylie: “One of the ... happiest days of my life.”**

colleagues who know about his literary pursuits have been supportive.

Through steady hard work, David has made himself a fully enfranchised member of the literary world, in love with the wonder of well-told stories, whether his own or others’. He realizes his short story collection and the novel *Dubble* may or may not get into print or find the same level of acclaim. Undaunted, philosophical

rises; he’d leave the Army when the current term of his enlistment expired and live the life of a writer. It didn’t quite

**“It’s been a 30-year train chugging down the tracks, and it finally pulled into the station.”**

happen then. (Neither did his graduate career: a combination of Army moves and procrastination meant he didn’t get his master’s degree from UAF until 2004.)

That first agent did not see the marketing potential in *Dubble*, and at the time, short story collections were not strong sellers. In David’s words, a story collection looked like “moldy bread to agents; they didn’t want to touch it.”

Now, despite the success of *Fobbit*, David is still working a full-time, 40-hours-a-week job in public affairs for the Bureau of Land Management. It’s a better situation than his Army job, less red tape and without the burden of a chain of command second-guessing his every sentence. He is his own one-man shop. His BLM boss has been flexible and generous in granting David time off to promote his book, and

about the good luck and bad luck that has informed his writing career so far, David says, “It’s been a 30-year train chugging down the tracks, and it finally pulled into the station.”

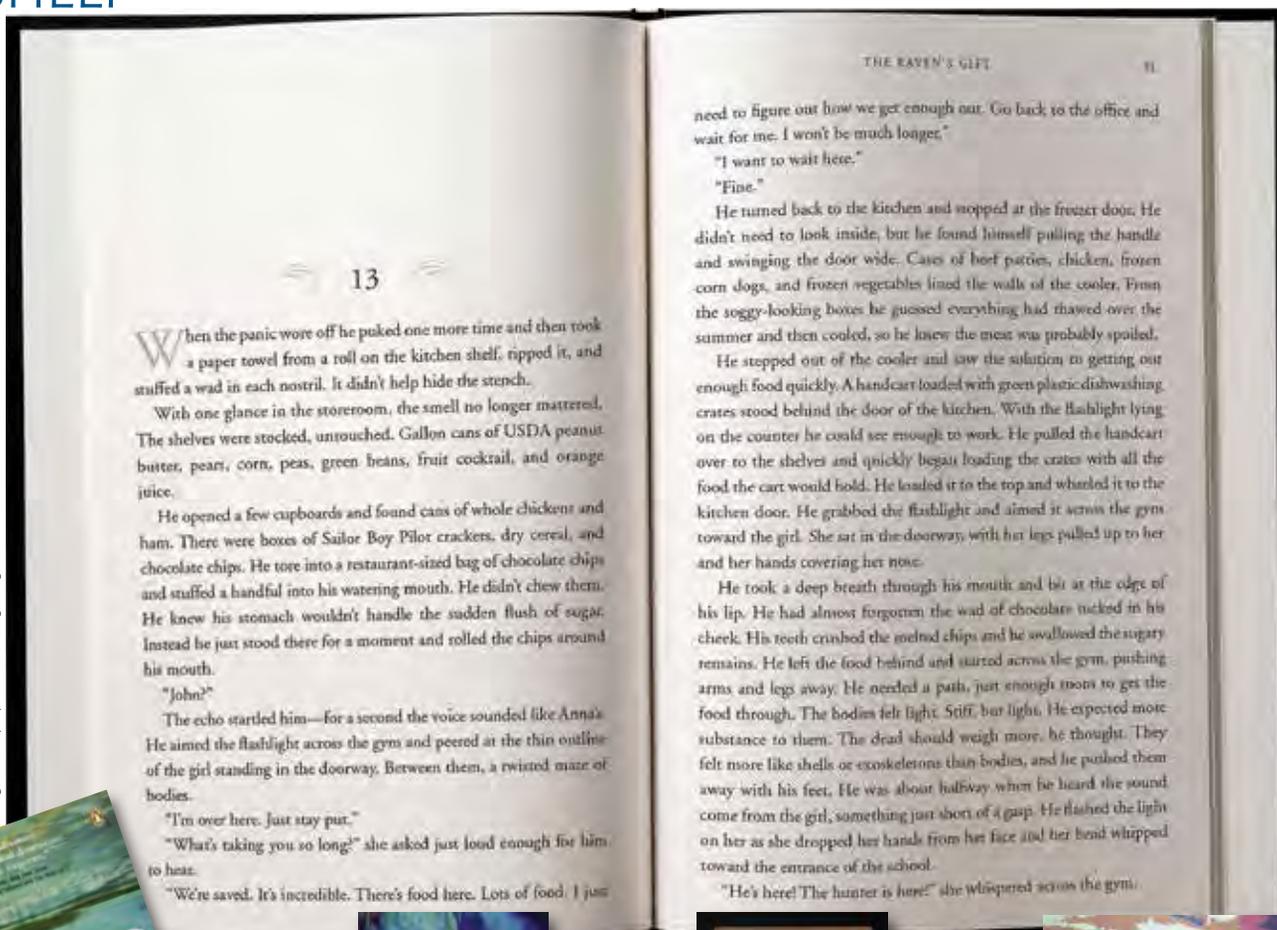
Still, being a writer means being something of a professional fatalist. What you did in your last novel or story or poem is no use in writing the next thing. You’re always starting from scratch, always accepting that rejection is part of the deal. Like every writer, David would like to see the day when his day job would be doing his own work — writing more stories and novels. But he worries the abundance of freedom would not necessarily translate into the discipline needed to spend seven hours at his desk. Given all he has accomplished in the bits of time he managed to grab for himself over the years, that seems an unlikely outcome.

So until his dream job becomes his day job, David Abrams still wakes up at 3:30 every morning in the cold dark, sitting at his desk, crafting another story to tell. 🐉

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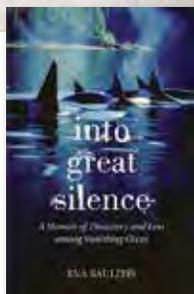
Professor Emeritus Frank Soos taught English and creative writing at UAF for 18 years. He takes considerable pleasure in witnessing the success of his students in the literary world.

Images courtesy of publishers or Google images.



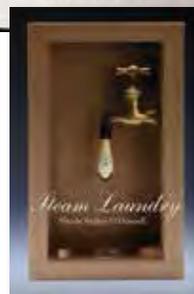
**1. The Raven's Gift**  
Don Rearden, '97  
2013, Penguin Group  
[www.donrearden.com](http://www.donrearden.com)

John Morgan and his wife can barely contain their excitement upon arriving as the new teachers in a Yup'ik Eskimo village on the windswept Alaska tundra. But their move proves disastrous when a deadly epidemic strikes and the isolated community descends into total chaos. When outside aid fails to arrive, John's only hope lies in escaping the snow-covered tundra and the hunger of the other survivors — he must make the 1,000-mile trek across the Alaska wilderness for help.



**2. Into Great Silence: A Memoir of Discovery and Loss among Vanishing Orcas**  
Eva Saulitis, '93, '99  
2013, Beacon Press

Ever since Eva Saulitis began her whale research in Alaska in the 1980s, she has been drawn deeply into the lives of a single extended family of endangered orcas struggling to survive in Prince William Sound. Over the course of a decades-long career spent observing and studying these whales, and eventually coming to know them as individuals, she has, sadly, witnessed the devastation wrought by the Exxon Valdez oil spill of 1989 — after which not a single calf has been born to the group.



**3. Steam Laundry**  
Nicole Stellon O'Donnell, '97  
2012, Boreal Books/Red Hen Press  
[www.nicolestellon.com](http://www.nicolestellon.com)

*Steam Laundry* is a novel in poems based on the true story of Sarah Ellen Gibson, a miner's wife during the Klondike and Alaska gold rushes. Her journey began as she followed her husband to Dawson City, Yukon Territory, in 1898. She stayed there three years as the town's boom and her marriage burned out. In 1903, she left her husband and sons to start over in Fairbanks, Alaska, with another man. Based on archival research and incorporating historical documents and photographs, the poems approach the past through the ghosts of correspondence.



**4. River of Light: A Conversation with Kabir**  
John Morgan and Kesler Woodward, professors emeriti  
2014, University of Alaska Press

Surrender to a wild river and unexpected things can happen. Time on the water can produce moments of pristine clarity or hatch wild thoughts, foster a deep connection with the real world or summon the spiritual. *River of Light* is centered in one man's meditations while traveling on a river. John Morgan\* spent a week traveling the Copper River in Southcentral Alaska, and the resulting encounters form the heart of this book-length poem. Artwork by distinguished Alaska artist Kesler Woodward is a sublime companion to the text.

\*No relation to the character in Don Rearden's work of fiction, far left.

# FULL FRAME

Sculptor Joan Bugbee Jackson perfectly captured the energy and purposefulness of the university's first president. Charles E. Bunnell began as the first leader at the Alaska Agricultural College and School of Mines in 1921, but by the time he retired 18 years later, his school of six students had become a much larger institution with a new name: the University of Alaska.

Bunnell was widely admired by students, many of whom regarded him as having played a pivotal role in their lives. He could also be dictatorial and a less-than-congenial colleague. Among other professional tiffs, Bunnell engaged in a long-running feud with James Wickersham, who had been instrumental in establishing the college. Everyone, however, respected his dedication to the university.



CHARLES E. BUNNELL  
FIRST PRESIDENT  
ALASKA AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE  
AND SCHOOL OF MINES  
UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA  
1921-1939  
"AN ALUMNUS"

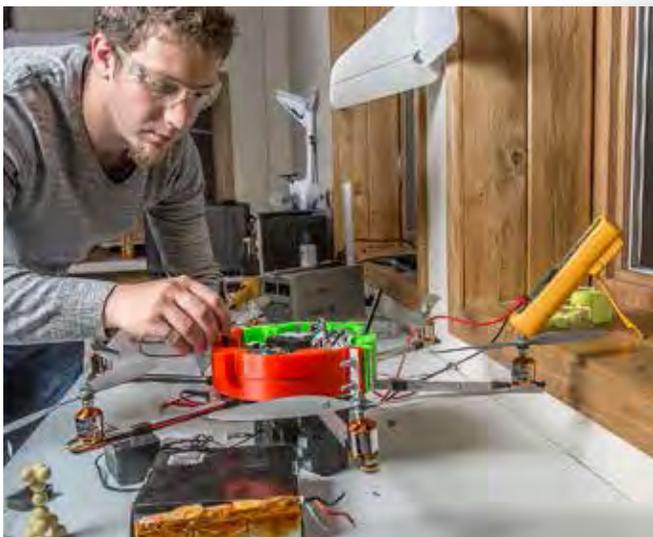


Relive your memories of college. You can order a reprint of this photo and many others at [www.photos.uaf.edu](http://www.photos.uaf.edu).

# IN IN PLANE



HOW UNMANNED AIRCRAFT ARE TRANSFORMING SCIENCE



# SIGHT

By Amanda Bohman

**B**its of Styrofoam, plastic bottles, driftwood and fishing nets litter the Pacific Ocean by the ton. “We still don’t know how much is floating out there,” said Bill Pichel, a scientist with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. “There has been a lot of debris coming up on Alaska coastlines.”

UAF is helping develop a way of identifying marine debris using small robotic aircraft outfitted with cameras. Some are launched by hand and guided using a tablet computer.

The Alaska Center for Unmanned Aircraft Systems Integration, an arm of the Geophysical Institute, uses remote-controlled aircraft to advance science in various ways, including studying volcanoes, surveying glaciers, mapping archaeological sites, measuring sea ice, monitoring wildfires and counting Steller sea lions. The program’s mission is broad — to explore ways unmanned aircraft can be used for science or the public good — and is carried out all over the world.

Pichel became interested in unmanned aircraft after meeting Greg Walker, who founded UAF’s program and is now its chief technology officer, at a conference in Anchorage in the early 2000s. They agreed to collaborate. The project grew more urgent after the 2011 tsunami that washed out entire communities along Japan’s eastern coastline. Scientists think most of the millions of tons of rubble probably sank. NOAA tracked the rest of the debris using satellite images until it dispersed in the vast Pacific Ocean.

“The resolution from the satellites isn’t good,” Pichel said. “The resolution isn’t good enough to know if you are looking at a piece of debris or a wave breaking.”

He is working with UAF to determine if and how unmanned aircraft can be launched from marine vessels and flown over the ocean to identify debris.

“Manned aircraft are very expensive,” the scientist said. In contrast, unmanned aircraft can fly low, fly in dangerous conditions, and take high-quality video and photographic images.

“We are experimenting with cameras and techniques in searching,” Pichel said.

That means determining which unmanned aircraft and cameras work best, which search patterns are effective, and at what altitude the aircraft should be flown.

Marine debris damages habitats. Animals can eat it or become tangled up in it and die. The debris also carries invasive species. A large commercial fisheries dock broke loose during the tsunami in Japan and floated across the ocean, washing up on an Oregon beach more than a year later. The highly invasive Asian brown seaweed and the Asian shore crab were found on the dock.

NOAA is considering outfitting all of its marine vessels with unmanned aircraft for various projects, according to Pichel.

“It’s a tool,” Pichel said.

The Idaho Power Co. decided to try unmanned aircraft for monitoring the fall chinook salmon run on the Snake River after a 2010 helicopter crash killed a pilot and two biologists. The utility called on UAF for help.

It was the second helicopter to crash while conducting the salmon-counting work. “That really threw up the red flag to us as to how dangerous it was to do this work,” said Phil Groves, senior fisheries biologist with Idaho Power.

**UAV operator Mike Cook (right) and graduate student Sam Vanderwaal (opposite, bottom) work on components of aircraft they’re building. Vanderwaal’s device is built primarily from plastic parts generated from a 3-D printer housed in the ACUASI lab in Fairbanks.**





# "IT'S A TOOL."

**The Federal Aviation Administration designated UAF as one of six UAV test sites in the country. UAF will manage the Pan-Pacific UAS Test Range Complex, working with partners in Oregon and Hawaii. The Aeryon Scout (above) is one of several UAVs being studied for their potential uses in national airspace.**

Groves contacted the unmanned aircraft testing center. In 2012, the facility used an Aeryon Scout quadcopter — essentially a flying camera — to get images of the oval, bed-sized salmon nests, which are easy to see from the air.

The salmon, protected under the Endangered Species Act, spawn downstream of three hydroelectric dams in Hells Canyon. Idaho Power monitors the salmon run, along with government agencies and a tribal agency.

Flying the canyon is challenging because of wind and unpredictable weather. "I've had some really freaky flights," Groves said.

Flying unmanned aircraft allowed biologists to view live video of the spawning salmon from a safe location.

They later used the recording from the Scout to count the nests. They also counted the nests from a helicopter and compared the results with the unmanned aircraft. Using the video, they counted 1,316 nests. From the helicopter, the

## The Alaska Center for Unmanned Aircraft Systems Integration

The unmanned aircraft testing center at UAF is the largest research facility of its kind in North America, with about 150 small robotic aircraft and a staff who travel the world demonstrating what the aircraft can do.

"We are not using the aircraft for spy purposes," said Greg Walker, chief technology officer of the testing center, known as the Alaska Center for Unmanned Aircraft Systems Integration.

Walker helped UAF launch its unmanned aircraft program in 2001. The first project was a high-altitude, long-endurance test flight to Alaska from the Southwest United States. The former U.S. Army officer has been working with unmanned aircraft since graduate school.

Formerly located at the Poker Flat Research Range, offices are now situated in an industrial area in south Fairbanks. The center has a staff of about 15, with half the workers employed by UAF and half working as contractors.

The testing center flew more than 150 missions in 2012, according to Walker. The center bills clients for its services. All

missions are for research or humanitarian purposes.

One humanitarian mission helped get a much-needed fuel tanker to Nome. A storm caused the town in western Alaska to miss its fall fuel delivery, so a Russian tanker wound up supplying Nome the following January. UAF dispatched an Aeryon Scout unmanned aircraft to collect images of sea ice to assist ships approaching the Port of Nome.

The aircraft can be flown using a mouse, stylus, keyboard or touch screen, or they can be programmed.

The university has special permission from the Federal Aviation Administration to fly unmanned aircraft.

Some of the aircraft owned by UAF were donated by the U.S. Air Force; the rest were bought by the university. Each piece of equipment is valued between \$300 and \$100,000. One model is gas-powered, while the others are electric.

UAF owns nine different models of unmanned aircraft. The largest aircraft in UAF's collection has a 10-foot wingspan and weighs about 40 pounds. The smallest

aircraft is about the size of a smoke detector and weighs 2 ½ pounds.

"The little ones are as useful as the big ones," Walker said. "It depends on what problems you want to solve."

It also depends on the payload, the cameras and sensors attached to the aircraft. The payload is what brings home the data.

"What's important is the data. The data is what drives everything," said Rayjan Wilson, an aerospace engineer for UAF who works with the testing center.

Wilson's job is to determine which kinds of cameras and sensors are needed for a project. Sometimes engineers design and fabricate the payload. Sometimes they purchase the cameras and sensors and modify them to suit the situation.

"We've gotten a lot of success out of using a GoPro camera," Wilson said.

GoPro cameras are small, lightweight and cost only a few hundred dollars. They mount easily to unmanned aircraft and produce high-quality video and still images.

Wilson said lasers on unmanned aircraft are also used to gather information such as

count was 1,375 nests. The difference between the two numbers is insignificant, according to Groves. He suspects the count from the unmanned aircraft is more reliable than the one from the helicopter but said further study is needed.

“We had fantastic success,” Groves said. “It’s been great working with them. It’s amazing what they are doing with these things.”

In Iceland, UAF used unmanned aircraft for a project to survey a Viking settlement. In South Africa, UAF tested unmanned aircraft as a tool for wildlife management. In Chile, the testing center used the aircraft to map a glacier.

In Alaska, the center is looking at ways the oil and gas industry can use unmanned aircraft. The center collaborated with the U.S. Coast Guard to experiment with using unmanned aircraft for oil spill response. Oil companies are looking at using the aircraft to detect pipeline leaks, survey roads and locate polar bear dens, according to Marty

Rogers, director of the unmanned aircraft testing center.

The aircraft can be flown over roads so builders can get images showing the road conditions. Using the photographs, they can decide what materials are needed to make repairs, Rogers said.

Infrared cameras can be attached to unmanned aircraft to locate polar bear dens. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service monitors polar bears on Alaska’s North Slope. Oil companies are required to be aware of dens and avoid disturbing them.

Unmanned aircraft work well in locating wildlife because the aircraft can fly low, and they don’t seem to bother animals. “The aircraft can go out and look for where the bears are denning without actually disturbing the bears,” Rogers said.

The testing center carried out a highly successful Steller sea lion count in the western Aleutian Islands, flying unmanned aircraft low enough to get high-resolution images without spooking

the animals. Scientists are studying the sea lions to learn why their populations appear to be on the decline.

The sea lion count also provides a glimpse of how the testing center might fly unmanned aircraft from marine vessels over the open seas to detect marine debris.

Pichel, the NOAA scientist, said he expects field testing for the marine debris project to take place during the first half of 2014.

“We want to get the technology to the point where it can be operationally used,” he said. 📧

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Freelance writer Amanda Bohman, '07, can be reached at [aknewsgirl@gmail.com](mailto:aknewsgirl@gmail.com).

**Web extra:** Learn more about UAF’s unmanned aerial vehicles and the Alaska Center for Unmanned Aerial Systems Integration at [www.uaf.edu/aurora/](http://www.uaf.edu/aurora/).

pipeline leaks. When air moves through a small sensor attached to the aircraft, lasers inside the sensor dim when hydrocarbons, such as methane, are present. The data are then transmitted to researchers on the ground.

The next step for the testing center is refining how it provides data to its clients. Currently, the center provides the raw data and the client must synthesize the information. Wilson said the center is looking into ways to process the data and package it. “We’re trying to provide an end-to-end solution,” he said.

## UAVS

### Aeryon Scout —

Manufactured in Canada, this tiny helicopter is 8 inches tall and 32 inches in diameter. Powered by a lithium polymer battery, its top speed is 30 mph with a ceiling of 1,500 feet. Made of carbon fiber, this aircraft has a flight duration of 25 minutes.

**Raven A** — This fixed-wing aircraft is built in California and weighs a little more than 4 pounds. With a 4-and-½-foot wingspan and Kevlar wing construction, the aircraft can fly up to 500 feet in altitude and for up to 90 minutes. The operational speed for this battery-powered aircraft is 34 mph.

**ScanEagle** — This fixed-wing aircraft of carbon-fiber construction weighs about 26 pounds and is 4 feet long with a 10-foot wingspan. Its maximum takeoff weight is 44 pounds. The ScanEagle can fly for more than 20 hours. Its maximum speed is 95 mph. The aircraft is built by a subsidiary of the Boeing Co.

**Puma** — The Puma All Environment can be hand-launched quickly. It’s rugged and suitable for land-based and maritime missions. This fixed-wing aircraft is quiet and stealthy at extremely low altitudes. It carries both video and still cameras. The aircraft is powered by lithium ion batteries. It has a range of 15 kilometers and a flight endurance of two hours. The aircraft weighs 13 pounds and has a 9-foot wingspan.

## INSITU ScanEagle

Image courtesy of Insitu Inc.



UAV descriptions adapted from manufacturers’ information.

FOUND

AFFECTS



Story and photos by Todd Paris

Canadian Mike Stevens is one of the most sought-after harmonica players in the world, but the residents of Akiak don't care much about that. They care about the music. During a break at a dance and concert performance with a local band in the village's community center last July, Stevens invited the kids to follow him into the attached laundry room, where he handed out free harmonicas, followed immediately by an impromptu lesson on how to play. For most of the kids, it was their first experience with the instrument, and the smiles that resulted were topped only by the variety of weird and wonderful sounds that ensued.

Stevens and fellow musician Raymond McLain made the trip to the Kuskokwim River community through an outreach effort by Terese Kaptur, director of the Fairbanks Summer Arts Festival. Sally Russell, assistant director at UAF's Kuskokwim Campus in Bethel, jumped at the chance to host the event.

Stevens has devoted a good part of the past decade to fighting substance abuse, primarily huffing, in remote northern villages of his native Canada. (Huffing is the debilitating and sometimes deadly practice of sniffing toxic fumes from small bags to get high.) In 2012, Stevens was awarded the Queen's Diamond Jubilee award for founding ArtsCan, a nonprofit organization that brings together artists and indigenous Canadian youths in creative expression.

Stevens said the harmonica is a perfect avenue for his work with substance abusers. Not only are they small and easily transportable, they connect in a more practical way with kids who are into huffing.

"Harmonicas are the gateway since it's all about breathing," he said. "I've seen kids pick up a harmonica for the very first time and be able to use it instantly to express their feelings and emotions in a way they've never experienced before. It can make them feel better by being able to say something on the instrument that is genuinely theirs and instantly valid."

After visiting Akiak, Stevens and McLain stayed an extra day in Bethel, where they again performed



I've seen kids pick up a harmonica for the very first time and be able to use it instantly to express their feelings and emotions in a way they've never experienced before. It can make them feel better by being able to say something on the instrument that is genuinely theirs and instantly valid.





before an appreciative local audience, but not before visiting with residents of the state's only huffing treatment center. Stevens again passed out free harmonicas to the dozen or so residents, all young men between the ages of 13 and 18. He shared a quick lesson, but more importantly, he listened to their stories with compassion and without judgment.

Stevens and McLain returned to Bethel and Akiak in March, which Mike Williams, Akiak's village chief, was glad to see. "It was an event that had lasting influence about positive self-esteem," he said. If funding allows, they hope to return for a third visit during their arts festival stint in July. Stevens believes in maintaining a relationship with people he meets during his travels, and that follow-up is crucial to providing a positive influence on young people.

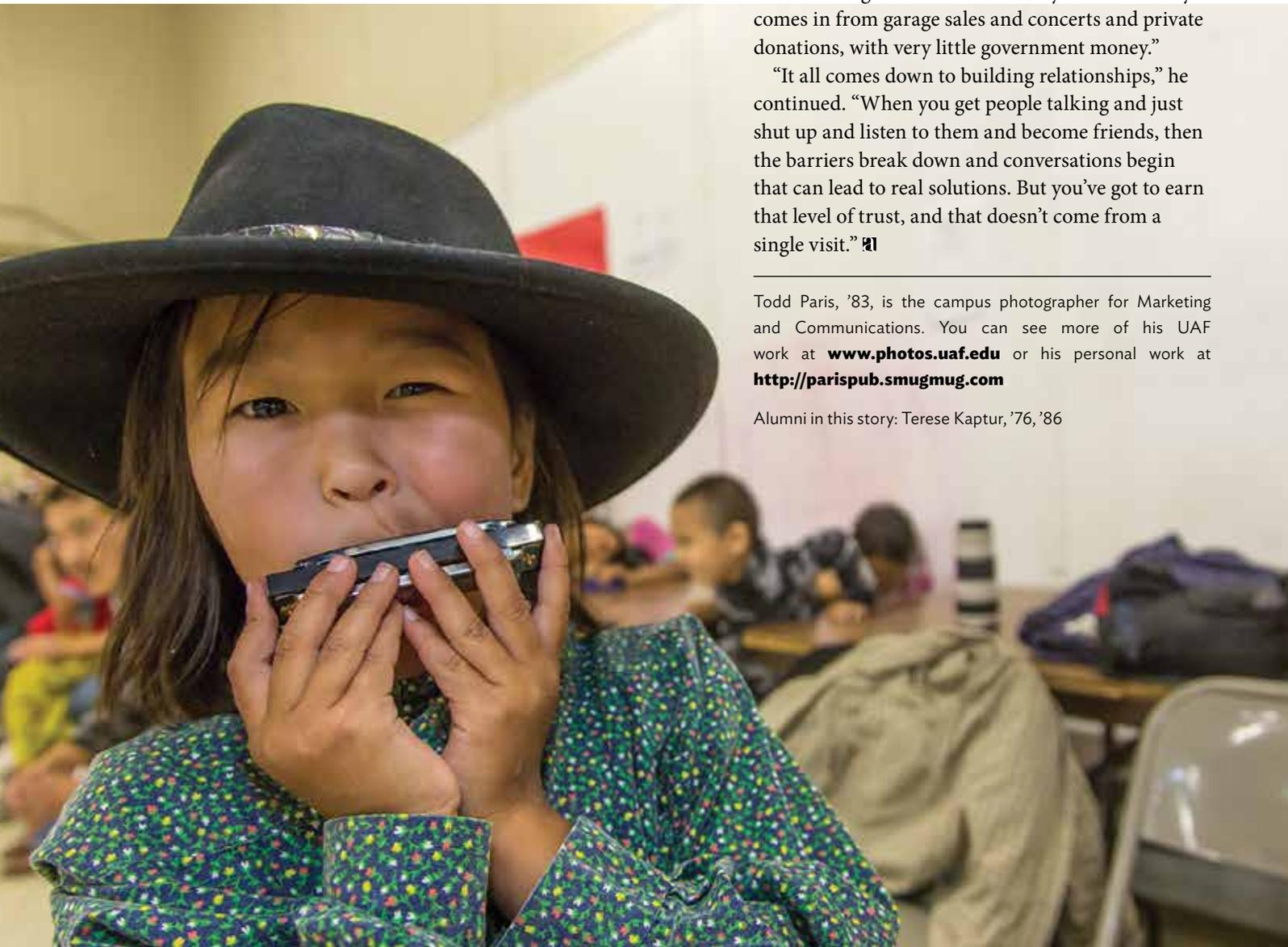
"It's been close to 14 years since I first saw kids huffing in Sheshatshiu [an Innu community in northern Labrador]," Stevens said. "Since then I've been able to get back there twice a year. The money comes in from garage sales and concerts and private donations, with very little government money."

"It all comes down to building relationships," he continued. "When you get people talking and just shut up and listen to them and become friends, then the barriers break down and conversations begin that can lead to real solutions. But you've got to earn that level of trust, and that doesn't come from a single visit." ❏

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Todd Paris, '83, is the campus photographer for Marketing and Communications. You can see more of his UAF work at [www.photos.uaf.edu](http://www.photos.uaf.edu) or his personal work at <http://parispub.smugmug.com>

Alumni in this story: Terese Kaptur, '76, '86



“Some of the kids are still playing along with some adults,” Chief Williams said. “They have been asking about when the next visit would be because they really enjoyed the jam session.”



 When you get people talking and just shut up and listen to them and become friends, then the barriers break down and conversations begin that can lead to real solutions. 

**Web extra:** Read more about Mike Stevens and his youth outreach program at [www.mikestevensmusic.com/artscan/](http://www.mikestevensmusic.com/artscan/). Warning: The accompanying video includes scenes of drug use by children.

THEN  
AGAIN

# ED RUCKSTUHL



*Ed Ruckstuhl returned to Fairbanks for his 50th class reunion in September 2013. While on campus, he gave an oral history interview with archivist Leslie McCartney, curator of oral history with the Alaska and Polar Regions Collections and Archives in the Rasmuson Library. An excerpt follows. The complete interview is available for checkout. Visit <http://library.uaf.edu>.*



Photo from 1963 Dennis Yearbook.

*After graduation, Ed worked all over the world doing what he learned to do at UAF: building a runway in Barrow for the Alaska Division of Aviation; constructing offshore platforms and pipelines in the Gulf of Mexico for Conoco; dredging canals in Indonesia and a base for operations in Madagascar; and building facilities in other places, including Louisiana, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Thailand, Norway, the North Sea and the Republic of Georgia. Ed retired in 2001. He credits his time at UAF for setting the stage for his success. College, he says, is meant to prepare you not just for a job but for life.*

# HIL, '63



Barrow expedition image courtesy of Ed Ruckstuhl.

**Leslie:** How did a Southern boy from Louisiana end up at UAF?

**Ed:** I was attending school in the South when I had a car accident, so I took a semester off. In the meantime my father had gone to Alaska to work at the ballistic missile site in Clear, in charge of the power plant. On one of his visits home, I returned with him and my mother. We drove from Louisiana to Fairbanks in December of '59 and I started at the university in January. It was quite an experience, as I'd never really seen snow before. My first challenge was learning how to walk wearing leather shoes. The solution: Throw the leather shoes away.

It was a totally different culture here. I was raised in a segregated society [in Louisiana]. Coming to Alaska, segregation did not exist. Things I had been raised with, I found wasn't really society, it wasn't how we should act as human beings. That really changed my perspective and I think helped make me a successful person. Everyone on campus was so open. We had students from every state and five or six foreign countries. We had less than 500 students total but to have that vast difference in people and cultures was a great experience. I'm really so glad I came here for that.

Our classes were small and we knew our professors on a first-name basis. They had us over for dinner. It was almost like we were their children. We had George Knight, Professor Mendenhall, Hal Peyton, Professor Burdick, a really great group of men. In those days salaries were very high so the university probably had their pick of who would come here to teach.

My largest class was an English class in the Bunnell Building auditorium, maybe 40 people.

**Leslie:** Did you live on campus?

**Ed:** Yes, I spent time in Nerland, MacIntosh and Hess. The Hess I'm talking about no longer exists.

**Leslie:** What buildings were here when you were here?

**Ed:** Back in those days you had men's dorms and ladies' dorms. The ladies were all in Wickersham. The original Hess Hall was right next to Wickersham. Eielson was here, and the Old Main building, which was the university building when I first came but was only here for the first year and a half. Across the street to the north, another original structure housed the rifle team and ROTC and perhaps some of the wildlife [department]. The basement and first level of the engineering building were built while I was here, and the Bunnell Building was here. Down campus you had MacIntosh, Nerland and Stevens, which was the newest dorm. We were the first graduating class to use the new gym [the Patty Building] for the ceremony; the program even said "commencement services will be held in the new gymnasium." I don't think it had been named yet. The Tilly cafeteria

was under construction. The old power plant was across the street from where the bookstore is now, and the new power plant, now 50 years old, was under construction.

**Leslie:** What about Signers' Hall?

**Ed:** That was the gym. That was where Starvation Gulch used to be held. That's where tradition came in and the Tradition Stone. Just prior to my coming here, Starvation Gulch was the biggest function on campus for the students. It was the freshmen's responsibility to provide the alcohol, or home brew, to serve at Starvation Gulch. One year they apparently did such a good job that people dressed up in their mining outfits, [complete with] firearms and bullets, and the result was the loss of some light bulbs, windows and other possible structural damage to the roof. It was decided after that function that alcohol should not be allowed on campus.

**Leslie:** What other types of social activities were there?

**Ed:** Engineer's Day was held on St. Patrick's Day. The miners would detonate a bit of dynamite to wake everyone up at five in the morning. One year it was cold, 30 below, and the detonations in the cold air broke several windowpanes on campus. There was usually some sort of rivalry between the engineering and business administration students. One year the head of business administration was kidnapped, put on an airplane and dropped off in a remote village. There would be a tug-of-war and to make it interesting they'd define the line with manure from the experimental farm — [all] in front of the cafeteria [Constitution Hall]! 🍌



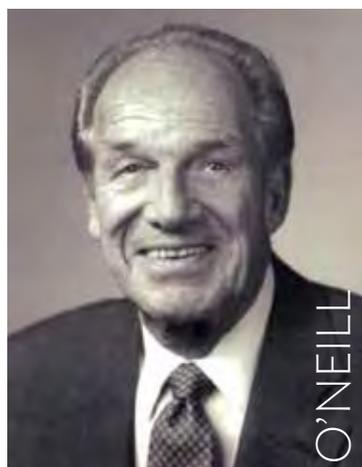
John Sigler Photograph Collection, 2004-111-791, Archives, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

**Volleyball match, Signers' Hall. Signers' was the gym in the '50s, when this photo was taken, and in the early '60s when Ed attended UAF.**

# SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

Connect with #NanookNation on social media.

## CLASS NOTES



**Patrick O'Neill, '41, '53, '76H\***, was inducted into the National Mining Hall of Fame in September 2013 at the age of 98. He is the author of a 2007 UA Press book, *From Snowshoes to Wingtips*.

### 1950s

**Joe Tremarello, '58, '68**, was inducted posthumously into the Alaska School Activities Association's Hall of Fame in August 2013. His wife, **Ann Tremarello, '57**, accepted the plaque and citation on his behalf.

### 1960s

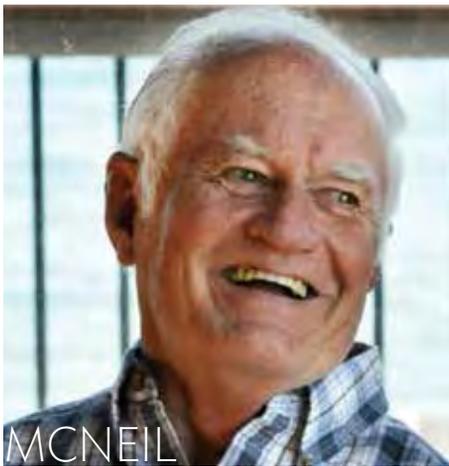
**Carol Johnson, '68**, earned a bronze medal in the women's singles 65–69 age bracket in table tennis at the World Senior Games in St. George, Utah. **Jane Parrish, '97**, and Carol teamed up to win the gold medal in the women's 65–69 age mixed doubles. Carol also won bronze in the 65–69 mixed doubles with Bob Janes of Juneau.

### 1970s

**Mary Hughes, '71**, was appointed to the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, the country's premier authority on higher-education governance. She is the first Alaskan to serve on this national board. She is also the longest-serving member on UA's Board of Regents.

**Toni Mallott, '72**, received the Citizen of the Year Award at the 2013 Alaska Federation of Natives Convention in Fairbanks.

\*H = honorary degree



**C.B. McNeil, '59**, president of the first graduating class from the state university (all previous classes were from the territorial university), retired in September 2013 after 29 years as a Montana state district judge. Read more at <http://bit.ly/CBMcNeil>.

**Stephen Jewett, '77, '97**, received the 2013 Conrad Limbaugh Award for Scientific Diving and Leadership from the American Academy of Underwater Sciences. He is a research professor in the School of Fisheries and Ocean Sciences at UAF.

## 1980s

**Michael A. Abels, '80**, was inducted into the U.S. Martial Arts Hall of Fame July 20, 2013, as a silver life member for 30-plus years in martial arts training.

**Carl F. Benson, '86**, was inducted into the Alaska Nanook Hall of Fame in 2013. Carl earned a pair of All-American honors for the Nanook men's swim team at the 1986 NCAA Division II Championships. He placed third in the 100-yard breaststroke and fifth in the 200 breaststroke. He received Alaska's Most Valuable Swimmer honor in 1985 and 1986 and was named UAF's Male Scholar Athlete in his senior year. Carl is now the principal scientist for a Fairbanks environmental consulting firm.



## Douglas W. Huber, '54, and Anne M. Huber,

**'53, '61**, celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary in Denver on Aug. 23, 2013. They have lived in Austin, Texas, since 1991.

"We are 1953 and 1954 graduates of UAF. We were married in Fairbanks, and our three children were born there. Later, I taught music at Joy Elementary School, and after getting out of the Army, my husband also taught in the UAF mining engineering department for seven years under Earl Beistline and Don Cook. We enjoyed our years at UAF very much."

**Paul Krejci, '89, '90, '93, '10**, traveled to the Canadian Arctic to find the remains of an arctic trader, Joe Bernard, who died 100 years ago. The trip was research for Paul's book, *In Search of a Stranger*.

**Herb Maschner, '89**, teaches at Idaho State University and is the director for the Idaho Museum of Natural History. He visited the UA Museum of the North last summer to complete a project creating an online database of bones from every known arctic bird, mammal and fish. The Virtual Zooarchaeology of the Arctic Project can be seen online through Idaho State University. Read more at <http://bit.ly/Maschner>.

**John David Rausch Jr., '89**, was inducted into the Academic Hall of Fame of Tulpehocken High School in western Berks County, Penn., in 2013. He graduated from THS in 1985. Dave is the Teel Bivins Professor of Political Science at West Texas A&M University in Canyon, Texas.

## 1990s

**Pat Pitney, '90**, was one of 14,000 people to carry the Olympic torch on its journey to the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia. She traveled with several other torch bearers to the North Pole on a Russian icebreaker. Pat is the vice chancellor of administrative services at UAF.

**David Berube, '91**, was reappointed in June to the State Vocational Rehabilitation Committee. The committee promotes statewide interest in the rehabilitation and employment of people with disabilities. David is the legal rights advocate for the Disability Law Center of Alaska.

**Janet Bartels, '92**, is the executive director of the Alaska Division of the American Heart Association.

**Jennifer Moss, '92**, displayed her work called "Edge of the Wild" for the Art in Heart Project in downtown Fairbanks last fall.



# CLASS NOTES

**Jeremy Vermilyea, '92** — “Found out I have been named as one of *U.S. News and World Report's* 2013 ‘Best Lawyers.’ Who’d a thunk it?”

**Mark Lomax, '97, '06**, is director of Substance Use Disorder Programs for Akeela.

**Jane Parrish, '97**, earned a silver medal in the women’s singles 65–69 age bracket in table tennis at the World Senior Games in St. George, Utah. She teamed up with **Carol Johnson, '68**, to win the gold in women’s doubles.

**Carmen Randle, '98**, was awarded the Distinguished Budget Presentation Award for the city of Fairbanks from the Government Finance Officers Association.

**James Soileau, '98**, was awarded the Distinguished Budget Presentation Award for the city of Fairbanks from the Government Finance Officers Association.

**Jeff Kulawiak, '99**, is project manager of business continuity for Premera Blue Cross in Washington.

## 2000s

**Meadow Bailey, '00**, is the development director for the American Heart Association in Fairbanks.

**Teisha Simmons, '00, '03**, received the Hannah Solomon Woman of Courage Award at the 2013 Alaska Federation of Natives Convention in Fairbanks.

**Zachary Kassel, '01**, and **Manda Kassel, '00, '06**, welcomed a baby girl named Zahna Mae in 2013.

**Kristen Sullivan, '01, '08**, is the owner of Ruby Snacks, which has evolved into a full-time business of natural dog treats. The company is named after her sweet dog, Ruby, who has since passed.

**Joe Hardenbrook, '02**, and **Anna Sorenson, '06**, are co-partners with Christopher Quist in a café on Driveway Street, near the *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner* offices. It is properly named the LUNCH Café and Eatery.

**Joe Kemp, '02**, is the technical engineer in the State Pipeline Coordinator’s Office for the Alaska Department of Natural Resources in Anchorage.

**Heather Gaines, '03**, married M. Scott Moon Sept. 21, 2013, in Nikiski, Alaska. She is a registered nurse at Central Peninsula Surgical Services in Soldotna and lives in Kenai.



**Scott Gelber, '03**, was promoted to principal from senior manager at Ernst & Young in Seattle in 2013. Scott advises clients on IT and information security operations.

**Michele Harmeling, '06**, is the membership development coordinator and board secretary for the Anchorage Chamber of Commerce. Prior to joining the chamber, she worked in nonprofit, outreach and volunteer management roles at the Alaska Center for Performing Arts and other organizations in Washington state.



**Lacie Grosvold, '08**, joined the KTUU Channel 2 News team in November 2013 as a reporter and multimedia journalist with a focus on investigative news.

**Gail Dabaluz, '10**, is the director of business and economic development for the Central Council Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska.



**Clarissa (Dicke) Toupin, '12**, received a five-year teaching fellowship from the Knowles Science Teaching Foundation. The KSTF Teaching Fellowships aim to improve science, technology, engineering and mathematics education in the nation by building a stable, sustainable corps of STEM teacher leaders.



**Theresia Schnurr, '12**, earned a BS degree at UAF and was one of UAF's top runners and skiers throughout her undergraduate career. She was awarded the Marion Frances Boswell Memorial Award in 2013. In October Theresia defended her master's thesis, which examined glucose transporter-4 (or GLUT4), an insulin-responsive glucose transporter, in white blood cells of sled dogs. She began the research as an undergraduate and has been working with Assistant Professor **Kriya Dunlap, '03**, on new, minimally invasive methods for detecting insulin sensitivity. Low levels of GLUT4 indicate insulin resistance, which is a precursor to type 2 diabetes. Their current study is looking at the effects of physical conditioning on GLUT4 expression in human subjects. Theresia left Fairbanks this winter to travel a bit before pursuing a PhD at the University of Copenhagen, in Denmark. Her research will be part of a larger research initiative called "Governing Obesity" (<http://go.ku.dk/>).

**Jennifer (Caims) Johnson, '04**, won an election in November for the Ward 1 warden position in Waterville, Maine, over her husband, David. They have been married 10 years and have three children.

**Grace Farstad Raisharma, '04**, and **Chirag Raisharma, '08**, have a daughter, Eve, a toddler, and had their second child in February. Chirag is a petroleum engineer for the State of Alaska's Division of Oil and Gas in the resources evaluation section.

**Matt Garee, '04**, competed in the North American Strongman Nationals in Denison, Texas, in October 2013.

**Lanien M. Livingston, '04**, was hired as the HR recruiter for the Tanana Chiefs Conference in August 2012 [not November as previously published].

**Etsuko Pederson, '05**, was awarded an individual artist award for music composition by the Rasmuson Foundation in May 2013 in Anchorage. Visit her on the web at [www.etsukokimura.com/](http://www.etsukokimura.com/).

**Maria Anastario, '06**, is the HeW Grant project manager for the Renton Technical College in Renton, Wash.

**Ralph Elook, '06**, is the community counselor for Title VII Indian Education at Service High School in Anchorage.

**Angelina Santa Ana, '06**, is a training specialist for the Southcentral Foundation in the Family Wellness Warriors Initiative.

**Iris (Wood) Sutton, '07**, displayed her art "Gulls Perch" for the Art in Heart Project in downtown Fairbanks last fall. Her "Raven and Ermine" art was selected for the 2014 KUAC poster.

**Jamie (Beyerle) Gray, '09**, was inducted into the Alaska Nanook Hall of Fame in October. A former NCAA Division I rifle All-American, she competed at UAF from 2002–2006 to help win the team championships in 2003, 2004 and 2006. She earned individual national titles in air rifle in 2003 and smallbore in 2006. She competed in the 2008 Beijing Olympics, taking fourth in air rifle and fifth in smallbore.

**Rachel Roy, '09**, is the economic development director in Sitka.

**Kristen Shake, '09, '12**, participated in an arctic science expedition in July 2013 aboard the Canadian Coast Guard icebreaker *Sir Wilfrid Laurier*, cruising in the northern Bering and Chukchi seas. The work was part of the National Science Foundation-sponsored Distributed Biological Observatory that will comprise five field seasons. Shake is conducting research at Clark University on arctic marine policy. Read more at <http://bit.ly/KristenShake>.

## 2010s

**Huseyin Biceroglu, '12**, and Kristina Miller were married in Fairbanks. They live in Güzelyalı, Izmir, Turkey.

**Ben McFarlane, '12**, and **Johanny Felix Bonilla, '12, '13**, were married Sept. 7, 2013, at the Georgeson Botanical Garden in Fairbanks.

**Alisha Drabek, '13**, is the executive director at the Alutiiq Museum in Kodiak. She is a Kodiak resident, community educator, and one of the first Alutiiq second-language speakers of her generation. Read more at <http://bit.ly/AlishaDrabek>.

**Hannah Foss, '13**, displayed her art "Kindan-No/The Forbidden Pool" for the Art in Heart Project in downtown Fairbanks last fall.

**Charlie Hill, '13**, is the assistant athletic director for compliance at UAF. He is also a senior airman in the Alaska Air National Guard.

**Ashish Kishore Fatnani, '13** — "I started with Halliburton in January 2013 as a drilling consultant. My job is to train/mentor and consult on various drilling solutions offered by Landmark, Halliburton. In my short stint I was awarded with MVP (Maximizing Value-Added Performance) in July 2013 for a project in which I had to make an imaginary company which was called Nanooks. (Can you believe it?!) So that's the reason I wanted to share it with UAF."

## Matriculates

**Philip Glowa** displayed his art "Marbled Assemblage" for the Art in Heart Project in downtown Fairbanks last fall.

**Laurie Olin** received a National Medal of Arts from President Obama at the White House. The honor, bestowed by the National Endowment for the Arts, is the highest national award for artists. Laurie was one of 24 people to receive medals for the arts and humanities at the ceremony in July. Read more at <http://bit.ly/LaurieOlin>.

**Dana Wassmann** is a human resources technician for the Tanana Chiefs Conference.

### KEEP IN TOUCH

Send us your news at

[www.uaf.edu/alumni/classnotes/](http://www.uaf.edu/alumni/classnotes/) or email [aurora.magazine@alaska.edu](mailto:aurora.magazine@alaska.edu).



**Bernice Marie Hildebrand Joseph, '88, '98**, passed away Jan. 7 from pancreatic cancer, in Fairbanks.

She was born March 12, 1964, in Tanana and raised in Nulato. Bernice earned a bachelor's and a master's degree from UAF, and was working on her PhD from the University of South Australia Adelaide. Bernice retired from her job as vice chancellor and executive dean for Rural, Native and Community Education in May 2013.

Bernice's tireless dedication to the education of Alaska's indigenous peoples was a passion of hers, one she was successful in accomplishing. Her cultural knowledge and heritage was the foundation for advancement of her Western education. Bernice always consulted respected community members in whichever region she was in before addressing the local community. She willingly shared her knowledge and wisdom with all who crossed her path.

She was a firm believer that you could achieve anything you put your mind to; any goal was attainable.

A tribute to Bernice was entered into the U.S. Congressional Record on Jan. 13. Her body was laid to rest in Nulato.

**David Aspelund, '75**, Oct. 6, 2013, Naknek

**Christine Attla, '97**, Sept. 20, 2013, Fairbanks

**Jennie Baker, '94**, Jan. 7, Minto

**Jane Behlke, matriculate**, Oct. 1, 2013, Anchorage

**Albert Belon, '52, '84H\* and professor emeritus**, Sept. 9, 2013, Ester

**Paul Richard Blackwell, '67**, Oct. 1, 2013, Chicago, Ill.

**Annie Cungauyar Blue, '09H\***, Nov. 4, 2013, Togiak

**Florence Bowen, '69**, Aug. 23, 2013, Big Lake

**Sally Jean Burris, matriculate**, Oct. 9, 2013, Fairbanks

**Axel Robert Carlson, professor emeritus**, Sept. 8, 2013, State College, Penn.

**Patrick Cole, '72**, Nov. 21, 2013, Fairbanks

**Gene Dinkel, '60**, Oct. 1, 2013, Wasilla

**Maryanne Douglass, '70**, Aug. 28, 2013, Geneseo, N.Y.

**Marianne Dudley, '96**, Aug. 12, 2013, Fairbanks

**David Edmunds, '96**, Dec. 4, 2013, Anchorage

**Tommy Evon, '03**, July 1, 2013, Manokotak

**Euncha Fisher, '02, '04**, Jan. 1, Anchorage

**Denis Fox, matriculate**, July 1, 2013, Fairbanks

**Daniel Glass, '08, '12**, Sept. 22, 2013, Fairbanks

**Willis Greimann, matriculate**, Jan. 4, Fairbanks

**Florence Hage, '70**, Dec. 7, 2013, Fairbanks

**Edith Hall, '35**, Dec. 7, 2013, Fairbanks

**L. Evelyn Harvison, '72**, Aug. 13, 2013, Fairbanks

**Melinda "Mindi" Hawman, matriculate**, Nov. 25, 2013, Fairbanks

**Dorothy Hildre, '43**, July 12, 2013, Juneau

**Edward Hoch, '66**, Oct. 17, 2013, Fairbanks

**Robert Hunsucker, professor emeritus**, Jan. 9, Klamath Falls, Ore.

**Constance Jones, '74**, Aug. 22, 2013, Anchorage

**Vera Oovi-Kaneshiro, former staff member**, Nov. 19, 2013, Anchorage

**Niilo Koponen, '57**, Dec. 3, 2013, Fairbanks

**Donald Lynch, professor emeritus**, Jan. 30, Fairbanks

**Lawrence Mayo, '63**, Sept. 30, 2013, Fairbanks

**Edmund McMahon, '70**, Aug. 5, 2013, Anchorage

**Evolyn Melville, matriculate**, Oct. 26, 2013, Fairbanks

**Samuel Moses, '80**, Aug. 8, 2013, Anchorage

**Janice Neimeyer, '90**, Aug. 8, 2013, Auke Bay

**Judith Kay Nelson, Bristol Bay staff member**, Sept. 15, 2013, Dillingham

**Naomi Ogden, '12, Community and Technical College staff member**, Aug. 6, 2013, North Pole

**Rose Ringsad, '46**, Jan. 15, Fairbanks

**William Root, '67**, Jan. 18, Anchorage

**Robert "Pete" Russell, '58**, Jan. 2, Vancouver, Wash.

**Robert Shafer, '51**, Sept. 5, 2013, Tallahassee, Fla.

**Judith Shapiro, '01**, Oct. 27, 2013, Fairbanks

**Michelle Simpson, '04**, Nov. 18, 2013, North Pole

**Raymond Strength, '09**, Dec. 12, 2013, Santa Monica, Calif.

**Donald Turner, professor emeritus**, Jan. 21, Fairbanks

**Jimmie Watford, '87**, Nov. 15, 2013, Canton, Miss.

**Richard Whitbeck, '69**, Jan. 17, Longview, Wash.

**Jane Williams, matriculate and former library staff member**, Aug. 24, 2013, Fairbanks

**Thomas "Sonny" Young, '97**, July 21, 2013, Sitka

**Mary Jane Yerg, '50**, Nov. 21, 2013, Minneapolis, Minn.

**Kenneth Zonge, '62**, Nov. 21, 2013, Tucson, Ariz.

\*H = Honorary degree

## Going

Do not wipe the tears from my eyes,  
For I am not dying.

Think not of sadness because I may be gone soon,  
For I am returning home.

She called me back, and I heard Her,  
For my bones belong to Her.

My heart has never left Her,  
For She is my home.

I have never left Her,  
For She owns me.

I must go home again,  
So the Great One may look upon me as I go.

## The Great Land

The memory can be a strange thing. I may not remember every word of this perfectly, but this is what happened during a visit to a village in the mid-70s.

I had a conversation with a very old Alaska Native. I considered him an elder. I did not know his status in the village, but I was taught to respect those older than me, and this man had respect etched into his skin. He asked me, "Are you an Alaskan?"

The question, though not startling, gave me pause. I have been in Alaska since 1970 and never really thought about it. I was an Army brat. At that time I had lived in Germany, Italy, California, South Carolina, Maryland, Virginia, Alabama, Georgia, perhaps some others, and had crisscrossed the Lower 48 a few times. I was born in South Carolina, but Alaska was becoming "home."

"Yes," I said.

"You are a black man. You are not from here. How can this be?" He asked with such calm that I knew he was not in the least bit insulting.

It took me an instant to say, "This is my home!" I knew a truth so deep that something resonated in me that I feel to this day.

There was just a hint of a smile as he said, "Then She owns you."

I do understand the concept of returning to the Land, but this seemed to be different. The puzzled look on my face produced a genuine smile. If a blush could have been seen on a black man, I blushed.

"The Great Land is not just home. She owns you, all of you. For it to be your home, She takes you. You do not choose. If you are an Alaskan, then you are my brother, for She is our Mother," again with that calm that sees to the core of your being.

I have moved away from Alaska, but this memory reminds me more than anything that I have a home. For the longest time I thought I chose Alaska as home. She chose me. I will find a way to spend my last days there and allow my spirit to be taken by Her and my bones to mingle in The Great Land. I belong to Her.

I am an Alaskan.



**Ron Williams, '76, '84**, graduated from UAF with a BS in physics and an MS in space physics. He currently lives in the Dallas/Ft. Worth area working in the IT field as a chief technical architect. He has done stints as CIO and CTO for various companies in Texas.



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Artwork by Daniel Darrow.

## NEXT ISSUE: DEBRIS LOBES

“DEBRIS LOBES” — THE NAME MIGHT CONJURE IMAGES OF ALIENS OR A WEIRD GROWTH YOU’D WANT A DOCTOR TO SEE. ACTUALLY, THEY’RE WORSE. FORTY-THREE OF THESE SLOWLY SLIDING FIELDS OF ROCKS AND TREES LIE NEAR THE DALTON HIGHWAY AND TRANS-ALASKA PIPELINE WHERE THEY PASS THROUGH THE BROOKS RANGE. A HANDFUL HAVE STATE HIGHWAY OFFICIALS AND PIPELINE OWNERS WORRIED. READ MORE ABOUT THE FROZEN DEBRIS LOBES IN THE FALL 2014 ISSUE OF *AURORA*.