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APRIL 2019

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The Spenardian is a hyperlocal magazine for the neighborhood of Spenard that is published three times a year. In addition to the current events and news of Spenard, The Spenardian features stories about food, culture, arts and entertainment, history and profiles of the neighborhood's businesses and inhabitants.

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In the Beginning: The Windmill



WORDS BY VICTORIA PETERSEN
PHOTO BY YOUNG KIM

Sitting in the Koot's parking lot is arguably one of the largest — both physically and figuratively — symbols of Spenard.

The ornamental windmill, decorated with lights of green, red and white looms over the neighborhood.

"I didn't think it would become the icon it is today," former owner of Chilkoot Charlie's, Mike Gordon, said. "I thought it was cool. It was a pretty neat landmark, but no, at the time I didn't envision it being on T-shirts or used as a symbol."

However, the symbol is starting to show some natural wear and tear. Gordon said the windmill could use some love. In its current state, the wood is starting to rot, and the lights that line the windmill's legs hardly work, Gordon said.

"If you ever saw it when all the lights were on, on the legs through the tail, and the spokes were working — in other words, if the whole thing was working the way it was supposed to — it was a rare moment," Gordon said. "There was usually something wrong with it."

Cue Rod Hancock and his company, the founding owners of the Moose's Tooth empire. They are the technical owners of the windmill. In an email, Hancock said the owners just recently decided to get the windmill back in working order.

"We have just recently decided to rebuild/refurbish the windmill this summer, so that the lights and structure will

shine again in all its former glory," Hancock said.

Hancock said he didn't have an exact schedule ready, but it will be completed in 2019.

The windmill is roughly over 60 years old. It has been sitting in the same parking lot since the 1980s, but it began its life in Alaska in the early 1960s.

Anchorage businessman Byron Gillam owned a liquor store on East Fireweed Lane. In the early 1960s, he was traveling in Southern California when he discovered a DIY windmill kit. Gillam bought the kit and installed it in front of his liquor store, the Kut Rate Kid.

The windmill lived on East Fireweed Lane for many years, with different owners as years passed. By the 1970s the windmill was in the hands of a local character Mike Von Gnatensky, better known as "Mafia Mike." He told Gordon he would donate the windmill to him if he paid to have it moved to his parking lot.

"[Mike] had a pizza place in midtown he was going to move it to," Gordon said. "But he asked around and people said Mike Gordon will buy anything."

Part of the contract also noted that a plaque be placed on the windmill forever honoring Mafia Mike's donation. Gordon said it cost around \$10,000 to move the windmill from East Fireweed Lane to its current home in Spenard.

"It was a nightmare," Gordon said.

The windmill was installed in the Koot's parking lot

in the early 1980s, shortly after Chilkoot Charlie's was established. The plaque went missing shortly after the move, but the windmill is here to stay.

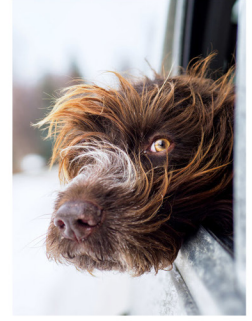
Chilkoot Charlie's hosted a celebration several years after the windmill was moved to the parking lot. Gordon didn't know the specific date but said it was around 1989 or 1990. The community gathered at the party to fill a 55-gallon drum with neighborhood memorabilia. The drum was buried under the windmill and remains unearthed today, about 30 years later. He doesn't remember what he put inside the drum, but Gordon said it was probably a selection of Chilkoot Charlie memorabilia. Gordon said there was no set date for the time capsule to be opened. There are no current plans to unearth the time capsule.

In recent years, Spenardians might have lost its neighborhood icon. Bob Gillam, son of Byron Gillam and well-known Alaska investor, had made offers to Gordon on the windmill. Growing up around his father's business, Kut Rate Kid, Gillam wanted the windmill as a memento to put on his family's property near Lake Clark. Gordon said he would sell it as long as the Gillams could replace it and not leave Spenard without a windmill. Gillam passed away last fall; the deal never went through.

The windmill currently stands above the Spenard Farmers Market every summer as well as the Spenard Food Truck Carnival. These events use the windmill as a landmark to let locals know the events are "under the windmill."

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THE TRADITIONAL BARBER SHOP: A RITUAL WORTH PRESERVING

WORDS AND PHOTO
BY DARCY STEIN

Earlier this winter, I spent some time traveling around Mexico with my husband. A few weeks into the trip, he was in need of a visit to the barber.

Being in an unfamiliar place and not speaking the language as fluently as we wished was initially a daunting task. After walking around in circles through a neighborhood that was not chock-full of American tourists, we managed to find a place that he thought looked promising: a no-frills, old school-looking barbershop filled with two iconic barber chairs, several folding chairs, a dark-brown mini-fridge, an old TV that was playing a black-and-white movie in Spanish and a table of semi-recent newspapers and magazines.

The barber was an older gentleman, and just by watching him work you could tell he'd been at it for a long, long time. As I sat and waited for my husband's cut and shave to be finished, I had ample time to look around the room and absorb my environment.

I was surrounded by a handful of Mexican men. There were two barbers — the older one cutting my husband's hair, and the younger had just gone out

and brought beers back. There were two men waiting, and an assortment of locals popping in and out to share news or just say hello). Lastly, there was my husband (who, with his Italian blood and several weeks of constant sun, could almost pass for Mexican... minus the whole glacier-blue eyes thing), and me: a freckled, blue-eyed, red-haired New York Jew turned Alaskan yogi.

I felt like I was sneaking a little glimpse into a sacred ritual of the opposite sex: a space I wouldn't normally see. I felt fortunate and extremely intrigued.

Sitting in that black folding chair, I began cursing myself for not having my camera. This was just the sort of thing worth capturing. Duh, I thought.

Then it hit me. This is the type of sacred space we don't give nearly enough credit. I thought of all the unisex or super feminine hair salons I had heard about or passed while driving around Anchorage and mentally compared all of those to the very small number of straight up barber shops I've seen or heard about. Is this a dying thing? Where are all the barbers in Anchorage?





Cue Danny Uriarte. He's been a barber for 26 years and has owned and operated the Anchorage Barber Shop for 16 years. His shop sits at 2960 Minnesota Drive —the Carrs' Plaza to us Spenardians — just across the road from the Northern Lights Plaza.

Uriarte notes that there is a Great Clips in that plaza, which boasts lightning-fast haircuts at a cheap rate, often combined with some type of extra discount or special offer.

Uriarte says that these big-chain hair joints do pose some competition but notes he has a steady stream of regular clients, about 25 to 30 coming in daily for cuts. He says his clients are more interested in quality than quantity. I thought fondly of the Mexican barber shop and the friendly locals that came in casually throughout my short time there.

The Anchorage Barber Shop itself is decorated simply: a black-and-white checkered floor, Alaskan men-centered magazines stacked on a table in the waiting area, framed old vintage photos and a flat-screen TV. While we were talking, several clients walked in for cuts, and I got the opportunity once again to observe this long-established ritual.

Uriarte greets his clients as they climb into the barber chair before them. They are positioned strategically in front of the TV, where they can relax and enjoy the pleasant distraction. Uriarte then turns on his laser-focus eyes and the cut begins. He pipes in here and there with polite small talk, inquiring about this or that, but never breaking his concentration. At the end of the cut, Uriarte does the once-over. He checks for detail and accuracy and gets rid of those pesky loose hairs that get stuck on

your skin. He neatly sweeps the hair off the floor, and the client settles up. He moves intentionally and efficiently, and just like that, the space is again ready for the next client.

I asked Uriarte if he had any help at his shop. When he first said he served upwards of two dozen clients a day, I thought that was a lot for one person. After observing him breeze through three clients back to back, I was no longer skeptical.

He replied he's a one-man band. There are several options for barber school in Anchorage, he explained, making the pool of potential hires few and far between. There are more choices for beauty schools in town, Uriarte said. The local barber scene is dwindling.

The next thing I know, a glowing smile spread across his face like wildfire. Uriarte wishes to open his own barber school. This training program would involve a barber apprenticeship program that would train new barbers that appeal to a wide variety of clients, not just a particular community. With his contacts, apprenticing barbers will be able to get into a shop right away, train with someone more experienced than them, and continue learning and refining their skills.

Suddenly, I found myself breaking out into the same sort of glowing smile. I was joyfully taken back to memories of how happy my husband was post-cut because his barber in Mexico just knew exactly what to do, despite a language barrier. Uriarte knew his clients' clipper numbers and they all left looking trimmed and neat, more cheerful than they were when they came in.

REAL THINGS I'VE SEEN

~ FROM ~

MY SPENARD BACKYARD

BY LAUREL ANDREWS

A porcupine
eating our foliage.



A woman I'd never met offered me free weed.



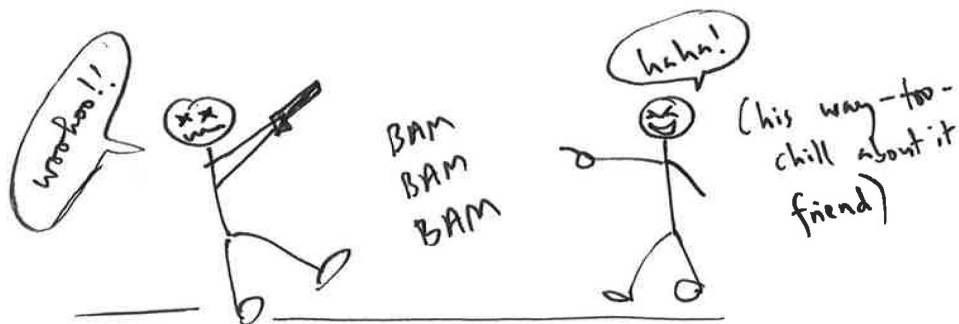
I never sell it,
only give it away!

A man asked if I'd seen anyone run by with a dufflebag FULL OF GUNS, stolen from Caleb's house.*



*name has been changed

A man drunk as a skunk,
& firing his gun on the fourth of July.



A weiner dog who takes himself on walks,
regularly.





A BRIEF HISTORY OF WEST'S AUDITORIUM

WORDS BY SAM DAVENPORT
PHOTO BY YOUNG KIM

What do Grateful Dead, Elvis Presley, Ozzy Osbourne, Ray Charles, Johnny Cash and June Carter all have in common? They have all performed in the West High School Auditorium.

Starting in 1954 it was for many years the major performing arts center for Anchorage. From live elephants to rock 'n' roll artists, the auditorium has hosted a number of characters.

A place to start would be with Tammie Smith-Scott, the lead auditorium technician for the Anchorage Schol District. She is passionate about the theater and has kept most of the plays' programs. She also helped privately raise \$1.4 million that recently restored the auditorium — a testament to the community.

West's auditorium is the largest of any high school in the state. It was around before the Sullivan Arena and the Egan Center, making the space a hot spot for concert and events. The auditorium has 1,918 seats and a pit that drops 16 feet, which can hold a full orchestra.

The hall was built in 1954 and originally named Anchorage High School. The name changed in 1962, says Smith-Scott.

"I've been in a 7.2 [magnitude earthquake] in [this hall], which was a little bigger than the one we had [on Nov. 30, 2018]," she said. "This hall is where I want to be when the big one hits again."

In 1955, Sydney Laurence's wife donated one of her late husband's paintings to the auditorium, where Smith-Scott says it hung until 1975. When she took over in 1993, everyone kept asking her "where the Sydney Laurence went." She found out that it was at the Anchorage Museum, where it said that it was on loan from Anchorage High School. It was appraised at \$650,000.

While they didn't bring the original back to the hall, the painting has been a highly successful fundraising tool for the auditorium. Since 2006, \$2.2 million has been raised for auditorium renovations. Donors requested that a portion of the money would be spent on bringing back the gold curtain and keeping the original wood floor and trim.

All of the money has gone towards upgrades and equipment, including new seats. Artists from the Anchorage area painted seats to sell at auction for \$19.54 each, a homage to the school's founding year. Smith-Scott says when renovations were taking place in 2007, her team found old documents in the seats, including a proclamation to build the Alyeska Pipeline.

Smith-Scott said one of her favorite performances was the PeKing Circus, where live elephants were brought on the stage.

"I myself saw Gordon Lightfoot here, Three Dog Night, a lot of the old orchestras," Smith-Scott said.

FINDING MY OWN SPENARD

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY
PAOLA BANCHERO

Somewhere I read that Henry Rollins, the punk raconteur and Southern California fixture, had to move away from Santa Monica because he was getting too comfortable and he wanted to stay counter-cultural.

I've rolled that sentiment over a lot, especially as I've become older and more settled in my suburban-like home in a good neighborhood in Anchorage. Whenever I moon over a Pottery Barn catalog or get too smitten with a kitchen gadget or feel like I just ignored a person living on the streets while I zip around in my warm Honda, I think about Henry Rollins.

We have to work to feel a little unsettled because our lives are built to make us feel content, coddled, comfortable. We look for the easy way out — driving rather than taking the bus, avoiding eye contact rather than facing a stranger, buying the myth that a new purchase will change anything.

Like Rollins, I had been feeling like I needed to change things up. In adulthood, I had moved every few years, making my way through a series of cities in the Midwest and Southwest. Then suddenly, I realized I had been in Anchorage for 15 years, almost half of them in my suburbs-in-the-city home. I started working on a plan with my family: Leave Anchorage for a year and regain that little part of me that is punk — it's more than you would guess from my nondescript outward appearance.

If city neighborhoods are like musical genres, I live in the soft rock part of town: for every song in its favor, a mediocre one will be along any minute. Spenard is the punk in town. Like punk rock, its heyday as a real rabble-rouser was 40 years ago. Now it has the look of Henry Rollins himself. Still gritty, but with a gentrified, jowly exterior. Like Rollins, Spenard's soul is still mischievous. To me, punk is make-shift, improvised, questioning. It's decidedly

anti-materialistic and not quite without rules, but close. When you listen to real punk, you feel you need to do what matters and you need to do it now, and the hell with what everyone else thinks. That's why I tend to spend a lot of free time in Spenard, and I knew during my year away from Anchorage, I would have to find my own punky Spenard in corners of the cities where I would be visiting.

Finding the inner Spenard of a community takes effort. First off, avoid the neighborhoods that shout Top 40 or arena rock. You can forget about neighborhoods dialed into the country station, too. Strangely, neighborhoods that sing the blues or thrum with hip-hop are closer to what you're looking for to achieve Spenardian levels of satisfaction. Turn the corner, cross the street, go down a few blocks. Maybe you'll wander into the experience too. It's more than sensory. I mean, Spenard can smell like the diesel truck you get stuck behind one day and like bread baking at the Franz Bakery the next.

So out I went, searching for a way to recall, not replicate, the Spenard experience.

Where would I find the equivalent of the Chester Creek? Where would I find art? Where would I have an intimate experience rather than a flashy one? I started out by walking. It's how I've gotten to know cities I've lived in previously. When you are on your feet, a city comes down to scale. You can see the patterns of litter hidden in the seams between fences and sidewalks. You can hear schoolchildren rushing in from the playground as the bell rings. You can glance into people's living rooms, see what they are making for dinner.

All this thinking about why I wanted to step out of my life in Anchorage and rediscover my peripatetic youth made me take a deep plunge into the meaning of place.

No one was more helpful in this effort than Henri Lefebvre, a French thinker who wrote about how place is produced. Lefebvre critiqued everyday life, including how we construct place in our minds and who gets to decide how public space is used. Hint: It's those with power. Certain activities are more socially appropriate or practically feasible to do in some spaces than in others. We tend to frown, for example, at people who carry out the routines associated with the bathroom in public, such as clipping fingernails. We tend to take for granted what given places are for, what activities are most appropriate, even permitted, within a place.

It took my pre-teen daughter and Disneyland to shake me into understanding. One of the places we visited these last few months was the Magic Kingdom. We were on Main Street, USA, a nostalgic ode to small-town America. She said how much she liked it and why couldn't cities look like this. But to me, I could hear no music. There is no funk station in Disneyland, let alone a raucous punk vibe.

Many cities want to have the squeaky-clean texture of Main Street, USA, if not exactly the aesthetics. CBGC, the nightclub that birthed New York punk, is now a high-end fashion emporium. Other sites of counter-cultural

movements have been papered over by corporate brands. What kinds of places had the music I was looking for, the music I missed of Spenard? Well, it had to be noisier. True public spaces are linked to civil society. They welcome freedom of expression in all its messiness.

My meanderings yielded the kinds of places where I feel like community is paramount, and best represented Spenard — where my perceived space melded with my lived space. Let me take you to those places.

First, I found it on the street, through graffiti and public art and sometimes discarded shopping carts. When I saw those, I knew I was getting closer to the punk part of my temporary home. On occasion, a person could remind me of Spenard. Something about their scuffed boots, slouchy clothes, tattooed arms, earnest disposition. But I also found it in public trail systems and parks. I know just a portion of the Chester Creek is technically in Spenard, but it's among my favorite spots: where I can see swampy wildlife and people of all varieties. Trail systems and parks should unite us: the young and the old, the newcomers and the veterans, the animal lovers and the people lovers, the wealthy and the poor, the moose and the dog.





I found independent bookstores and libraries elemental in my search for Spenard-away-from-home. From a punk perspective, libraries are superior to bookstores: anyone can access them, they are often on bus routes, they foment collaboration and community. Rarely do you go to the library and come out with the exact material you were after and nothing more. Libraries are the ultimate place for a DIY way of learning, the way many punk icons did. And while Spenard doesn't really have a library of its own, it has two independent bookstores that serve similar functions. Both Title Wave and The Writer's Block, in different ways, urge people to read, to engage with each other, to discover what matters. They are both places that stake a claim to a Spenard where a subculture of readers and writers can exist.

There is no place more universal than an open-air market, whether it is selling vegetables or records. I gravitated toward markets for their nearly free appeal. You can buy or you can browse, so you can go there with little money and no one will judge. The local market is also among the most diverse places in any community. Farmers, middlemen, children, elders, home chefs, gastro-nerds, tourists and beggars are plentiful. You get to see the same faces, week after week, feel like you are part of a place's landscape, culture and culinary heritage. So whether it was crate-digging on the beach or buying as many avocados as I could

comfortably carry home, I exploited every open-air market I could find.

Finally, my wandering made me thirsty, and I found respite in cafés the kind Spenard has: the Kaladi Brothers location in the Northern Lights mall is my go-to coffee house and has been since I moved to Anchorage. Cafes were the sites of tertulias, social gatherings at coffee houses where people came to become informed, to discuss ideas and debate viewpoints. It's a part of Iberian and Latin American culture, and it helped spark democratic ideals, like a caffeinated community council meeting or a breathing newspaper. I can think of half a dozen cafes just a few blocks from each other — all with different clienteles and approaches to the public square. And though I never hear punk rock in any of them, there is one that helps me recall Spenard. A sign on the wall declares that there are no owners, no employees, no customers — just people and friends. I can sip my coffee and close my eyes and hear Black Flag or the Ramones.

Being away from home for a year has unsettled me and my family. We've all felt at times discomfort and unease. Because we're pushing beyond what we know — it's all a makeshift experience and we barely know how to play our instruments — it's the most punk thing we've ever done.



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SPENARD ROADHOUSE: A 'NEIGHBORHOOD GATHERING PLACE'

WORDS BY MARIAH DEJESUS-REMAKLUS
PHOTOS BY YOUNG KIM

About 11 years ago, Laile Fairbairn and Jo Ann Asher had a vision. They wanted a family-friendly space where a mom could have her drink while the kids ate good food, a gathering place for “casual fine dining.” At the time, Fairbairn already owned Snow City Cafe and Asher had Sacks Cafe, both located in downtown Anchorage, and they figured they should do something different in another part of town.

“I used to go to Bear Tooth like, three times a week with my family,” Fairbairn explained. “Some friends said that it’d be great to have another restaurant in Spenard... So I reached out to [Asher], who’s now my friend, and said ‘Well, here’s a project,’ and on New Year’s Day 2008, she said, ‘Yeah, let’s do it.’”

Hogg Brothers, a block from Bear Tooth Theatrepub, then went up for sale, and for the rest of 2008, the two women designed and created what would later become Spenard Roadhouse, which celebrated ten years in February 2019.

Fairbairn emphasized that there were different approaches to the process, including a perspective given by Asher’s daughter, Sage. While Fairbairn had been in her late thirties with two young children and Asher wanted a place with good food for herself and her husband. Sage

Asher was younger and “on top of trends.” These various angles lent a hand in curating the vision for the new restaurant.

“It just kind of worked,” Fairbairn said.

The Roadhouse’s website describes it as a restaurant and bar that serves “contemporary comfort food.” The menu offers a variety of items from fried calamari to nachos for appetizers; quinoa, Caesar and Mediterranean shrimp salads; an “old school” BLT and avocado melt in sandwiches; classic fish and chips or jambalaya for those adventurous with spice and rice; and, of course, pizza from plain cheese to cajun chicken. There are also several brunch and dessert menus along with picks for the kids, and the bar hosts a number of wines, whiskies and cocktails.

The kitchen has focused on creating menus that cater to a range of guests, and in the past few years, that has come to include those with food allergies. It’s important for the staff to be thorough and provide alternatives for people, Shawna Calt, bar manager, said. Several items are gluten-free, and there are options to add gluten-free or vegan ingredients, such as sesame-ginger vinaigrette dressing for the house salad.





“People come in because they trust us,” she added.

But understanding guests’ needs is only a small part of what the Roadhouse staff has done to provide for the community. Calt and front house manager Lois Kendrick have also been around since the restaurant’s beginnings and are proud of how far it has come, especially since a major part of the business has been building relationships with and giving back to the community, such as their Tots for Toys gift drive where people bring in children’s gifts and are given tater tots.

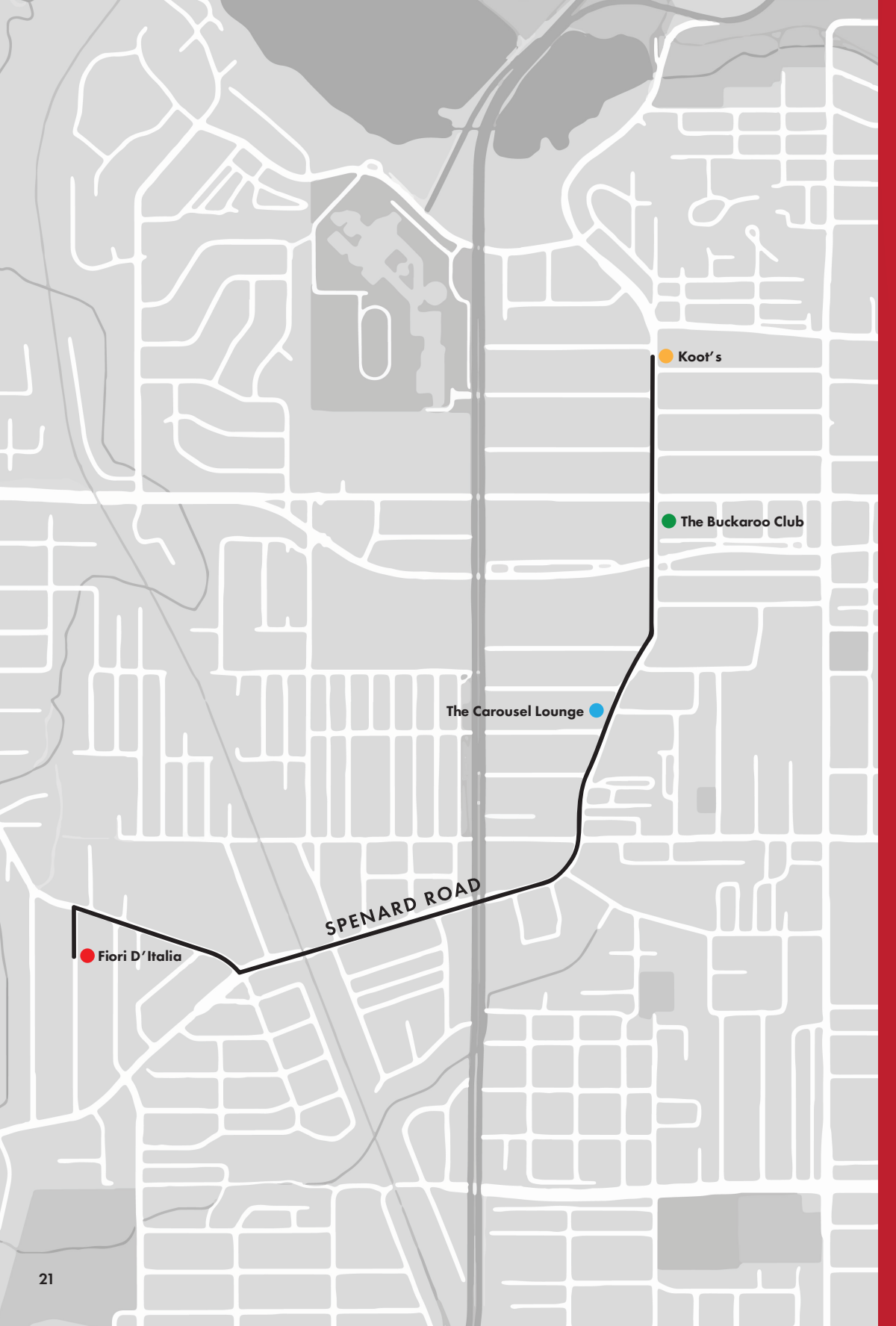
The Roadhouse also gives “tots” away during major elections; guests just have to sport their “I Voted” stickers to earn their plate.

Creating relationships with Anchorage and its locals goes behind the scenes, too. Kendrick noted that the chefs work with local farmers as an effort to support local businesses.

Fairbairn is now the president of Locally Grown Properties, which manages the Roadhouse, South Restaurant and Coffeehouse (of which she is the general manager), Snow City Cafe and the Crush Bistro and bottle shops. To her, the Roadhouse’s guests have made the restaurant their own. Though the staff has worked to keep up with and adapt to industry trends while staying true to the original vision, “guests help figure out how it’s going to be.”

There are currently no big plans for the Roadhouse except to keep contributing to the community and making good food. Calt said the kitchen is planning the new summer menu, and Kendrick is grateful that the restaurant has been fortunate to still be going strong after a decade.

“We hope to be a part of the Spenard neighborhood for as long as I can see,” Fairbairn said.



Fiori D' Italia

The Carousel Lounge

Koot's

The Buckaroo Club

SPENARD ROAD

Historic Spenard bar crawl

WORDS BY VICTORIA PETERSEN
GRAPHIC BY LEVI BROWN

Fiori D'Italia

For the last 25 years or so, Fiori D'Italia has been Spenard's hidden gem, tucked away in a residential neighborhood near the so-called Presidents neighborhood. The classy bar is dimly lit and features Alaska's largest whiskey collection. The menu features carefully-crafted cocktails, made by bartender Ylli Ferati. The bar and restaurant were the former home of the Garden of Eatin', which was a small neighborhood eatery serving fare out of a quonset hut; the hut still sits adjacent to Fiori today.

The Carousel Lounge

Built in 1964, the Carousel Lounge originally opened in 1967 under the management of Steve Cooper. In 2003, new owners purchased the bar and painted the exterior red with stripes in honor of Van Halen. The Carousel Lounge served its supposed last drink on May 15, 2016. The Anchorage Daily News reported that the closure was due to the economy and health issues with one of the co-owners. The bar was frequented by the Hells Angels in the 70s and 80s.

The Carousel Lounge reopened in 2018, with the help of Paul Berger. To maintain the friendly neighborhood vibe of the historic bar, Berger kept the original name and sign.

The Buckaroo Club

Established in 1953, this Spenard staple has been serving the community since before statehood. The bar is located at 2809-2819 Spenard Road and it is known as "the buck" to Spenard residents. In the spring of last year, the property was put up for sale by its previous owners. According to ADN archives, the bar survived the 1964 earthquake and a fire in 1991. The property includes the Buckaroo Club, the spaces of Bambino's Baby Food and Pizza Olympia, an extra space that is currently being used for storage, and the land.

Koot's

Touted as one of the most historic and iconic bars in all of Alaska, Chilkoot Charlie's opened its doors on New Year's 1970 in what had been the Alibi Club. Mike Gordon opened the bar, which only comprised a small part of the building. With the discovery of rich resources, the last frontier boomed, along with bars and nightclubs across Alaska's biggest city, in Anchorage's most infamous neighborhoods. The bar brought up bands from across the country, including Metallica, Ted Nugent, Bad Company, The Steve Miller Band, Crosby Stills and Nash, Blues Traveler, Bon Jovi, Lynyrd Skynyrd, Journey, Ozzy Osbourne, The Beach Boys, Blue Oyster Cult, The Doobie Brothers, Aerosmith, Styx, Van Halen and Green Day, according to the bar's website. In 2000, the bar was even chosen as the number one bar in America by Playboy Magazine.



Lessons from Spenard

WORDS AND PHOTOS
BY SHAYNE NUESCA

I can still smell the snow. I was 6 years old, fresh off the plane from the Philippines. My mom, brother and I changed at the airport into hand-me-down snowsuits and winter coats. My dad and uncle picked us up in a 1980s Cadillac Coupe.

We drove for what felt like an hour, but in hindsight, it was more likely less than 15 minutes. That was the first time I felt Spenard's windy, curvy roads. We turned at the palm tree and went down West 30th Avenue. This street, the apartment complex right in the middle, became home for the next three years.

My grandmother's unit was upstairs. It was small and only had two bedrooms, but it was always full of people. I can't say exactly how many of us lived there — lots of family members were coming in and out — but I never felt alone.

It was a hub, a launching pad if you will, for my family starting out. My grandma's house was always the first stop for anyone coming in from the Philippines for the first time. My aunts and uncles, who lived and worked in Dutch Harbor most of the year, spent their breaks with us. Every weekend, it felt like my grandma's house was the gathering place for Filipinos on the west side.

I didn't know all the connotations that came with being from Spenard or living in the neighborhood. I didn't know it was one of the less desirable parts of town. It was just home for me. Looking back, it was the best introduction I could have had to America — what America really looks like.

Our neighbors were from every walk of life. We watched out for each other, and for me, they taught me about life in Alaska.



My very first friend was a kid named Dennis who was Alaska Native. He taught me how to sled and pack snow to build a hill. He also taught me the different “kinds of snow” and what was good enough to make a snowball or a full-blown snowman. Dennis’ mom was also the first person to teach me what it meant to “have a snow day.”

I didn’t understand how important having those connections were back then, but people like Dennis and his mom were critical to navigating our new life in Alaska. To have people around who knew you needed to learn the ropes, and were willing to help you out even in the smallest way meant everything.

When I was 9, my parents purchased a lot and had a house built on the south side. My dad took me to the unfinished house one day, he walked me to where my bedroom would be and he said, “This is yours.”

In that moment, I thought about this concept I heard about in school. It was called the American Dream, and I really felt that our house exemplified it.

Our new neighborhood, housing-wise, was a bit homier than where we were in Spenard. We had our own yard, we got a dog and our neighbors were more than an arm’s length away from our front door. Within two years, we even welcomed a little brother and sister.

We were one of the first families on the block. The whole development was brand new, but in time people started trickling in. Many of our neighbors were just starting out or were young families, new to Alaska and to America.

We had neighbors from Macedonia, Thailand, Laos and, of course, the Philippines. I realized then it was my turn to be welcoming, just like how Dennis and his mom were to me and my family.

That’s a lesson I’ve taken with me — to stay humble, remember the people who have helped you and to give back where and when you can. My family’s been away from Spenard for more than a decade now, but the neighborhood will always be with me.

Reduce Reuse Recycle

WORDS BY SAM DAVENPORT
PHOTOS BY YOUNG KIM

“Reduce, reuse, recycle” is a phrase that the owners of The Writer’s Block don’t take lightly.

Everything has a “second life,” says Vered Mares, one of the four owners at the Block. She says they attempt to have as little waste as possible — by using “every bit of everything that we have.”

“Nothing gets thrown away arbitrarily,” Mares said. “We freeze a lot of stuff.”

Bread and cookies are never thrown away. Instead, they are repurposed into bread pudding, croutons, crostini or pita chips. Tomatoes that aren’t eaten are reduced into soups; the trimmings of potatoes, onions, carrots, celery, peppers and onions get boiled down for stocks. They even make their own chicken stock from scratch.

Everything that isn’t useable for their stocks is fed to Mares’ chickens.

“This is not something that is by design, per se, it’s just how we were raised,” Mares said.







Many restaurants use what Mares calls “plate fillers,” which are rarely eaten in one sitting, like french fries. Mares says she and her team have spent a lot of time looking at portion sizes.

“It feels good to see a really, really full plate, but what that is full with makes a big difference,” Mares said. “Our portions really cut down on what comes back uneaten and also what gets taken home in to-go boxes.”

What might be even most surprising is the amount of waste — or lack of — The Writer’s Block creates. The restaurant does not have a dumpster. Instead, they use three residential cans per week which are typically not overflowing. Mares says that most weeks, their five recycling cans are crammed full.



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Songs to wind down Spenard: A curated neighborhood playlist

WORDS BY MADISON MCENANEY

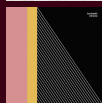
This playlist was designed with Spenard in mind. Fourteen tracks total, featuring local artists and bands as well as a few from out of state. The songs criss-cross multiple different genres with the intent for everyone to find at least one new artist to listen.



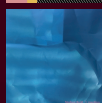
Who Are You - Jonathan Bower: Bower's latest album makes you feel like you're sitting in The Writer's Block on one of those cozy floor pillows reading his lyrics like a novel.



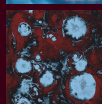
Two Seconds Flat - Emma Hill: Emma Hill is — to me — one of Spenard's most prominent musicians. If you like what you hear, find her at most Spenard Song Circle's at the Church of Love.



Vertigo (Ultrarare Version) - Hundredth: This has become one of my go-to albums when the clouds turn that dark blue and grey hue that reflects off the mountains and street lights. My fingertips tap my steering wheel to the beat of the drums as I drive to a show at Koots or La Potato.



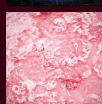
Talk Like a Human - Medium Build: Why does every new Medium Build album become my favorite Medium Build album? "Roughboy" felt like a genre flip for the band, one that feels groovier and recalibrated. Plus, who knew James the guitarist had pipes?



Thrown into the Dark - The Black Queen: Synth will save us. I want to drink Fairweather at Bear Tooth and listen to this album simultaneously forever.



Beige - Aspenyarrow: When I saw Aspenyarrow play live for the first time they quickly became one of my favorite Alaskan bands. Vocalist Katie and electronics extraordinaire Josh make for a talented duo. Being from Talkeetna and Fairbanks means they don't play shows in town as often, but their self-titled album is available for streaming which makes for great sunny day driving jams.



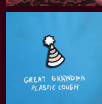
Queen - Slederbodies: This song is a bop. That is all.



Tiny Bugs - Sundog: Sundog should absolutely play every outdoor music festival in the state this summer, do you not agree? These groovy jams bring sunshine and circle sunglasses.



Spring Breakup - Termination Dust: Termination Dust, a favorite local band that sprang right up from under us in Spenard. This song is for Spenard, for Anchorage, for Alaska: Spring Breakup.



Favorite Show - Great Grandpa: Great Grandpa played a few shows with then-local band Granddad in Fairbanks a few years back, and I fell in love with their music.



Former Mundane - Aural Imago: The first time I heard Aural Imago was at the Church of Love, and have been seeing them produce content and play shows since. Justin Ferguson knows how to make his music heard.



Tuesday Blues - S!ge: S!ge lives in Portland now, but is from Alaska and has been involved in multiple projects up here. When she released this song, I knew she'd find her way back up here and sing her dark and twisty songs for us. So far she's just singing to us in this playlist, but I'm still holding out hope.



FACES OF SPENARD: MIKE

WORDS AND PHOTO
BY VICTORIA PETERSEN

Without Mike Gordon, I would not be here. No, he never saved my life or anything so grandiose. He opened a bar. At the local watering hole Chilkoot Charlie's, a slope worker and a hair-dresser — my parents — met.

Gordon is best known around Anchorage as the founding owner of the “world-famous Chilkoot Charlie's.” In a Soldotna coffee shop, we sat and talked for a while, about his new book, about his mountain climbing, about Spenard.

For the last 20 years, Gordon has been periodically working on his memoir which was released in March — but getting the memoir proved to be quite the task.

“We only got 12 copies of the book out of red China before they confiscated it,” Gordon said.

Gordon was working with a publisher overseas and was under the impression his memoir would be printed in Hong Kong.

“I thought things ought to be a little more liberal out there than on the mainland,” Gordon said.

The books were not printed

in Hong Kong. Instead, they were printed in mainland China, where censorship laws dictated Gordon's book as inappropriate.

“My publisher called me and said this guy in Hong Kong was reporting that the Chinese government spotted a couple of pictures that had been taken inside Tibet and they wanted to know about it,” Gordon said. “I said if they read that chapter they were not going to like it.”

The photos were taken in Tibet on one of Gordon's many mountain climbing trips.

“I made some comments about Tibet and China, and I was right,” Gordon said.

The Chinese government confiscated 6,000 copies of the memoir. The unfortunate event gave Gordon an unexpected opportunity to revisit his book and make any last minute changes before attempting to republish.

Before sending it back to print, Gordon added the words “Alaska Memoir” to the cover, included a forward about the printing incident and a blurb noting the book was officially banned in China.

“I took a few more jabs at the Chinese government,” Gordon laughed.

The memoir covers much of Gordon's storied life, from Chilkoot Charlie's tales to adventures in Venezuela. He said the thread that ties the memories together are the stories of Gordon climbing the world's tallest mountains.

In the 1980s, mountain climbing was an avenue for Gordon to get away from his cocaine addiction.

“I got hooked on cocaine during the pipeline days,” Gordon said. “Everybody was doing it in the 70s and 80s.”

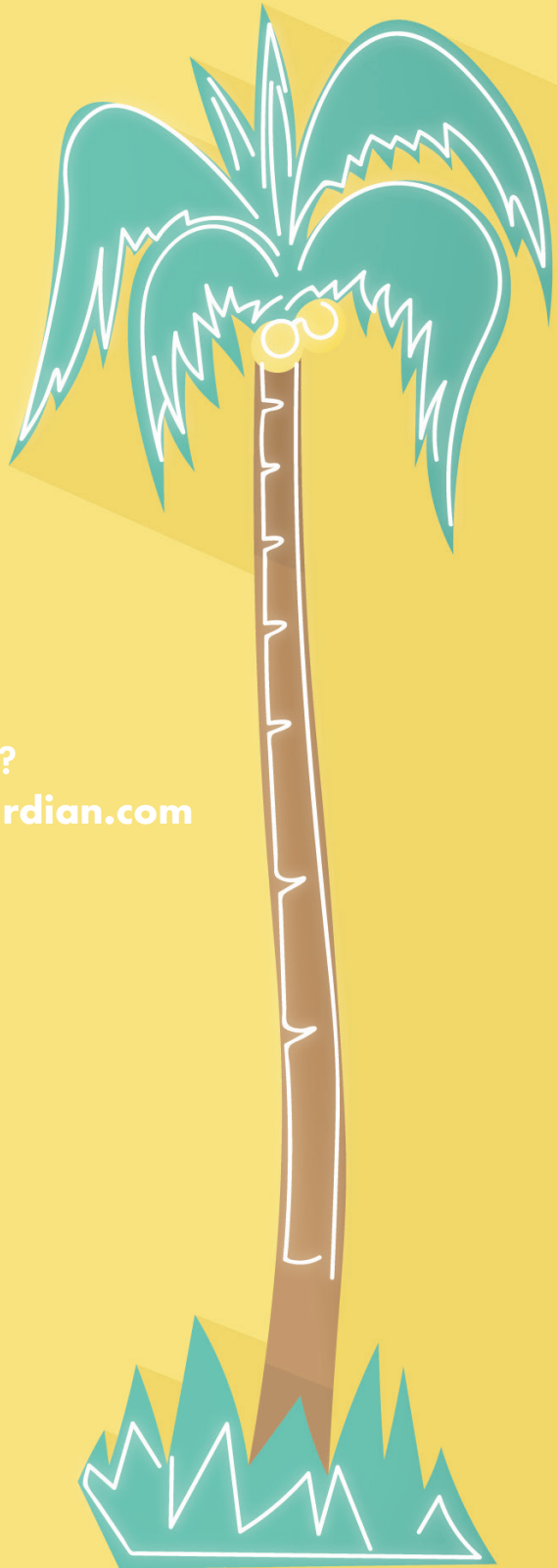
Gordon said writing an honest memoir is a difficult task, but he enjoyed the work. Included are stories of drug abuse, divorce, and maintaining his relationship with his wife.

“It's a love story too,” Gordon said.

Now, Gordon lives in Halibut Cove with his wife for part of the year.

The memoir, “Learning the Ropes, An Alaska Memoir,” is available now at most bookstores.

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NEW TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD

WORDS BY SAM DAVENPORT
PHOTO BY YOUNG KIM

Out North, a nonprofit in Anchorage home to KONR 106.1 is moving to Spenard.

The organization was originally founded to support LGBTQ theater productions and will turn 34 in May.

Jason Sear is the station manager at KONR and has been on the board of Out North since 2016. Sear says as a nonprofit, funding has always been an issue. Out North was previously located on Fourth Avenue — and before that, off DeBarr road.

Sear says the bills to keep the previous locations operational were much higher than anticipated.

“Rather than go through this struggle every single year and every single time we move of

trying to find more money... what we'd like to do is focus on what is currently working really well at Out North — which is the radio station,” Sear said.

Out North began filing paperwork for a radio station in 2006. They were fully licensed in 2010.

“It's a really long process to get a radio station license. That's why it's kind of crucial for us to keep it going and hang onto it,” Sear said. “If we lose it, we lose it and we'll never get it back.”

Out North's new location is right next to the Church of Love off of Spenard Road and is owned by Cook Inlet Housing Authority. Sear says Spenard was always on his radar of places to relocate to.

“Spenard is kind of like the

only real neighborhood in Anchorage where you can walk to everything,” Sear said.

Sear says the model of Out North is changing. While the new space doesn't have room for an art gallery or theater, he says there will be room for other additions, like a podcast room, which has been a high request from volunteers.

The radio station airs over 80 hours of volunteer-produced content a week and 35 to 40 hours a week of music by Alaskan artists.

As far as the future of the nonprofit, Sear says they still plan on hosting events in town at some popular neighborhood locations, like the Church of Love and The Writer's Block.





Back in my day...

WORDS AND PHOTO
BY JAY STANGE

My adoptive parents went to a lot of parties in my deep Spenard neighborhood in the late 1960s. My mom's best friend, Emily Satterberg, and her husband, Bill, owned a triplex at the corner of 33rd Avenue and Iowa Street. It had a huge yard and agreeable neighbors.

Barbecues and bonfires were de rigueur at their place. Emily was the neighborhood lady with a big personality who everyone knew. The local kids sought out her kitchen, which had a sign that said, "God grant me the patience to endure my blessings." Everyone's amazing mom or surrogate grandmother.

During one memorable yard party, Emily's daughter, Julie, cut her hand badly. In the urgency of the moment, Emily

clunked down her traditional scotch highball on a wire spool table. While they were triaging, two-year-old me walked over and tipped back the remainders. They discovered me later with whiskey breath throwing croquet balls into the air and watching them drop — narrowly missing my head. As the story goes, my mom put my head in the oven, gave me Ipecac to induce vomiting and tried a few other remedies, but to no avail. I held my liquor and went to sleep.

The friends and neighbors whom the Satterbergs gathered around them were from all over the place, and they remained friends until death; in some cases, it was for 50 years or more. This was just prior to the oil age in Alaska, and most of the people had come for

adventurous reasons, not oily, economic ones.

My mom, Geri Stange, used to say that it was an unspoken rule in those days that people didn't ask too many questions about the origins of new neighbors. It was enough to just be there, in a new place, making a new start. Besides, my mom would say, a lot of times you really didn't want to know. Running from the law, a bad marriage, racism in Lower 48 cities and poverty were a few of the escape stories you might not want to intrude on. We didn't know of those things. None of us had a lot of money, but people grew gardens, shared moose meat and salmon, and made sure everyone was okay, without too much government intervention — if you know what I mean.



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