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**SPENARDIAN**



ISSUE 05  
**AUGUST 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: Lake Hood

WORDS BY VICTORIA PETERSEN  
PHOTO BY YOUNG KIM

The shores of Lake Hood and Lake Spenard, near Ted Stevens International Airport, are decorated with dozens of small floating bush planes. The body of water makes up the world's busiest seaplane base, which handles nearly 200 flights a day. When summer turns to winter and the water freezes over, hundreds of planes based at the lake trade their floats in for skis.

The Alaska Aviation Museum near the lake's shore illustrates Alaska's unique history with air travel, from bush plane stories to annual hot air balloon rides over Delaney Park for Fur Rondy Festival.

The seaplane base used to be made up of two lakes, Lake Spenard to the east and Lake Hood to the west. Lake Hood was the original base, and Lake Spenard was used specifically for swimming and sunbathing. Lake Spenard was a municipally-owned lake used as a recreation site, complete with a roadhouse and boating and bathing facilities. In the 1970s, the state dug a canal between the two lakes to create the base.

However, the lakes weren't always used as a base for lift-off and flightseeing. Canadian born, Joe Spenard — the rabble-rouser who came to Anchorage in 1916 and left only a few years later — found himself on the shores of what was then called Jeter Lake while he was looking for a new business venture. At the time, Anchorage needed wood, and the Lake Spenard area — which was a part of the newly established Chugach National Forest — provided. The Chugach National Forest encompassed much of what is now Anchorage, and the land was closed to homesteading at the time. In 1909, the same year the national forest was established, Thomas Jeter

built a cabin on the land near Lake Spenard and Lake Hood, according to educational resources from the Cook Inlet Historical Society.

Jeter was forced by the courts to give up his land. Not long after, the area was opened for homesteading, according to the historical society resources. In the summer of 1916, Spenard staked his claim on a 160-acre homestead, which included then Jeter Lake. He developed the land and lake into a resort. The resort included a dance hall. On Aug. 4, 1916, Lake Spenard appeared for the first time in print in the Anchorage Daily Times.

Spenard persuaded the community to help cut down trees to build a trail from the city's boundary at Ninth Avenue and L Street, crossing Chester and Fish Creek to the lake. The Chugach National Forest asked Spenard to stop cutting down trees in the forest, but the dance pavilion became too popular with the locals. The route is now Spenard Road, and Spenard's name became synonymous with bootlegging.

In May of 1917, a fire destroyed Spenard's house and dance pavilion. That September, Spenard and his family moved out of Alaska and settled in Sacramento, California.

In 1919, the U.S. Forest Service designated the land around the lake for recreational purposes at the request of the city. Even President Warren G. Harding, on his 1923 visit to Alaska, spent an afternoon at the local hot spot. The city eventually established the Spenard Beach Park, and as many as 800 residents visited and swam at the park on hot summer days. In the winter, residents ice skated on its glacial surface.





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# A NEW HOME FOR THE SPENARD COMMUNITY GARDEN

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY  
RYAN CHERNIKOFF

The Spenard Community Garden, once located behind Cook Inlet Housing Authority's Church of Love, has moved to a new location. The garden plot now sits at 1303 W. 33rd Ave., behind the Lutheran Social Services of Alaska building in Spenard.

"We knew the location [behind the Church of Love] was going to be temporary," Alivia DeBusk, co-founder of the community garden said. "[Cook Inlet Housing Authority] offered us the space and water for a year and we knew it was a good start, so we went from there. I really feel that if that had not happened, we would not be where we are at today."

The Church of Love will soon begin renovations which, among other improvements, will include a remodeled entryway that will make the space fully accessible. Part of bringing the building up to municipal code was adding parking spaces, which won't leave room for the community garden.

The search for the garden's new space started almost immediately after it was built in May 2018.

"In order to keep utilizing the building as a community art space, we had to make renovations to get the building up to code," Candace Blas, manager of the Church of Love, said.

The Lutheran Social Services of Alaska's food pantry has benefited from the garden's produce. During a busy month, Lutheran Social Services serves over 1,200 households.

"Many of the families we serve are faced with the tough choice of paying their utility bills or eating," Alan Budahl, executive director of Lutheran Social Services, said.

A few Lutheran Congregations in Anchorage have built gardens, including Spenard-based Lutheran Church of Hope, which also supplies Lutheran Social Services with hundreds of pounds of produce during an average growing season.



“We are always happy to be able to hand out as much food as possible to struggling families, and to have the ability to hand out locally grown, nutritious produce is a wonderful feeling,” Budahl said.

The initiative started as a group project led by community volunteers and organizations like the Alaska Community Action on Toxics’ Yarcucopia, the Anchorage Permaculture Guild, Adrift Gardens, Anchorage Community House and the Anchorage Community Land Trust. The garden was funded by a mini-grant through the Anchorage Mayor’s Office.

The garden now sits where two condemned apartments connected to the Lutheran Social

Services building once stood. The dilapidated structures were torn down in 2016, and left a large, undeveloped area that needed a new purpose.

“We have wanted to construct a garden in that space for a while,” Budahl said. “We just could not find the resources needed to break ground.”

In late 2018, staff at Lutheran Social Services reached out to Alivia DeBusk for advice on how to get a garden started on their property; their original meeting was postponed after the November 2018 magnitude 7.1 earthquake. The group finally met in April and decided to move the garden to the Lutheran Social Services of Alaska property.

“I went into the meeting expecting to help [Lutheran Social Services] build their own garden, I ended up leaving that meeting with a new space for the Spenard Community Garden, I was very happy.” DeBusk said.

The new garden space was built June 1, with the help of community volunteers and organizations who helped give the garden its start. Much of the garden was built in one day, with planting happening the following week.

With the garden now located next door to the

Lutheran Social Services food pantry, DeBusk hopes to get families who use the pantry involved in the gardening process.

“I want to use [gardening] as a way to connect people to the food and to the earth,” DeBusk said.

Those interested in volunteering at the Spenard Community Garden can contact DeBusk at [adriftgardens@gmail.com](mailto:adriftgardens@gmail.com).



# ‘We’ll have a parade!’

WORDS AND PHOTOS COURTESY  
OF MONIQUE MARSAN

I recently came across *The Spenardian* while doing research about Joe Spenard for a cousin’s family tree. The name jumped off the page. I clicked on the link and saw a caricature of Joe in his famous yellow outfit, stub cigar and all. When I tried to order the magazine, the website was not set up for international orders, which led me to contact the people at *The Spenardian*. They were very excited to hear from a relative of Joe Spenard. My grandfather, Adélard, was Joe’s brother.

I briefly told *The Spenardian* about my trip to Anchorage many years ago. That’s when they asked me if I would write an article about it for *The Spenardian*. I agreed.

In the summer of 1998, I travelled the Yukon in Canada. I flew from Ottawa, Ontario to Calgary, Alberta, then I took a train through the Rockies to Vancouver, British Columbia, then a ferry from Vancouver to Vancouver Island, then a Canadian ferry north of the island from Port Hardy to Prince Rupert, where I took an American ferry through the inside passage to Skagway. I boarded a bus from Skagway to Whitehorse, Yukon.

There, I stayed with a couple I met in Ottawa who had invited me to visit the Yukon.

Once there, given that I was so close to Alaska, I felt that I could not go back home without visiting Anchorage and Lake Spenard. If I didn’t, I would regret it. I rented a car — my fifth mode of transportation — and off I went to Anchorage. My first stop was the Anchorage Museum because I knew they had recently featured a Joe Spenard exhibit.

When I arrived, it was closed for lunch. I was so disappointed, but I took a chance and knocked on the door. Someone opened it. I introduced myself and as I was going to be in Anchorage for only a few hours, I asked if I could be let in. I had no idea that my name would provoke such a response.

The door was swung open and the museum worker was so happy to meet me. I was given access to all the material the museum had on Joe Spenard and was allowed to photocopy anything I wanted. She also telephoned the State Archivist in charge of the Joe Spenard file, Lawrence Hibpshman of the Alaska State Archives. He

was on holiday, but someone got his files from his office and they were ready for me when I got there. I couldn’t believe how well I was received. Larry and I have since corresponded and we continue to do so. We have exchanged information about Joe over the years.

I told the museum worker that my Spenard family was thinking of travelling to Anchorage in 2000. She was so elated, she exclaimed, “We’ll have a parade!” The city probably would have done so because I had seen a newspaper article in Larry Hibpshman’s files about a visit of Joe’s wife’s niece from California to Spenard in 1960. The news and details of her visit were on the front page of the newspaper!

Unfortunately, our family didn’t go because it was going to be too expensive for many of us.

My next visit was Lake Spenard and the Regal Alaskan Hotel, which is now the Lakefront Hotel. On my way over, I stopped on Spenard Road and my friend who was travelling with me took a picture of me next to the street sign.

What a feeling I experienced when I arrived at the lake. I knew that the hotel was located where my great uncle Joe had his dance pavilion. I went in and had a meal at The Flying Machine Restaurant. On the last page of the menu I read: "Joe Spenard found the future site of this hotel by a moose trail, now Spenard Road, in 1922."

However, the year is wrong; Joe was in Sacramento by then. According to the Alaskan historian Robert N. DeArmond, Joe and Edith arrived in Anchorage in early 1916 and left Alaska in late 1917. I have found Joe and Edith listed in

the 1921 Sacramento City Directory.

I told the waitress that Joe Spenard was my grandfather's brother. Once again with the special treatment, she brought me a box of old photographs to look through, but I realized that they were photos after Joe had left the area. Still, it was so nice of her to do this for me. I was also given a copy of the menu which I still have.

I decided to stay the night at the hotel because I very much wanted to tour the city before leaving. I telephoned a tour service that night and left a message with my name. I was

picked up the next morning and the driver began the tour with the story of Spenard Road and Joe Spenard. He was making him out to be quite "colorful." When my friend told him that I was a Spenard and Joe's grand niece, I remember him looking at me in his rear-view mirror in disbelief. I can still see the look in his eyes. He was so overjoyed and said that he thought he had misheard my name on his voicemail. At one point he said, "Wait 'til I tell my wife I had a Spenard in my car!" (I believe his wife was involved with a genealogical society).





I left Anchorage with a sense that Joe Spenard was so beloved by the people. Yet, he and Edith had been there for such a short time. How could he have made such an impression on the people?

I was very grateful for the way I was received everywhere I went in Anchorage.

There is a lot of information in Alaska and on the Internet about Joe, but Spenardians do not have any information about his Canadian roots. You might know that he was born in 1879 in Ottawa, Canada and his parents were Alexandre Spenard and Emilie Martel, but that isn't all.

Most of you do not know that Joe came from a family of 12 children; nine boys and three girls. However, two boys died of croup at a very young age. For most of his life, Joe was raised in a family of 10 children. He was the fourth child; my grandfather was the twelfth.

The family name "Spénard" was originally Spennert and of German origin. The first ancestor to arrive in Canada was Andre Spennert. However, the French speaking people in Quebec City in Canada had trouble pronouncing the name so the spelling was changed to the people's pronunciation. On his marriage certificate in

1690, the priest entered his name as André Spénard, but André signed his true name, Andre Spennert, including no accent on the "e" in his first name.

Joe was baptized Joseph Léon Spénard, yet he used the name Joseph Arthur Spenard. Why? No one really knows. This is only a speculation on my part, but his brother just before him who died at the age of two and a half was named Arthur. Did Joe take on Arthur's name in memory of him? We will never know.

To be continued.



# RESTORATION AND PRESERVATION: DAYLIGHTING FISH CREEK

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY  
KATHRYN DUFRESNE

Fish Creek runs through and under the Spenard neighborhood, with six miles of the creek currently running through storm pipes added in the early 1960s to make way for the development of roads, railway and channelization. The creek now funnels under such locations as the Midtown Mall and the BP Energy Center.

The non-profit Friends of Fish Creek is looking to change that.

“[Friends of Fish Creek] was the brainchild of many different people who had the long-time desire to see Spenard’s beleaguered creek come back to the surface and be rehabbed,” Karen Button, Friends of Fish Creek Board member, said. “The two people who started it were myself and Jay Stange (Spenard Community Council President), but I would say it was a collaborative effort for certain.”

Friends of Fish Creek is looking to “daylight” — or bring the creek back above ground — hoping

to produce a more natural course for the waterway.

The Alaska Watershed Council notes in the Creek Report Card for the area — published in 2013 — that salmon still ran up Fish Creek in 1916. From 42nd and Lake Otis to Shelikof, “the creek is above ground and is important wildlife habitat. It then goes underground and emerges again in Spenard except for a brief daylighting at Cuddy Park.”

Habitat restoration is at the heart of the Friends of Fish Creek’s mission, as well as emphasizing the desire for the community to gather around the creek.

“We envision that we’ll be able to have connectivity east to west for a bike and pedestrian trail,” Button said. “Rehabbing the creek will help to mitigate flooding and we look to see it be a model for green infrastructure.”



However, with the plan in its early stages, barriers for the rehabilitation of the creek start at water pollution.

“I have friends who live right on Fish Creek and I’ve seen it after it rains and it’s very apparent that it’s receiving a lot of surface runoff,” Gillian O’Doherty, a habitat biologist with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, said. “Before you really wanted to reintroduce salmon into a system, you want to make sure the water quality is sufficient to support them.”

According to O’Doherty and ADF&G, one mile of Fish Creek is currently labeled as anadromous or having species that migrate between the sea and freshwater. Major fish blockage exists near the railroad crossings on Northern Lights.

“It’s the first thing they would need to address,” O’Doherty said. “At the downstream most extent, it’s [blocked] at the lowest crossing down at the end of La Honda Drive [near Rustic Goat].”

The creek’s main source of pollution exists from fecal coliform bacteria, sourced from urban stormwater runoff and waterfowl feces. The Alaska Watershed Council notes that removing Fish Creek from the Impaired Waterbody Listing should be a main priority for the daylighting project, and progress has already been made through efforts in coordination with the Environmental Protection Agency.

“With a big project like this, you have to break it into chunks,” O’Doherty said. “For fish passage, what’s critical to us is knowing that we’re opening up access to good quality habitat.”

Rehabilitating the area holds the hope of providing watersheds for public use and recreation, as well as returning historical salmon streams to the area.

“We would like to have salmon back in Spenard, and the other thing is to acknowledge the long arc of history of the Dena’ina people and the fish camps that they had here,” Button said. “This is Dena’ina homeland, and it’s really important to us in the process of rehabbing the creek that the arc of history doesn’t begin with the founding

of Anchorage and the urbanization that drove Fish Creek underground, but the history of the people who live in this area.”

Ch’atanaltsegh Liq’aka Betnu is the original name for Fish Creek, according to Dena’ina elder Shem Pete, as recorded in “Shem Pete’s Alaska” – Ch’atanaltsegh meaning “yellow water comes out” and Liq’aka Betnu meaning “King Salmon Creek.”

In a resolution by the Anchorage Assembly in 2018, spearheaded by Assembly Members Eric Croft and Austin Quinn-Davidson, Ch’atanaltsegh’s daylighting has been supported unanimously under the Anchorage 2040 Land Use Plan, funneling Municipal funds toward the project.





# ON AIR: AN UNSUNG HERO OF ALASKA RADIO

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WORDS BY AUDRI PLEAS  
PHOTO BY YOUNG KIM

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As the University of Alaska goes through budgetary turmoil, it is not without reminiscing about past community leaders who were cognizant about their neighbors through advocacy and innovation. For myself, I look to the Father of Television in Alaska, Augie Hiebert. To understand his impact is to recall a jovial time of growth — specifically the creation of KENI — Anchorage’s second broadcast station.

Tucked away near West High School are the former dwellings of the Midnight Sun Broadcasting Company’s original KENI structure. Since the building transitioned to a private residence a few things have changed; KENI now resides in the Dimond Center and is under the ownership of iHeartMedia.

Entrepreneur Austin ‘Cap’ Lathrop solicited one of the architects who worked on his 4th Avenue Theatre to design the station. Their first broadcast occurred on May 2, 1948 — but Hiebert would be the only one of the duo to see KENI’s evolution a couple of years later. Most may only summon Lathrop as the man behind the vacant theatre and not as a media mogul.

Sheila Toomey, an award-winning journalist who worked for both ADN and the Father of Statehood Robert Atwood’s Anchorage Daily Times, was a last-minute stand-in as a UAA adjunct instructor as I wrapped up my double major of History and Journalism and Public Communications. Toomey majestically evoked the essence, prowess and determination of past influencers and pioneers eliciting a picture of comradeship coupled with conflict through her storytelling.

Toomey illustrated the stark contrast and blistering differences between certain key figures. While Atwood was an outspoken ally in the quest for statehood, Lathrop was searingly against it.



Lathrop would pass away a little over two years after KENI's first broadcast. To speak of Lathrop is not without acknowledging the great strides made by Hiebert, who — as an engineer — helped him establish two broadcast stations in Alaska, the first being KFAR in Fairbanks.

Hiebert would go on to establish Alaska's first television station — KTVA — in 1953. The homegrown nature of our broadcast media would be undoubtedly bleak without his foresight and desire to lace, and promote, telecommunications throughout the state.

KENI may still be broadcasting; however, another entity that Hiebert helped get its start may not in the near future. Without his assistance and steadfast support of KRUA, University of Alaska Anchorage's college radio station, would not exist in its current capacity.

In 1987, the college station borrowed a small transmitter to conduct their first broadcast as KMPS. The radio waves melodically sailed through the phone lines of the campus dorms before coordinating with the FCC to become an FM station a couple of years later. Hiebert maintained a presence around the organization years after their first FM broadcast on February 14, 1992, offering guidance and a bounty of resources.

Without Hiebert, some of us would not be able to say we volunteered at or ran a college radio station nor have the ability to work in the professional broadcast landscape to produce news in the state. He was voraciously passionate about ushering in new waves. Someone who thought about the next generation as our future, not as competition.

# Diamond in the rough

WORDS BY VICTORIA PETERSEN  
ILLUSTRATIONS SHARA KAY DIAMOND

Being a tattoo artist was always Shara Kay Diamond's childhood dream.

When she was young, Shara's parents quit letting her borrow their check-writing pens when they would go out to eat because she would use up all the ink drawing on the disposable placemats. One day, her uncle mentioned, "You should be a tattoo artist, then people would wear your art."

She eventually studied art at the University of Alaska Anchorage and has since been recognized for her work in Best in Show, Juror's Choice, Honorable Mention, and was even awarded Best in State at an ASAA all state art competition.

Shara grew up on the Arctic side of Spenard and spent many hours playing games at the Space Station, watching \$2 movies at Bear Tooth and cruising the strip with her fellow teenage muscle car enthusiasts.

"I love living in midtown, especially in the Spenard area because of its unique/gritty charm," she said. "It still feels the same even though there have been new businesses popping up. Whenever I come back from being out of town for an extended period of time, I see a prostitute, I think to myself, 'I'm home.'"

Shara, a lifelong Spenardian, is constantly learning and trying new techniques challenging concept and design. Her inspiration comes from her love of nature — specifically birds and reptiles — the unknown and the search for truth.







★SHAI





Shara also works in other mediums outside of tattooing, exploring symbolism and continuing to build her portfolio as well as artistic presence in her community. She plans to continue to build her portfolio by revisiting the painting medium in full depth, to explore symbolism and visuals that can induce healing.

“It is a very special opportunity to have the trust of someone I have only met briefly, to take their dreams and bring them into reality,” she said.

Find Shara at The Hole Look, Tuesday through Saturday. [sharakaytattoo@gmail.com](mailto:sharakaytattoo@gmail.com).

SHARA KAY★



# WHEN LIFE WAS SIMPLE

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WORDS BY QUINN CHRISTOPHERSON  
PHOTO BY YOUNG KIM

When I hear planes fly over wherever I am, I'm immediately brought back to running around our well-kept backyard of my childhood home. Dad worked long hours to keep us four kids and our mom living in our single family home in Spenard. We were middle class with a Ford Taurus sitting in the driveway. We had a painting of Lake Hood hanging above the fireplace. Lake Hood is where we took the dog, and spent days in the sand and sun when nothing mattered. I used to fantasize about stepping into one of those float planes along the lake, just to sit in the seat to see what the pilot saw for a second. I never got in one, but I got this tattoo to remind me of when life was simple.

# S-U-Z-I

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY  
MICHAEL WANZENRIED

One of the strange things about living in a place like Spenard — where its history is still palpable and people from who lived it are still around — is that your present feels continually tangled with it. An unexpected benefit of the social stigma surrounding Spenard, however, is that it has effectively provided my almost-daily aimless, meandering walks around the neighborhood with a degree of solitude I don't always find on some of the trails in Kincaid or elsewhere. Outside the more commercial districts, there are so few people outside their cars that if it weren't for the constant noise, you could almost pretend the city was temporarily abandoned. It also probably explains most of the graffiti.

In 2017, recently unemployed and enjoying the first really sunny morning walk of that year's breakup, I was surprised to see a neighbor standing outside of his house. When he noticed me, he gestured with a bottle of goo-be-gone and bristle brush at some freshly scrubbed letters on his retaining wall and demanded to know if I had any idea who did this.

From behind a skim of blue liquid, I could make out these almost cursive and sloppily joined letters: S-U-Z-I. Although his question was probably rhetorical, I was aware enough of the movie trope where criminals return to the scene of their crimes that I shook my head no and lingered long enough to ask what happened. Ap-

parently, the one he was working on was new that morning and likely done out of revenge for two others he had scrubbed away a few days before. The older ones had the same letters but were done in a slightly different, more angular style.

When my neighbor returned to his wall, I scooted toward the path paralleling International Airport Road. Although it felt too serendipitous to be a coincidence, I came across another Suzi in the pedestrian tunnel. Then, an abundance of them strewn across the retaining wall. Different designs. Bubble lettered ones. Some with little bombs beside a notation for the year they were produced, and so forth. Finding more on dumpsters and fences closer to my neighborhood, it was clear Suzi had been busy for some time.

I think the answer to how I missed these after walking through the area so many times could be reduced to two things. The least satisfying would be to blame the winter darkness. More likely, in the absence of some motivation to take actual notice, Suzi tags — like much of the graffiti in Spenard — are seen, but rarely results in a lasting impression. Perhaps it was meeting someone engaged in some kind of struggle that started it, but after that day, I could not help but see Suzis everywhere — and they were everywhere.



Since then, I've found Suzis on just about every conceivable public surface minus (to the best of my knowledge) homes or vehicles. Suzis vandalize garbage cans and dumpsters, conduit boxes, boundary markers, railroad bungalows, a gluten-free restaurant, retaining walls, a pedestrian overpass, street signs, a Hawaiian sushi place, political signs, light poles, railroad crossing equipment, benches, planters, CON-EX boxes, fences, sheds, culverts, tunnel walls, support columns, a Polaris dealership, a ping pong table, several bridges, rocks and Spenard Builders Supply on Minnesota.

I can't say being able to see Suzi brought any measurable improvement to my life. I also can't say whether my walks started revolving around finding new ones.

I can say finding a new one provided a jolt similar to the dopamine rush you get from reading a text from an ex you know better than to engage with. It's not what you want but it's what you got.

Things between Suzi and I, however, took a strange turn one afternoon while walking from the not-quite-a-park at Northwood and Spenard in the alley behind Thai Siam and Out of the Box. Here I discovered a kind of primordial soup to Suzi's struggle with finding the just-right graphic representation. A place that was the equivalent of the notebook I presume other

taggers use to play with ideas before going public.

Without getting too bogged down in describing Suzi's stylistic trajectory, suffice to say these locations provided a rough outline of Suzi's evolution from uncomplicated printed renditions of Susi, Suze, Sooze, and Soosie before committing to Suzi — then cycling through increasingly joined, angular then organic, and finally abstract designs that, aside from a creative low point where anthropomorphic characteristics like a mouth and eyes became occasional features, seemed to indicate the realization of a vision.

The last incarnation of Suzi was largely abstract, written in a single motion, with a mirror image quality to it that, while recognizing it for the vandalism it is, was clearly superior to previous attempts. Based on the number of repetitions I saw, it seemed Suzi had finally found something permanent.

In a way, I could identify with this struggle. In elementary school, I found myself in a class with three other Michaels. In an attempt to reject my school given name of Mike W. I tried alternate spellings. I tried Michael with the 'e' and 'a' reversed but that felt too close to a misspelling. I stuck with M-y-k-e for a few months before I realized what an emotional and psychological effort it would take to make it permanent.





Not only did a failure to be consistent with it cause some confusion with the other Michaels, but when the teacher corrected the spelling of my chosen name, I was unprepared to defend my new self. I was no M-y-k-e. And for this, I will give taggers like Suzi some props for the emotional labor they have to undergo.

A side effect of becoming personally invested with Suzi is I came to have higher expectations for them. Not only did poorly executed tags cause my eyebrows to arch — if you're going to go through all the trouble of coming up with a design for your vandalism, at least try to be consistent with it — I also became sensitive to how few other tags there were to compare against Suzis. Clone, Niko, Grsy, Bent&Cream tags

appeared with some regularity but not in a way that felt competitive. They generally occurred alongside each other and not, as occurs in other cities or places in Anchorage, in some kind of crowded competition with each other for dumpster space and recognition among peers.

The only tag that consistently topped a Suzi tag was another Suzi. At first, instances where Suzi returned to update or modify old Suzi tags seemed like a strange thing to do. When I noted suspicious similarities in the 'e' of an early Suzi tag with that of nearby Clone and Bent&Cream tags, I felt both a sense of betrayal and extreme pity. Suzi must be one of the loneliest taggers in the world.



TART

JED





If Suzi had been having, as I now think, a territorial struggle with themselves for the last few years, the effort to find the just-right tag became all the more bizarre. Why bother tinkering around the edges when the purpose of a tag is claiming responsibility for vandalizing something? Also, if there is essentially no one else you're in competition with, who cares what your tag looks like? Either your peers respect you or they don't. I hope they wouldn't withhold praise based on perceived quality. Ultimately, it seemed like Suzi was working at cross purposes.

On one hand, they're scribbling on everything in sight — the hallmark of a typical tagger. On the other hand, they seemed to crave some recognition for doing it in a way that seemed more artistic. Suzi's very public process of self-discovery achieved an aesthetic of sorts that their process could never lift out of mere vandalism. This conundrum shows why the common tag is so annoying.

Unlike other varieties of graffiti that use spray paint or stencils to make some kind of commentary on the world that the viewer can agree or disagree with, tags like Suzi are more depressing in their essential navel-gazing narcissism. The message carried by such a tag — be it simply printed or more complex — will always be reduced to me, me, me, me and me.

For many reasons, you would be forgiven for dismissing Suzi's work as largely uninteresting, a public blight, embarrassingly amateurish, or simply failing to engage the public in a conversation about the intersection of artistic expression and the defacement of property. The only thing Suzi seems to have added to Spenard over the last few years, besides widespread anger and frustration, is a sense of grittiness that people tend to associate with the old Spenard.

As a kind of postscript to what will become of Suzi's efforts, this year's breakup came with a thorough spring cleaning. Where the loss of Suzis could once be reliably attributed to municipal or waste management workers painting over their property, a large number of Suzis were reclaimed in a less predictable and uncoordinated ways: by home and small business owners throughout Spenard with layers of blue and yellow paint, and less striking — but no less efficient — municipal-styled gray and off-white blotches.



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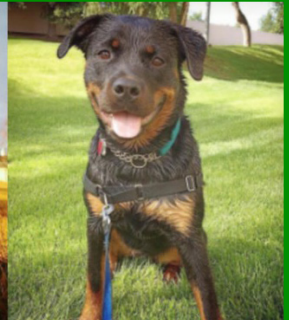
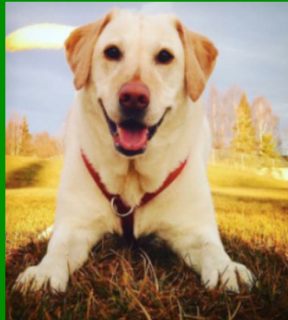
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“If you can handle Koot’s on a Wednesday night, then most clubs down south will be a breeze,” Kass Smiley, local comedian and independent producer, said.

Smiley has been an active player in the local scene for almost 10 years. Originally a musician, Smiley gave comedy a shot when a stranger heard a comedic song she wrote and invited her to an open mic that was more comedy-friendly. She took him up

on his offer, and after that, was hooked.

“Laughs felt better than singing sad folk songs to people who didn’t want to hear them every week,” Smiley said.

For many of the regulars at Koot’s, like Matt Burgoon, a Minnesota transplant who performs at open mics around town every week, comedy is a passion.

“I get jobs where the hours I work won’t interfere with shows at night or weekends,” Burgoon said. “While I was in college I scheduled my classes around when I do comedy. I’m always kind of thinking about it in the back of my head.”

Though the scene is passionate, it’s deflating, with many comics noting a steady decline over the past decade.

“In any other city there would be a comedy club next to a metro or bus line that operates Wednesday through Sunday,” Smiley said. “We don’t have that in Alaska.”

This time, fondly remembered by local comics, was the golden age of Anchorage comedy. Led by Alaska comedy legend Greg Chaille, now a manager for popular comedian Doug Stanhope, Koot’s was the place for nationally-known comics like Andy Hendrickson and Billy Wayne Davis to perform.

“Back then, Koot’s was bringing up headliners every other week,” John Norris, part-time Anchorage comic and full-time video producer, said. “If we didn’t eat shit on stage, we were able to open for the headliners.”

Now, people like Smiley and Norris are trying to light the fire once again. Last year, Norris started Bear Bones Comedy, working as an independent producer to bring national talents like Kristen Toomey, Barry Rothbart and

Beau Johnson to Alaska. In April, Smiley kick-started the Alaska B4UDie Comedy Festival, a six-night event featuring more than 50 national comedians. Of the 18 shows Smiley produced, 10 of them sold out. She’s already begun plans for next year.

“I don’t want to see it die, so I’ll do what I can to help it grow,” Norris said.

### **The Last Laugh**

Coming to an open mic at Koot’s is like seeing people through a microscope. It’s a myopic place where you can see the very best and the very worst of people. On some nights, comics can crush it, and on others, they get crushed.

“Whether you’re doing a show in front of a hundred people and they’re all super excited or you’re doing it in front of three people and they don’t like you immediately; it’s really stressful,” Norris said. “The people that do it are really brave and really fun and are trying their best.”

Though comedy in Anchorage has seen brighter days, the comedians who populate the scene aren’t giving up. Just like the comics that make it a reality, the Anchorage comedy scene keeps powering through its set, rolling with the laughs, the applause and the silence.

“If I didn’t get some kind of satisfaction from it, I wouldn’t do it,” Smiley said.

# FACES OF SPENARD: LILA

WORDS BY MARIAH DEJESUS-REMAKLUS  
PHOTOS BY YOUNG KIM

When Lila Vogt moved to Anchorage in the late 1970s, she didn't feel at home until she discovered Spenard.

Lila grew up in Fairbanks and never thought she would end up in Anchorage, let alone a neighborhood that would make her feel like home.

"I never really felt at home here until '81 when I found this house because I kind of discovered Spenard and Spenard is very much like Fairbanks," Vogt said. "There are hand-built houses, people literally carving a home out of the wilderness... They use whatever building materials they can lay their hands on."

The one-story home she purchased on Lincoln Avenue was built in 1952 with two bedrooms added. It was her perfect starter home, though she knew it would be her forever home. She raised her two children in that neighborhood. She said there were more vacant houses than occupied homes. They had a pony, raised chickens and rabbits, and the traffic-free streets were her children's playground.

Lila immersed herself in Spenard and its culture. Her passion for Alaska history drove her to learn about the neighborhood, collecting old photographs and conducting interviews. She ended up working with Larry Hipschman, state histo-

rian, and Duke Russell, local Alaska artist, to research and present lectures in town.

"That was really an interesting experience because, like so much of history, it's written by man about man," Vogt said. "A woman has to do something really extraordinary to get a paragraph in a history book, so to speak."

During her time with Hipshman and Russell, Lila remembers how women she interviewed would say things such as "I didn't do anything," but Lila disagreed. These women came to Alaska, didn't know anyone and created a life out of nothing. She didn't believe it was true that men were the only ones responsible for building Spenard.

"I see those women as the unsung heroes throughout history," she said.

Lila's love for her neighborhood didn't stop there. As an active member of Spenard's community council, she recognizes the need for representation of the community's diversity.

"I know it's not easy, especially for immigrant people, to step up and just say, 'Here I am,' she said. "I want to be part of the community,' but they are part of the community."



She wants to see those people represented and participate in addressing the issues Spenard faces as a community, she said.

Lila began to see a change after some time though, watching the other houses in the neighborhood sit vacant for years or go through extensive renovations. One of the things that had drawn her to Spenard was the aesthetic of “fixer-upper” homes, houses that were built in the ‘40s and ‘50s and perfect for young Alaskans. Seeing that start to fade has

become her biggest concern, and she hopes “total gentrification” doesn’t happen in her lifetime.

The houses aren’t the only things changing, though. Local businesses in Spenard have come and gone, and some have stayed and changed over time. Lila noted The Writer’s Block as one of the places she frequents. Hogg Brothers Cafe (the building now houses Spenard Roadhouse) and Gwennie’s (when the kitchen was in a small trailer and next door to the old fire-

house near Benson Boulevard and Spenard Road) were old favorites. She and her children have been customers of Pancho’s Villa for decades, and Franz Bakery (formerly Sunrise Bakery) is another business she enjoys. Shopping locally is important to Lila, whether it’s buying artwork from an Alaskan artist or food from the bakery.

Though she isn’t materialistic, the walls in her home are adorned with various forms of art by local artists.





“If you like [the art], support the artist,” she said. “They can’t live on air.”

Reminiscing on the Spenard of yesterday, Lila remembers the neighborhood as “really curvy” with lively bars and drive-in liquor stores known as a red-light district.

“That’s when they weren’t too concerned about drinking and driving,” she laughed.

Though much of that has gone away, Spenard is still

home to Lila; she never had any thoughts of leaving.

“I would’ve loved to live more remote,” she said. “My daughter’s living in Talkeetna right now, and I love that lifestyle — being out and away from everything, but it just isn’t feasible.”

Lila hopes people will get to know Spenard’s community and see it’s a great place to live. Despite changes the neighborhood has gone through, there are parts of it that have remained constant. Fellow Spenard-

ians are building onto their homes instead of completely renovating them, and Lila appreciates them not turning the neighborhood into something it isn’t.

“I don’t mind improvements, but I just don’t want to see a total change of character,” she said, “You know, that’s what Spenard has always had, is character.”



# SPENARD DREAMING: DENALI DREAMS SOAP COMPANY HAS IT GOING ON

WORDS BY DARCY STEIN  
PHOTOS BY YOUNG KIM

Many years ago, I realized a conventional “nine-to-five” job was not for me. Kudos to those who can really sink their teeth into a big slice like that. But, for those of us who are resistant to taking such a plunge, wrapping soap three days per week during the tourist season at one of Anchorage’s only handmade soap shops sounded pretty ideal. A lucky find on the general labor section of Craigslist for sure. As soon as I walked into Denali Dreams to turn in my application, I knew it was a pretty rad place.

Ever walk, bike, or drive down the 2200 block of Spenard Road, right before you hit Hillcrest? Then you’ve probably smelled the tantalizing scent of bread baking at Franz, or a distinct and deliciously clean aroma that you can’t quite pinpoint because it smells like so many things at once. This is the “soap shop” smell, and it is often the first thing patrons notice as they enter the store.

Welcome to Denali Dreams Soap Company, a locally-owned handmade soap factory and small storefront in Spenard that is unknown to many Anchorageites, but shouldn’t be. Here, you can find all things nourishing, from soap with Matanuska glacial silt in it, to salve for your dog’s paws, a packaging-free line of “Bearnaked” soaps and all-natural bug repellent

that you actually want to put on. In our culture of mass-production with access to endless products on Amazon, sustainable and locally owned operations often get overlooked or forgotten. Luckily for all of us (and our skin), this is not the case for Denali Dreams.

So who’s behind this operation you ask? Meet Caitlin Sombatratanakul (it rhymes with “wombat-mechanical”). Caitlin started working at Denali Dreams Soap Company in the summer of 2005; one of the two owners was her then-boyfriend’s mom. She got hired as a seasonal employee labeling lip balms to help out with the busy Christmas holiday. Caitlin loved working with her hands and enjoyed the relaxed and therapeutic work environment. She moved through several positions at the shop, eventually learning the age-old tradition of soap making.

Fast forward 10 years: Caitlin is still working for the original owners of Denali Dreams, and they approached her to purchase the business from them. Caitlin knew she would own her own business someday, she just didn’t know what it would be. This was her big opportunity and she accepted it graciously. After a somewhat long yet seamless transition and a last-minute miracle that gave Caitlin the funds for such a transaction, the business was hers.





If you know this block of Spenard, you're aware it has undergone a drastic makeover within the last few years.

Caitlin explained that in years before, the road wasn't as safe for pedestrians or cyclists, and motorists were not as mindful of them either. Now, the sidewalks are wide enough for more than one person at a time, creating a more inviting environment for people to walk or bike down this end of the block, with less fear they'll meet their fiery end trying to cross the street after their

sweaty indoor cycle class to get a cold-pressed juice, or during their morning bike commute to work.

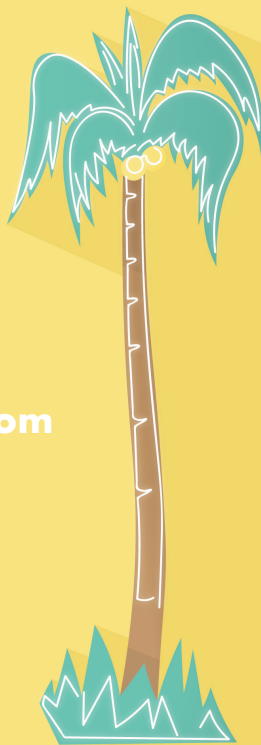
"The desire to be here has changed," she said.

Caitlin remembers when she first started working at the shop she only had three walk-in customers per week. Back then, the shop had more of a mysterious air (it was mostly a wholesale operation, so the large front windows were cloaked in lace curtains, and half of the current storefront

was an employee lunch area), and way less foot traffic.

Now, customers come into the shop on a regular basis throughout the day, drawn in by the lovely aroma that's being wafted over them, or having seen a beautifully wrapped bar of Denali Dreams soap at a tourist shop downtown, or just because they are curious what sort of business is going on inside the bright pink building on the north side of Spenard.

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# THE RED TRIPLEX ON NORTHWOOD DRIVE

WORDS BY AND PHOTOS  
COURTESY OF MIZELLE MAYO

Before I stepped foot in Anchorage, I lived at the tip-top of Alaska: Utqiagvik, formally known as Barrow. The weather conditions prompted us to often stay inside because of its never-ending cold, limited daylight.

The opportunity to grow up in an environment filled with socialization, where we had family and more opportunities for education, was the reason my family decided to move to Anchorage. Our first stop and our first home was my grandparents' red triplex.

That red house, located on Northwood Drive in the heart

of Spenard, is filled with the richness of not just my childhood, but the relatives I had grown close to throughout my years.

In the early '70s, My grandma and grandpa, Perla and Casiano Mayo, came to Alaska from the Philippines in search of opportunity and a better life for their children. My grandpa came first, after finding a job at the pipeline. In 1973, my grandma and her first two children were able to move to Alaska, too. My grandma had three more children back home, and my family found themselves living between Alaska and the Philippines.

Growing up, my dad and his siblings went to Northwood Elementary School, Romig Middle School and West High School. During their adolescence, there were many house parties and gatherings at the triplex.

One time, things almost got out of hand when a party reached the full capacity, stretching into the porch and front yard. Now, the porch has been restructured and expanded to fit more of my nieces and nephews when we have family gatherings.





My dad and his siblings began adulthood and moved into various apartments, all within the vicinity of my grandparent's house.

Filipino culture is heavily invested in the importance of sharing our lives together. My childhood consisted of deep bonds with my cousins through picking raspberries in my grandparents' backyard (and the neighbor's, too). We did everything together, like share clothes, ride our bikes to the park, feed the ducks at the pond near the house and enjoy the cuisine of our grandparents.

Whenever we had a birthday or holiday, my grandma would make her signature dish: a pancit that stood above all other pancits I have ever tasted. She takes the time to make the noodles soft and juicy with lemon, combined with the tenderness of the chicken mixed in with the vegetables

— the dish was so incredibly mouth-watering, but I might be biased.

Moving from Barrow to Anchorage when I was five years old was a foreign feeling at the time. The overwhelming introduction to my 17 cousins and eight aunts and uncles was the best way to be welcomed to Anchorage and Spennard.

Stationed in the back lot of my grandpa's house was a small RV that was set right next to the fence with the grass growing taller than our heads at the time. It had this orange-golden glow to it, not just because this was our own little escape into our worlds, but because the orange stripes that wrapped around the RV were chipped and bits of the actual frame shined through when the morning sun rose.

My cousins and I cleaned out that RV and created a playhouse. Here, we would map

out where to find spiders and other hidden treasures. We each brought small pillows from our homes and placed new sheets of linen on the bed that was made for two in there. We wiped down the leather seats and the dining table that had a limp to it because one of the legs was missing. One of us found a mason jar and filled it with dandelions and placed it in the middle of our angled dining table. We all took turns making sure that the place was clean. It was a cherished place.

Growing up as the third set of Mayo's in our family, my siblings, cousins and I had the opportunity to grow in an environment where my grandparents taught us the importance of sharing. We shared our food, our stories and legends. We grew up on the morals of selflessness and compassion for people. I am glad that I was introduced into Spennard with my family.



## Back in my day...

WORDS AND PHOTO  
BY DAWN LINDSAY

This is a photo of Norman Sparks, William Thompson and myself — Dawn Lindsay — in front of Foodland Grocery, which was located at the corner of Spenard Road and Minnesota Drive. A Holiday and Brown Jug are now there.

We lived in Spenard at the corner of 36th Avenue and Oregon Street, a few blocks from Foodland, in a house owned by Norman.

Norman first started renting

out rooms to friends, four UAA students in the winter of 1989. That summer, the house landed on the Anchorage map as an iconic and slightly infamous community-style house and hang-out spot for the twenty-something crowd. It was simply known as The Oregon House.

Spenard had a seedy underbelly then — as it does now — and Foodland employed a menacing, full-time security guard to patrol the parking lot and

front door. They would follow people around the store if they seemed suspicious. I remember being slightly terrified of him.

Trips to the old, run-down Foodland grocery store were a part of life for Oregon House residents. At 7 p.m., the greasy spoon deli counter items were marked down 50 percent and broke students from the O House would swoop in for cheap eats.



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