

# 1000

*years  
since the birth  
of an Alaskan  
legend ...*



*... Elizabeth  
Peratrovich's  
spirit flies on*



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to Dec. 1, 1958



## FLASHBACK TO 1945

# Super Race Theory Hit In Hearing

## Native Sisterhood President Hits at "Rights" Bill Opposition

Editor's note: This story originally was published in the Feb. 6, 1945, edition of the Juneau Empire on Page 8.

Opposition that had appeared to speak with a strong voice was forced to a defensive whisper at the close of yesterday's Senate hearing on the "Equal Rights" issue. Mrs. Roy Peratrovich, Grand President of the Alaska Native Sisterhood, the last speaker to testify, climaxed the hearing by wringing volleying applause from the galleries and Senate floor alike, with a biting condemnation of the "super race" attitude.

Reciting instances of discrimination suffered by herself and friends, she cried out against a condition that forces the finest of her race to associate with "white trash."

Answering the oft-voiced question, "will this law eliminate discrimination," Mrs. Peratrovich admitted that it would not; but, she queried in rebuttal: "do your laws against larceny and even murder prevent those crimes?" No law will eliminate crimes but, at least, you as legislators, can assert to the world that you recognize the evil of the present situation and speak your intent to help us overcome discrimination, she said.

### Opposition

Declaring their opposition to the law, unless it is amended, Senators Scott, Whaley, Collins and Shattuck spoke their feelings on the issue during the two hours of discussion: while Senators Walker and Cochran held forth in favor of the law, Senator Joe Green was chairman for the Committee of the Whole hearing.

Senator Allen Shattuck opened the discussion by repeating a statement he declared he had already made to Roy

Peratrovich, Grand President of the Alaska Native Brotherhood. "This bill will aggravate, rather than allay, the little feeling that now exists," he stated. "Our native cultures have 10 centuries of white civilization to encompass in a few decades. I believe that considerable progress has already been made; particularly in the last 50 years," Senator Shattuck declared.

### ANB President Talks

Peratrovich was then asked to the stand by Senator N.R. Walker and, following questions that established his education, background and right to speak for the Indians, Peratrovich was invited to express his views on the question before the Senate.

He pointed out that Gov. Ernest Gruening, in his report to the Secretary of the Interior, as well as in his message to the Legislature, had recognized the existence of discrimination. He quoted the plank adopted by the Democratic Party at its Fairbanks convention, which favored action on the natives' behalf. Reading the names of the members of the committee that helped to frame that plank, he pointed out that among them were members of the present Senate body.

"Only an Indian can know how it feels to be discriminated against," Peratrovich said. "Either you are for discrimination or you are against it, accordingly as you vote on this bill," he added.

### Has Amendment

Declaring that he had an amendment to propose to the measure, Senator Frank Whaley read a lengthy prepared address to the assembly, in which he labeled the measure a "lawyer's dream" and a "natural in creating hard feeling between the whites and natives." He stated his flying experience in many parts of Alaska as authority behind the opinion he had reached.

Declaring himself "personally assailed" by Senator Whaley in his remarks, Senator O.D. Cochran raised his voice for the bill, offering instances of discrimination which

came, he declared, from a list of similar occurrences in his own knowledge that would occupy the full afternoon to relate. As in his speech on the matter before the House, Senator Cochran made use of a theatre in Nome as a prime example of an establishment where discrimination is practiced.

Senator Walker supported Senator Cochran's views, declaring that he knows no instance where a native had died from a broken heart, but adding that he did know of situations where discrimination had forced Indian women into living lives "worse than death."

### Scott Talks

Senator Tolbert Scott, in one of his rare participations in debate, spoke from the heart his feeling that the bill, as it stood, would not accomplish the purpose intended. "Mixed breeds," he declared, are the source of trouble. It is they only who wish to associate with the whites. "It would have been far better had the Eskimos put up signs 'No Whites Allowed,'" he said. He stated his belief that the issue was being raised to create political capital for some legislators, and concluded that "white women have done their part" in keeping the races distinct; if white men had done as well, there would be no racial feeling in Alaska.

### Liquor Problem

Speaking from his long experience, among the Eskimo peoples in particular, Senator Grenold Collins furnished a sincere and authoritative voice in opposition to the bill. He supported Senator Scott's contention regarding mixed breeds by citing the well-being of the Eskimos of St. Lawrence Island, where white men have not worked their evil. "Eskimos are not an inferior race," he stated, "but they are an individual race." The pure Eskimos are proud of their origin and are aware that harm comes to them from mixing with whites. It is the mixed breed who is not accepted by either race who causes the trouble. Declaring, "I believe in racial pride" and do not think this bill will do other than arouse bitterness, Senator Collins lashed out at the sale of liquor to natives, as the root of the trouble.

A motion to report progress, offered by Senator Walker, was approved, following the testimony of Mrs. Peratrovich, which terminated discussion.



# Elizabeth Peratrovich, bringing light to all people

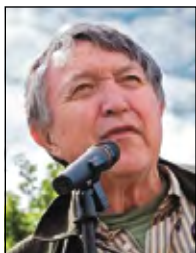
## Anti-discrimination moment of 1945 still illuminating lives

JAMES MASON

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How much can a society change in 100 years? How much can it change during a short speech to the Alaska Territorial Legislature?

This Fourth of July will mark the 100th anniversary of the birth of Elizabeth Peratrovich, a woman whose influence did much to turn white Alaskans away from the discriminatory practices common in the times before statehood. While she worked tirelessly all her life to improve the lot of Natives, it was her speech to the Alaska Territorial Legislature on Feb. 5, 1945, that marks a pivotal moment in Alaska history. Her testimony on that day is credited with influencing the Alaska Senate to pass the Alaska Civil Rights Act. In 1945 Alaska Natives were second-class citizens in their homeland, a land they'd inhabited for thousands of years. The newcomers who'd been arriving since the Russian sale of Alaska to the United States discriminated against the Natives, banning them from living in certain neighborhoods, not allowing them in restaurants or theaters, and discriminating in



Roy Peratrovich Jr.



COURTESY PHOTO

Elizabeth and Roy Peratrovich in Denver. Roy Peratrovich Jr. writes, "Mom was 42 and I was leaving for my freshman year at the University of Washington in Seattle. ... Kind of a sad day for them."

employment. Native leaders campaigned hard for an end to such practices.

The anti-discrimination bill was introduced by Edward Anderson, the Swedish-born former mayor of Nome. In those times the Alaska Territorial Legislature met for 60 days every other odd-numbered year. In 1943 the bill was defeated, this despite the fact that the nation was at war and Alaska Natives were serving in the nation's armed forces. The bill was brought before the Legislature again in 1945 and passed the House by a vote of 19-5. But the Senate was a tough nut.

"Who are these people, barely out of savagery, who want to associate with us whites, with 5,000 years of recorded civilization behind us?" asked Juneau Sen. Allen Shattuck, a primary opponent of the bill. Those aligned with Shattuck said the bill was unnecessary, that Natives had made great progress "in the 10 centuries since contact with white civilization." They said the bill would aggravate the already hard feelings between Natives and whites. The legislative process allowed an opportunity for citizens present to speak on the bill. Elizabeth Peratrovich was the last speaker.

"I would not have expected that I, who am barely out of savagery, would have to remind gentlemen with 5,000 years of recorded civilization behind them, of our Bill of Rights," she said in response to Shattuck. She went on to describe the treatment Natives lived with, such as signs in shop windows saying "No dogs or Natives allowed." When she finished, there was wild applause from the gallery. The Senate passed the Alaska Civil Rights Act by a vote of 11-5. It was the first law banning race-based discrimination in the United States.

Peratrovich was born in Petersburg and was a member of the Lukaax.ádi clan, in the Raven moiety of the Tlingit nation. Her son Roy Peratrovich Jr., now living on Bainbridge Island in Seattle, is also a Raven. He created a monument to his parents, a sculpture of bronze and stainless steel that stands in Anchorage's Peratrovich Park. Roy Jr., a retired engineer, explained by telephone that the work depicts Raven's bringing light to the world. And that, he says, makes the statue a fitting memorial to his parents, who worked to bring harmony to the people of Alaska.

"They also brought light to the world," he said.



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# Why my grandmother was so loved

## COMMENT

**BETSY PERATROVICH**

*For Alaska Newspapers*

*Editor's note: This was written in 1997 and is republished with permission of the Peratrovich family.*

Although terrified of the bogey man and "the thing under my bed," I wasn't afraid of encountering ghosts or goblins at Evergreen Cemetery — except of course, on Halloween. So, on Halloween, I took the long way home, but during the winter I was right there with the other kids — sledding down the gently sloping cemetery hill.

Unlike the other kids, you could often find me at the cemetery during the summer months as well. I had friends, but I was an odd sort of child, and I didn't mind being alone.

My parents weren't obsessed with knowing where I was every minute of every day, and they never knew I used to go there. This was before parents had to live in constant fear of their kids being kidnapped or otherwise harmed. Besides, this was Juneau. Where would somebody go if they kidnapped a child in Juneau? To the end of the road?

"Gramma's" grave was sheltered by one of the many graceful pine trees that forested the cemetery. I still remember how peaceful it was there, and how beautiful. Tall trees filtered out the bright sunshine as their huge branches overlapped on an ever-upward journey. After brushing off her headstone, I'd sit on the soft pine needles and wonder what she was like.

"Your grandmother would have loved you so much," they used to say. Or, "Your grandmother would have spoiled you." Beyond that, nobody talked about her much. Grandpa had never really gotten over her death, and he'd get choked up or misty-eyed when he spoke of her. And my father hardly mentioned her; it was probably painful for him as well. But I had never met her, so I used to feel cheated. Here lay this person that everyone seemed to love so dearly, and I didn't know why.

Since then I've slowly come to know my grandmother. Scraps of conversation and other bits of information have woven together to give me a somewhat threadbare account of her life. And threadbare though it may be, I now know why they loved her so. Sometimes I still feel cheated, but never for long. Because now, all I have to do is think about what she left me.

She enjoyed knitting, and she was good at it. I have a delicate newborn sweater she made, passed down to me along with the rose-patterned bone china cups and saucers she loved so dearly. But although I treasure these, what my grandmother left me, my most cherished inheritance, is that which cannot be seen; cannot be touched. You see, long before Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., began his crusade for equal rights in the Lower 48, my grandmother, Elizabeth Wanamaker Peratrovich, was determinedly fighting the same battle in Alaska. And she won.

In hindsight, it is fitting that Elizabeth, a Tlingit Indian, came into this world on Independence Day. Born in Petersburg, Alaska, on July 4, 1911, she was adopted by Andrew and Jean Wanamaker, also Tlingit. Andrew and Jean were Presbyterian missionaries who instilled their religious faith in Elizabeth; yet their lives were a curious blend of the old and the new. Perhaps the best example of cultural differences is offered by Andrew himself — who as a young boy had traveled from Sitka to Ketchikan in the last Tlingit war canoe, yet who would also live to see man land on the moon.

Elizabeth spent her childhood in small Southeast Alaska communities such as Klawock, Kake, Klukwan and Ketchikan. Upon graduating from Ketchikan High School, she attended a teachers college, Bellingham Normal School, in Bellingham,



COURTESY PHOTO

**Betsy Peratrovich** with a photo and bust of her grandmother, Elizabeth.

**"So who was Elizabeth Peratrovich? A civil rights leader? Yes, but this vibrant woman was also a beautiful, loving wife; a caring, nurturing mother; and a loyal and generous friend."**

— **BETSY PERATROVICH**

*Granddaughter of the Alaska civil rights champion*

Wash., now known as Western Washington University. Roy Peratrovich of Klawock, who graduated from Ketchikan High School along with Elizabeth, was attending the same college. The two would-be teachers fell in love and were married in Bellingham on Dec. 15, 1931. But since this was a time of economic hardship for many, the couple was soon forced to abandon their dreams of teaching and return to Klawock.

Their three children, Roy Jr., Frank, and Loretta, were born in Alaska. It was in Klawock that Elizabeth and Roy became heavily involved in the Alaska Native Brotherhood (ANB) and the Alaska Native Sisterhood (ANS).

The ANB and ANS were originally organized by Alaska Natives seeking full citizenship rights. Their adopted motto was "No taxation without representation."

Unfortunately, although citizenship was granted in 1924 to all American Indians including Alaska Natives, it held no guarantee of equal rights. Natives paid taxes, yet were denied many services. Numerous businesses sported signs such as "We Cater to White Trade Only," or "No Natives or Dogs Allowed." Typically, housing was segregated, as were schools and theaters. According to Vern Metcalf, in an article appearing in the April 1, 1986, edition of the Juneau Empire, "Coming in late to a movie one night in 1941, I noticed that the entire balcony seemed to be rooting for Indians in a Wild West shoot-em-up. When the lights went on, I found out why. ..."

As a result of their deep commitment to abolishing discrimination, Elizabeth and Roy quickly rose through the ranks of the ANB and ANS. Endeavoring to unite Native communities in the cause, they often spent their own money traveling to outlying villages. In addition to the financial burden of these journeys, there were other — perhaps more painful — hardships to be borne by the couple and their three children.

Travel was not the convenient matter it is today, and bringing small children along on these trips was all but impossible. Thus there were occasions that the young family endured separation, like the time my father had to stay at an orphanage in Juneau. Although this couldn't have been easy on the children, it must have been equally difficult for Elizabeth — a woman who once wept as she related that Native children were being counted "by the head, like cattle" by a school district seeking to reimburse the white teachers who had to teach them.

In 1940, Elizabeth and Roy agreed that if

their actions were to be of consequence, the family would have to move to Juneau, the capital city. Once in Juneau, they wrote letters and contacted government officials and community leaders to protest racially motivated inequities and to ask that unfair practices be stopped. They soon learned there were no laws prohibiting discrimination in the Territory of Alaska, and realized that in order for their efforts to eliminate discrimination to be truly successful, the first step had to be passage of equal rights legislation.

Assisted by Alaska's Territorial Gov. Ernest Gruening and congressional Rep. Anthony Diamond, Elizabeth and Roy obtained copies of anti-discrimination bills from around the country, which served as the foundation for Alaska's equal rights bill. First introduced in 1943, the proposed legislation was defeated. After two additional years of research and lobbying, the bill was reintroduced. It passed the House with little opposition, but when it reached the Senate it was the subject of intense controversy. One senator didn't want to sit next to Natives in theaters because they smelled. Another said, "Who are these people, barely out of savagery, who want to associate with us whites with 5,000 years of recorded civilization behind us?"

Roy Peratrovich was summoned to testify and did so; but when the floor was opened to the public, Elizabeth was the only person to voluntarily voice support for the bill. She immediately captured the attention of lawmakers and spectators alike by stating: "I would not have expected that I, who am barely out of savagery, would have to remind gentlemen with 5,000 years of recorded civilization behind them of our Bill of Rights. When my husband and I came to Juneau and sought a home in a nice neighborhood where our children could play happily with our neighbor's children, we found such a house and arranged to lease it. When the owners learned that we were Indians, they said 'No.' Would we be compelled to live in the slums?"

In the volatile atmosphere of the legislative gallery, Elizabeth stood her ground. Asked if an anti-discrimination law would eliminate discrimination, she quipped, "Do your laws against larceny, rape, and murder prevent those crimes? No law will eliminate crimes, but at least you, as legislators, can assert to the world that you recognize the evil of the present situation and speak of your intent to help us overcome discrimination."

The combination of Elizabeth's poise and dignity proved more than the bill's detractors could contend with. The bill passed the

## THE NAMESAKE



ROY PERATROVICH / COURTESY PHOTO

Earlier this year Roy Peratrovich Jr. said he surprised his daughter, Betsy, with this bronze bust of her that he calls "Namesake." "My daughter Betsy was named after the grandmother she never met," Roy says. "My mother, Elizabeth Peratrovich, passed away just seven months before Betsy was born. My mother would have been very proud of our Betsy — and that's what my father would tell her every time they met."

Senate that day, and was signed into law on Feb. 16, 1945. According to an article appearing in the Juneau Empire, "The once strong voice of opposition was quickly whittled to a defensive whisper. The 5'5" Indian woman stole the show. It was the neatest performance of any witness to yet appear before this session, and there were a few red senatorial ears as she regally left the chamber."

Elizabeth and Roy continued their work on behalf of Native rights, and other victories followed, including obtaining the right for Natives to be admitted to the Pioneer Home; winning workers' compensation benefits for Natives; having aid to dependent children extended to Natives; and ensuring that equalized payments were given to both Native and white recipients of old-age pensions. In 1955, Elizabeth attended the Convention of the National Congress of American Indians in Spokane, Wash., and was elected to their National Executive Council. Serving as the organization's Alaska field representative, she also traveled to Washington, D.C., for a conference on Indian Adult Education. A strong proponent of education, Elizabeth had always encouraged her children to get the best education they possibly could. Her elder son recalled that, when he was in high school, his mother would read the classics to him and a group of teenage boys every day after school. Although it's difficult to imagine a group of teenage boys looking forward to this type of activity, evidently they did; so much so, that if Roy Jr., was running late, his friends would try to find him so they could hurry him along.

It is said that Elizabeth usually had a big pot of stew or spaghetti on, which she was more than willing to share, and that she opened her home as well — often housing visiting basketball teams in their entirety — and, according to her husband, trying to adopt every stray cat in town. Friends and relatives remember her efforts to try to help her people integrate modern living with the Native way of life by sharing mail order tips and recipes for nontraditional foods; and offering travel advice for city-bound villagers, including inexpensive hotels and the best places to shop. An attractive, impeccably dressed woman, she also shared her fashion knowledge, and encouraged Native women to ask for help when shopping, rather than feel intimidated by salespeople.

So who was Elizabeth Peratrovich? A civil rights leader? Yes, but this vibrant



MAKING CIVIL RIGHTS HISTORY

# A LIFETIME OF FIGHTING

1900s

**MAY 1, 1908** Roy Peratrovich, Elizabeth's future husband, is born in Klawock.



COURTESY PHOTO

**Young Elizabeth** with her adopted mother, Jean Wanamaker. Elizabeth was born July 4, 1911, in Petersburg. She was adopted by Andrew and Jean Wanamaker, both Tlingit.

**JULY 4, 1911** Elizabeth Jean Wanamaker Peratrovich is born in Petersburg.

**1910s** Elizabeth's biological parents died, and she was adopted by Andrew (Chalyee Eesh) and Mary (Shaaxaatk'i) Wanamaker. Andrew was a lay minister in the Presbyterian church.

**1912** Alaska Native Brotherhood is founded.

**1915** Alaska Native Sisterhood is founded.

**1910s** Elizabeth attends elementary school in Petersburg, Sitka.

1910s

1920s

**1924** The U.S. Congress grants American citizenship to all Native Americans.



**1930** Elizabeth graduates from Ketchikan High School along with her future husband, Roy Peratrovich.

**1930-31** Elizabeth attends Sheldon Jackson Junior College in Sitka, and later Western College of Education in Bellingham, Wash.

1930s

**DEC. 15, 1931** Roy and Elizabeth are married.

**1932** Roy and Elizabeth move to Klawock, where it was less expensive to live during the Depression.

**1935** Roy Peratrovich joins the Alaska Native Brotherhood.

**1940** Roy Peratrovich is elected grand president of the ANB.

**1941** Roy and Elizabeth move from Klawock to Juneau

**DEC. 30, 1941** Roy and Elizabeth write a letter to Territorial Gov. Ernest Gruening complaining about "No Natives" signs in Juneau businesses.

**1943** The Territorial Legislature considers the state Anti-Discrimination Act for the first time.

1940s

**MARCH 12, 1943** Roy Peratrovich writes a letter published in the Ketchikan newspaper decrying the defeat of the Anti-Discrimination Act.

**FEB. 5, 1945** Elizabeth addresses the Territorial Senate during its debate on the Anti-Discrimination Act. She was the final speaker that day.

**FEB. 8, 1945** The Territorial Legislature passes the state Anti-Discrimination Act, the first such bill to become law in the United States.

**FEB. 16, 1945** Gov. Ernest Gruening signs the Anti-Discrimination Act into law.

**1952** Roy, Elizabeth and their three children (Roy Jr., Frank and Loretta) move from Juneau to Denver, Colo., where Roy works for the Central Bank and Trust Co. and studies at the University of Denver.

1950s

**1953** The Peratrovich family moves to Oklahoma as Roy is promoted to be a superintendent in the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

**1955** Elizabeth becomes a member of the executive committee of the National Congress of American Indians.

**DEC. 1, 1958** Elizabeth dies in Seattle after a long bout with cancer.



Gov. Ernest Gruening signs the Alaska Anti-Discrimination Act of 1945 as Elizabeth Peratrovich and state



COURTESY PHOTO

**Roy Peratrovich**, Elizabeth's husband.



COURTESY PHOTO

**Portrait of Elizabeth Peratrovich.**





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legislators observe. It was the first anti-discrimination act to be made law in the United States.



**Celebration of the "Flight of the Raven" sculpture dedication in downtown Anchorage on June 30, 2008, at the Roy and Elizabeth Peratrovich Park.**

PERATROVICH FAMILY / COURTESY PHOTO



COURTESY PHOTO

**Richard and Janice Jackson (center)** attend the Alaska Native Brotherhood convention in Saxman last October. At left is Dr. Walter Soboleff, who died in May, and at right is Alaska Native Sisterhood grand president emeritus Mary Jones.

## A role model for Alaska Natives

### COMMENT

**JANICE JACKSON**

For Alaska Newspapers

I greatly admire Elizabeth Peratrovich because she spoke up for all Native Alaskans. Elizabeth was the Alaska Native Sisterhood grand president in 1945 when she and her husband, Roy Peratrovich, the Alaska Native Brotherhood grand president, testified before the Territorial Legislature in Alaska on the anti-discrimination bill. Elizabeth was a strong, Tlingit lady who, along with her husband Roy, fought for Alaska's Native people.

Elizabeth and Roy represented all the members of the Alaska Native Sisterhood and Brotherhood who voted to bring forward the issue of discrimination in Alaska. Elizabeth and Roy rallied with the members of the ANB and ANS on behalf of Native Alaskans, who had gone to war for their country like other U.S. citizens, to have equal rights. The ANB and ANS is a nonprofit group who advocates for Native people on important issues.

Elizabeth Peratrovich is a wonderful role model for me as I serve my term as Alaska Native Sisterhood grand president. She displayed the leadership qualities of honesty and courage while bringing forth the issues of her people with determination and compassion. Her courageous speech in 1945 is distinguished for its impact in passage of the Anti-Discrimination Act in Alaska.

Elizabeth's relationship with her husband Roy was described by their son Roy Jr. as a "true partnership" because they did everything as a couple. Elizabeth and Roy traveled together throughout Alaska to represent their Native brothers and sisters in many important issues, such as employment, fisheries, health care and more. This is especially poignant because the Peratroviches were denied housing in Juneau simply because they were Native Alaskans.

Since my husband, Richard Jackson, is the ANB grand president and I am the ANS grand president now, it amazes me to look back at Elizabeth and Roy and wonder how they balanced their leadership roles while maintaining a family and home. They did so with impact and

dignity which is truly amazing. In my mind, Elizabeth must have been a godly woman. I like to think that she prayed for guidance every day as she sought answers to difficult questions.

Richard and I pray daily that God will guide us in making the right decisions for our Native people. We are also blessed to have mentors who help guide us; my parents, the executive members of the ANB and ANS, our elders, and other tribal leaders.

The goals of today are not the same as those Elizabeth and Roy faced because now we are faced with how to preserve our way of life, subsistence, our Native languages, and other cultural values, and eradicating the high suicide rate of our young people.

But today's leadership still requires the decision-making skills and compassion for our Native brothers and sisters as it did back in Elizabeth and Roy's time, along with a desire to do the right thing.

Recently Richard recalled meeting Roy Peratrovich and said, "I was privileged to meet Roy during my early involvement with the ANB during the Grand Camp conventions, and I was able to see how dedicated he was, respected, and I witnessed his example of selfless dedication for the ANB."

Elizabeth and Roy continue to help guide us through the example they left of outstanding leadership in helping our Native people to move forward. They had experienced firsthand how Native Alaskans were discriminated against, and using their positions in the ANB and ANS helped bring forth recognition that Native Alaskans deserved to have equal rights.

Each year we celebrate Elizabeth and Roy Peratrovich in Alaska, Washington, Oregon and California. Feb. 16 has been proclaimed Elizabeth Peratrovich Day in Alaska, and it gives us a chance to acknowledge that Elizabeth and Roy did a very fine job of representing the members of the Alaska Native Sisterhood and Brotherhood. Elizabeth and Roy selflessly dedicated their lives to advocate for all Native Alaskans, and we will proudly honor their memories every year.

*Janice Jackson and her husband, both of Ketchikan, are the first couple to serve simultaneously as grand presidents since the Peratroviches.*

TIMELINE COMPILED BY TONY HALL / ALASKA NEWSPAPERS

GRAPHIC BY ANNETTE POTTER / ALASKA NEWSPAPERS



# Being Elizabeth

## COMMENT

DIANE E. BENSON

For Alaska Newspapers

**B**etsy Peratrovich came into the theater at the Alaska Native Heritage Center and walked slowly to the stage. Her eyes scanned the 1940s gray wool suit, the Alaska Native Sisterhood googeinaa, and the white thin gloves. She circled around and looked at me dressed as her grandmother might have been in 1945 and said, "You look so much like my grandmother it's eerie."

Performing as Elizabeth Peratrovich over a six-year period was one of the most rewarding acting experiences of my life. It was never my intent to grow up and be an actress but after pipeline construction and no gas-line following I turned to school and there I found theater. It was a place to become something else away from the darkness of my own life; being characters — people — who did all kinds of daring things. Entertaining wasn't of much interest to me, but bringing history and the strength of Native people to life was; especially if it helped others to understand or experience our truth and "beingness." However, it became a more personal growth experience than I had expected — being Elizabeth.

In 1990 I sought to write a full-length, main-stage play about Elizabeth and Roy Peratrovich and the civil rights effort in Alaska, while never even considering that I might look like her. I had no funds to produce a play, yet I found myself on a two-year journey of research and fascinating interviews. In 1992, a cherished Tlingit elder, Cecilia Kunz of Juneau, shared stories with me over tea and dried fish, of her friendship with Elizabeth; of their activities and advocacy as young women in the Alaska Native Sisterhood (ANS), and her firsthand observations of Elizabeth's speech to the Territorial Senate hearing in February 1945. I felt so lucky to be talking with her. There is something so validating about having an elder take time with you. It was in talking with Cecilia that I learned several interesting details about Elizabeth that I incorporated into the play.

Elizabeth liked to knit — and evidently also to calm her anxieties — she knitted during the anti-discrimination bill hearings in 1945. Cecilia also told me about the day that Elizabeth and several of the ANS sisters moved a "No Natives, No Dogs Allowed" sign from in front of a restaurant. The sign was moved from the restaurant to a military service recruitment station. Native



PHOTO BY BETH SKABAR / ALASKA NEWSPAPERS; HISTORICAL PHOTO P01-3294 / ALASKA STATE LIBRARY PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION

Diane Benson has spent many years in the role of Elizabeth Peratrovich.

Americans served (and still serve) our country in record numbers. Imagine if the armed forces said, "No Natives allowed!"

In the 1940s, when these vivacious ANS women moved the sign, it was also a time when young Native men were serving in a war being fought against a horrid system of racism that sought to annihilate an entire people. But when the Native soldier returned home to Alaska during World War II he was not allowed to be seen walking on the street with his sister. No soldier,

whether Native or white, was allowed to socialize with a Native woman. That angered Elizabeth and Roy to no end. The more I learned about their efforts and the venerable way they chose to handle issues, the more excited I became.

I was not only excited but empowered. I had a tendency to rage rather than talk, or to withdraw all together when hurt by injustice. But in Elizabeth and Roy there was a dignity that even in the face of blatant injustice they maintained. Little did I

realize how that story, and Roy's passionate defense of all our servicemen and women, would affect me over 10 years later when I was performing the play through the Heritage Center, and my son was fighting in a war in Iraq. Every time I did the lines about how "many fine young Indian men are fighting in wars overseas, however their sisters are not allowed to publicly associate..." I felt what had to be Elizabeth's emotions too. What strength Elizabeth and Roy had, and what heart. When faced with the woefully unkind realities of war; the injustices of certain policies; the pain of social ignorance and prejudice; I remembered their dignity, and called upon their strength and the strength I knew our ancestors must have possessed.

In 2004 I was taken by surprise after a performance at the Wilda Marston Theatre in Anchorage when Betsy Peratrovich once again walked onto the stage; this time to gift me with a bit of her grandmother's embroidery work, forget-me-nots, in front of a packed house. It was a tangible piece of Elizabeth and her life and I was overwhelmed.

Elizabeth died when I was barely 4 years old, and so I never knew her, but I did get to know her husband and partner in the civil rights effort, Roy Peratrovich Sr. When curious about the history of the Alaska Native Brotherhood and Sisterhood, Roy took time to reiterate history and give me copies of some of his speeches to the ANB. He would speak about Elizabeth, the struggles with discrimination, and his pride in our people. Even though awestruck, I could not, at that time, appreciate the magnitude of their commitment to Alaska, to the ANB and ANS, and to their convictions.

Roy Sr. died in 1989 and as I privately mourned the absence of a great man, I began to realize the awesome influence they both ultimately had on my life, and the impact playing Elizabeth had in shaping my own sense of being and self-worth. Stories of Elizabeth, shared generously by her husband, their son Roy Jr., friends, and others over the years have given my life, as I know it has others, a dignity of spirit. May we all give something back to the efforts of those who dared to want, and who inspired others to want openly, a safer, more just society, believing in liberty and equality for all people.

*Diane Benson is a past two-term president of the Alaska Native Sisterhood, Camp 87, lifetime member of the National Congress of American Indians and active with the NCAI Veterans Committee. She is also an adjunct professor, writer and proud graduate of Alaska's own university system.*

## Ahead of her time — remembering Elizabeth Peratrovich



## COMMENT

MARK BEGICH

For Alaska Newspapers

**A**laska's young history is filled with stories that great movies are made of — adventure-seeking prospectors chasing rich gold deposits during the Klondike Gold Rush, or the life-saving efforts of dog mushers carrying serum along the Iditarod Trail to the diphtheria-stricken city of Nome. While these popular narratives illustrate the way many come to

**However, it was Elizabeth's passion, perseverance, and fearless leadership that made her a mother of one of the first major civil rights movements in the country.**

—SEN. MARK BEGICH  
U.S. senator, D-Alaska

know our great state, it is the lives of Alaskans such as Elizabeth Peratrovich that truly define the spirit of Alaska.

Born a century ago into the Raven moiety of the Tlingit Nation, Elizabeth spent her youth in Petersburg and Ketchikan. As a young adult, she attended Sheldon Jackson College in Sitka and Western College of Education in Bellingham, Wash.

In 1931, Elizabeth married Roy Peratrovich Sr., of Klawock. She was a well-educated Tlingit woman and a mother. However, it was Elizabeth's passion, perseverance, and fearless leadership that made her a mother of one of the first major civil rights movements in the country.

During this time in our nation's history, it wasn't uncommon for Alaska Natives, American Indians, and other minority groups to experience overt racism, discrim-

ination, and segregation. Businesses refused service to customers, schools designated drinking fountains for students, and landlords turned away potential renters.

Angered and impassioned by the poor treatment of Alaska's first people, Elizabeth and Roy wrote to Territorial Gov. Earnest Gruening. In the December 1941 letter, she wrote: "Our Native boys are being called upon to defend our beloved country, just as the White boys. There is no distinction being made there, but yet when we try to patronize some business establishments we are told in most cases that Natives are not allowed."

By early 1945, the Alaska Territorial Legislature was considering one of the first anti-discrimination bills in our nation's history. Elizabeth would soon give one of the most celebrated speeches in our state's

history in support of the bill. In part, she said, "I would not have expected that I, who am barely out of savagery, would have to remind gentlemen with 5,000 years of recorded civilization behind them of our Bill or Rights."

In these challenging times of a staggering national debt and cultural clashes, we need leaders who are not afraid to challenge the status quo and stand up for what is right. Elizabeth's work was not only a catalyst for Alaska Native civil rights, but a leadership legacy to which all Alaskans can aspire.

As we make tough decisions about the future of our state and our country, we need to be willing to face harsh criticism and do what is right — sometimes when it is not popular. When it came to civil rights for all, Elizabeth Peratrovich was ahead of her time; while her lessons of perseverance, passion and equality are timeless.

Happy birthday, Elizabeth. Thank you for your early vision and contributions to our state.

*U.S. Sen. Mark Begich can be reached at 877-501-6275.*



# A legacy to aspire to



**COMMENT**

**HEATHER KENDALL-MILLER**  
For Alaska Newspapers

As we reach the 100th anniversary of Elizabeth Peratrovich's birth, it is appropriate to pause and consider both the rich legacy of her activism against institutional racism perpetuated against Alaska Natives, and to consider whether Alaska today is free of the discrimination that she fought so courageously to eradicate. Elizabeth's legacy is well known. She is widely recognized for her work in support of the Anti-Discrimination Act that sought to ban the "No dogs or Natives allowed" signs that were common in public businesses throughout territorial Alaska. When the ban came up for consideration before the Territorial Legislature, Juneau Sen. Allen Shattuck spoke against it, arguing:

"Who are these people, barely out of savagery, who want to associate with us whites, with 5,000 years of recorded civilization behind us?" Refusing to be silenced, Elizabeth rose and offered the following response: "I would not have expected that I, who am barely out of savagery, would have to remind gentlemen with 5,000 years of recorded civilization behind them, of our Bill of Rights." Her testimony tipped the scales toward passage and in 1945 the bill was signed into law by Gov. Ernest Gruening. Elizabeth's efforts to eliminate discrimination and bring about equal rights for Alaska Natives are not merely historically significant; they have considerable relevance in today's world.

Nearly seven decades after the Anti-Discrimination Act was passed, I was recently reminded that actual change is slow in coming. In an article published in Alaska Newspapers recently, Stacy Deacon told how her family was denied housing in Anchorage because a prospective landlord pegged her family as village Natives who would likely leave him "high and dry" when the rent came due. Following on the heels of Elizabeth Peratrovich, Stacy did not take the racial insult or the landlord's disparate treatment passively. Instead, she filed her own Fair Housing Act lawsuit. While Stacy's lawsuit may prevail in curtailing the actions of a single landlord, the incident itself points to a larger problem. Indeed, as I circulated Stacy's story by email, I received far too many responses

from friends offering their own anecdotal stories of "a Native friend of mine in Sitka said they never had problems finding rentals in Sitka even though Sitka has a shortage of rentals, but nonetheless had problems in Anchorage" and "this is not the first time I have heard a story like this about Alaska Natives and rentals in Anchorage. I understand it's even worse in Fairbanks." Stacy's story illustrates that Alaska Natives continue to suffer disparate treatment from the private sector.

Institutional systems fare no better, a fact which statistics bear out. Take, for example, the Alaska Native Commission's facts and findings in 1993 that Alaska Natives made up just over 32 percent of the state's incarcerated population, despite the fact that Alaska Natives represented a mere 16 percent of the state's overall population and only 13.5 percent of the prison-age population. The commission also found that some 27 percent of all Native males between the ages of 14 and 17 were referred to the state juvenile intake system. The commission concluded that the high rate of incarceration of Alaska Natives was compounded by "a prevalent misunderstanding or misconception on the part of many non-Natives that only by administering 'Western justice' can there be justice, and this perspective is ultimately harmful to the pursuit of alternative dispute resolution strategies at the village level."

More recently a 2004 Alaska Judicial Report examined disparities for Native

defendants in felony proceedings. That report found that for all offenses combined, being Native was associated with longer total time incarcerated -- 93 estimated days for a Native defendant compared to 69 days for a comparable Caucasian defendant. In its Summary of Findings, the report stated that "[t]he percentage of Alaska Natives among charged felons in Alaska was little more than twice the percentage of Alaska Natives in the adult population," while "Caucasians were under-represented among charged felons in comparison to their percentage in Alaska's adult population."

People may debate whether these statistics are the result of overt institutional racism against Alaska Natives. Regardless of that debate, they certainly establish that Alaska Natives continue to be subject to biases that contribute to systemic disparate treatment. Are we as Alaskans capable of correcting this disparate treatment? I believe that Elizabeth Peratrovich would have answered this question with a resolute "Yes!" She believed that our Constitution and Bill of Rights compel us to grant full and equal privileges to all of our citizens -- a proposition impossible to dispute. On this 100th anniversary of her birth, let us pay tribute to Elizabeth Peratrovich's legacy and re-commit to the principles of her life's work.

*Heather Kendall-Miller is an attorney in Anchorage with the Native American Rights Fund.*

# We stand on their shoulders



**COMMENT**

**JEFFREY SILVERMAN**  
For Alaska Newspapers

The story jumped off the page. As a filmmaker, I was smitten by its potential. A young Native couple stand up against the establishment; a home front World War II story wherein Americans symbolically stamp out racism while fighting fascism abroad; an increasingly progressive-leaning society takes a step toward statehood; a far flung U.S. territory takes the lead in a civil rights movement that would sweep the country more than a decade later; and, best of all, a story with a dramatic turning point set in the territorial halls of power, delivered through the inspiring testimony of an unexpected heroine.

When I first learned about Elizabeth and Roy Peratrovich I was working at the Alaska Federation of Natives. Elizabeth Peratrovich Day, (Feb. 16, the day Alaska signed the Anti-Discrimination Act into law in 1945), was just 3 years old. At the time observance was limited to Tlingit country, mostly Southeast Alaska. Ten years later, in the aftermath of a paint ball attack against Natives in downtown Anchorage, the Alaska Legislature debated hate crimes legislation. One legislator argued that no law will end racism, a statement chillingly similar to the testimony at the 1945 hearing, when a senator who opposed the anti-discrimination bill asked Elizabeth Peratrovich if such a law would end discrimination. Her response resonates to this day: "Have you eliminated



Director Jeffrey Silverman works in Juneau on the set of "Ending Jim Crow in Alaska."

larceny or murder by passing a law against it? No law will eliminate crimes, but at least you as legislators can assert to the world that you recognize the evil of the present situation and speak your intent to help us overcome discrimination."

No lawmaker who had read her testimony or knew Alaska's civil rights history ever would have asked such a question. Something clearly needed to be done.

Diane Benson wrote and performed a critically-acclaimed one-woman play. I produced a short profile film that aired on PBS. Diane and I talked about a feature documentary for several years. The short film gave me something to show to funders. I raised enough money to film full, live action reenactments along with the usual documentary interviews and still photographs. We knew that bringing the civil rights efforts to life -- in particular the Peratroviches' testimony, would be an effective way to tell this story. "For the Rights of All: Ending Jim Crow in Alaska" was made with an all-Alaskan cast and filmed on location in Juneau and Anchorage. Last year it aired nationally on PBS stations and

screened at festivals.

In the course of research, writing, production and post production -- all told about seven years of work-- and working with many wonderful Native and non-Native people, I learned a few valuable lessons:

First: Elizabeth Peratrovich is a symbol. There were many, many people who helped move Alaska toward equality -- each generation inspiring the next. Recognizing Elizabeth Peratrovich is not a denial of the others but an affirmation that she is a symbol for standing up for what is right, speaking truth to power. I think of William Paul, Ernest Gruening, Alberta Schenck Adams, Elizabeth and Roy Peratrovich, the Late Dr. Walter Soboleff. Like the Fourth of July, Feb. 16 is for all of us. Alaska's own civil rights day

Second: storytelling -- telling and listening -- is vital. You have to know where you came from. Knowing family, culture, and the nation's lexicon gives you a sense of place. The history of my people, the Jewish people, is as wringed with beauty and horror, peace and peril in the 20th century as it

was 5,000 years ago. I'm lucky to be living in a free, democratic and pluralist society and I make sure my kids understand this as well. I can't possibly understand my good fortune unless I know what people went through to get me to this place.

Third: we are obligated to keep our history alive. As citizens, parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, we must not forget. Storytelling makes it OK to talk about the bad stuff, along with the good. Every meaningful history has both.

Finally: "We stand on their shoulders." At cultural events and meetings in Tlingit country I often heard this expression. My understanding is that the phrase is an acknowledgement of the debt we owe our ancestors, elders and all those who fought the good fight before us as well as an affirmation of our place in the continuum of history.

As a Jewish person this really hits home. Jews are hard-wired it seems to be hyper-conscience of our history. A terrible price was paid through the generations to not only survive but to perpetuate our faith and culture. We stand on their shoulders.

We are raised to seek out justice. We call it "tikkin olam," repairing the world. Everyone benefits when justice is achieved. I like to think that Alaska's anti-discrimination bill happened as it did because of our nation's system of justice and our ideals of fairness and equality. The Fourth of July celebrates what is good about America. The passage of the Anti-Discrimination Act was a triumph that all Alaskans then and now can be proud of. Our system of justice, flawed and human though it is -- enabled civil activism to succeed and the disenfranchised to be heard. In 1945 it worked. Can it work in 2011?

Let us all say together: "To all those Alaskans great and small who sacrificed in the cause of justice and equality, who dedicated their lives to fulfillment of the promise written in our Constitution: We Stand On Your Shoulders."

*Jeffrey Silverman is an independent media producer for Blueberry Productions Inc. in Anchorage.*



# Defining moment continues to shape Alaska



## COMMENT

**ARLISS STURGULEWSKI**  
For Alaska Newspapers

Throughout my longtime civic involvement in Alaska, I have thought about the powers of a single person or event to change the history of a place. I believe that the act of a Tlingit woman, Elizabeth Peratrovich, brought about a defining moment in Alaska.

In February 1945, Elizabeth Peratrovich was serving as Alaska Native Sisterhood

camp president when an equal rights bill came before the Alaska state Senate. One senator who opposed the bill asked, "Who are those people, barely out of savagery, who want to associate with us whites with 5,000 years of recorded civilization behind us?"

Elizabeth, born July 4, 1911, was highly respected in Tlingit society, rose to speak. Her obvious intelligence and beauty were far above the earlier descriptions of savagery made by the ill-spoken senator. She began, "I would not have expected that I, who am barely out of savagery, would have to remind the gentleman with 5,000 years of recorded civilization behind him of our Bill of Rights." Her remarks ignited the crowd and action in favor of the bill followed by a vote of 11-5.

What a momentous day for Alaska. I recall my wonderful Aunt Katherine, born in Juneau over 100 years ago and now deceased, recounted that some businesses had signs that read, "No dogs or Indians allowed." How utterly shameful! The leadership and courage of Elizabeth Peratrovich brought about profound positive changes

in our laws dealing with all Alaskans.

Thanks to Elizabeth's strong stand, Alaska was in the very forefront of equal rights legislation. The Civil Rights Act of 1964, enacted by Congress on July 2, 1964, was a landmark piece of legislation in the United States that outlawed major forms of discrimination against blacks and women including racial discrimination. Without question the battle to overcome racial discrimination has developed slowly over many years. The leadership of Elizabeth was and continues to exemplify what one principled leader can do.

Many positive things have happened in our Alaska since that momentous day in 1945. In the 1960s federal and state governments were laying claim to Alaska Native lands lived on by Alaska Natives for countless generations. Major efforts on the part of Alaska Natives and others led to the U.S. passage of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) in 1971. ANCSA was intended to resolve the longstanding issues surrounding aboriginal land claims as well as to stimulate economic development in Alaska.

For many years education was a huge issue for Alaska Natives. Many Alaska

Native students were sent outside to boarding schools or to Mt. Edgecumbe or the Wrangell Institute. Availability of access and involvement of Alaska Natives in education was a major topic of intense interest. Establishment of Regional Educational Attendance Areas (REAs) began to allow for local control and governance of our K-12 schools.

I have been thrilled to witness the success of the Alaska Native Science and Engineering Program (ANSEP) originated at the University of Alaska Anchorage by Dr. Herb Schroeder. This fine program with its nurturing approach is producing outstanding and successful students.

Did Elizabeth Peratrovich's appearance before the Alaska Senate in February 1945, speaking so eloquently for equal rights, change our history? I for one say yes! It was and is a shining moment in our history — one that can continue to guide us as we work to make Alaska that very special place for ourselves and for our children and for those that come to this place.

*Arliss Sturgulewski is a former state senator.*

## Aunt Elizabeth's message to the family



## COMMENT

**TANYA GULARTE**  
For Alaska Newspapers

In 1958, I was 10 years old when Aunt Elizabeth died. Living in different Alaska towns, my memory of her comes from family stories and now through the publicity of her and my Uncle Roy's pursuit of equal rights for Alaska Natives and for all people. In February 1945, Aunt Elizabeth was 33

years old when she made her well-known speech to the Alaska Territorial Legislature that turned their support, leading to the passing of the Alaska Anti-Discrimination Act, the first anti-discrimination act passed in the nation. Although I did not experience overt discrimination, my parents shared some of their experiences with me. As a young girl my mother, Agnes Peratrovich Oskolkoff, was a student at Chemawa Indian School in Oregon and was having a conversation with her girlfriends, speaking in Tlingit. When a teacher heard them speaking in their "savage language," they were punished by kneeling on a broomstick handle for an extended amount of time and had to put their hands out to be hit with a ruler. My father, Jack Oskolkoff, told me of taking a girl to a movie in Sitka, but having to sit on opposite sides of the theater, one side for Natives and the other side for whites. It is difficult to think of how Native people were treated, and explains the drive it took for people like Aunt Elizabeth to pursue fair and equal treatment of Natives.

I grew up hearing my mother speak not

only of my Uncle Roy and Aunt Elizabeth, but also of my Uncle Frank Peratrovich's involvement in Alaska politics. Although, as a young girl, I did not appreciate how deeply they had devoted their lives in helping others, I intuitively knew our family was special and influential in the Alaska communities. When one speaks of Elizabeth Peratrovich, it is imperative to speak of her partner, greatest supporter and her husband, Roy Peratrovich. They were a power-couple, both serving as grand presidents of the Alaska Native Sisterhood and Alaska Native Brotherhood. As an adult, when I reflect on Aunt Elizabeth's life, I admire many of her characteristics. Even as a busy wife and mother of three young children, Roy Jr., Frank, and Loretta, Aunt Elizabeth was able to manage her life helping others. Aunt Elizabeth chose the right time and place to speak of her beliefs. It is important to realize that having a disagreement can be made in a dignified manner, as she did. It is important to understand what the truth is and what is unfair, and to be able

to articulate your point of view. It is important to realize that your family is unique and special and becomes a legacy for the next generation. Although there are families who are separated by divorce, death, or other circumstances, it is important for parents to teach the younger generation values in a context that is meaningful. All families have family legacies that must be shared and passed on to give root to the next generation. My aunt and uncle dedicated their lives to helping people, not to become notable, but to pursue the values they were taught by their parents. I was fortunate to know and love Uncle Roy for many years. He once shared a memory with me of his mother who would end her prayers with, "Lord give my sons wisdom and strength so they can be of some help to their people. ..." Uncle Roy and Uncle Frank did, as did Aunt Elizabeth.

*Tanya Gularte is a retired educator of 30 years from the Anchorage School District. She lives in Anchorage with her husband, Jerry, and they have two children and three grandchildren.*

## Tea with Elizabeth and a timeless message

## COMMENT

**MAXINE PADDOCK RICHERT**  
For Alaska Newspapers

Our mother, Constance Paddock, passed away March 17 at age 90. Throughout our lives and our children's, she used her wonderful storytelling talent to inspire and amuse us with stories that illustrated overcoming poverty and prejudice. The stories about discrimination she initially faced and overcame on coming to Juneau were especially compelling. They included being denied service at a hair salon and a restaurant. An Episcopalian, she was told at church that she should go to Walter Soboleff's Native church.

During World War II, soldiers and sailors stationed in Juneau were told not to date or be seen with Native women despite the fact that many Native men served in the war.

In 1946, she and other Native women who had graduated from Haskell Institute were recruited by Elizabeth Peratrovich to lobby a Nome senator about the Anti-Discrimination Act. Elizabeth advised them to tell the senator their own stories of discrimination. He was horrified at the discrimination they suffered and promised to vote in favor of the act. My mother's story about her first meeting with Elizabeth Peratrovich in 1942 and the powerful impression this Native activist made on her follows:

"I met Elizabeth Peratrovich shortly after arriving in Juneau to work for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, in 1942.

"Elizabeth invited her niece, Nellie Peratrovich, Evelyn Ridley, Rebecca Keok and me to a tea party. The four of us were recent graduates of Haskell Institute, Lawrence, Kansas. We had taken the business course and were employed as secretaries for the BIA.

"Mr. and Mrs. Roy Peratrovich were at the door to greet us. Roy, a tall, dark and handsome man, stood behind his very pretty, smiling wife. After talking to each of us, Roy excused himself and we were left alone with our vivacious hostess who served a wonderful tea.

"Elizabeth congratulated us on our positions and our appearance. She cautioned us about doing the very best with our education. 'You are the role models for our Native people!'

"She told us about the discrimination toward Native people in Juneau. We were well aware of that sad situation for we had seen signs on restaurant and store doors which said: no Natives or dogs allowed.

"My impression was that Elizabeth felt a deep responsibility to see a law created which did away with discrimination toward Native people. She worked hard on the anti-discrimination bill, and at age 34

watched Gov. Gruening sign it into law.

"When I recall Elizabeth, my description of this beautiful woman would be that she possessed the fruit of the Holy Spirit: Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

"It was Elizabeth who encouraged me to apply for the assistant chief clerk's position during the last Territorial Legislature in 1957. I know it made her proud to see me, the first and only Native (Athabaskan) performing my job. We worked together that year; she as the House receptionist.

"I am honored to tell the world how Elizabeth Peratrovich with abiding faith and courage fought for her Native people and won, freeing them from the bounds of discrimination."

*Maxine Paddock Richert lives in Juneau. Her mother first wrote her comments about Elizabeth Peratrovich in a letter dated Feb. 13, 2002.*

## BETSY

From Page 3

woman was also a beautiful, loving wife; a caring, nurturing mother; and a loyal and generous friend.

Elizabeth succumbed to cancer on Dec.

1, 1958, having seen her first grandchild born the preceding June. Since then, her accomplishments have become increasingly recognized and appreciated. In 1989, the Alaska State Legislature declared Feb. 16 as "Elizabeth Peratrovich Day." That same year, Elizabeth was inducted into the Alaska Women's Hall of Fame. In 1990, as

part of National Women's History Month, she was honored by the Fairbanks Chapter of the National Organization of Women as one of the "Courageous Voices Echoing in our Lives" — the first time the award had been given posthumously. In 1992, Gallery B of the Chambers of the Alaska House of Representatives was dedicated to

Elizabeth. As then-Rep. Fran Ulmer noted, "... She was, and remains today, a shining example of the power of a single individual to shape the course of the State."

*Betsy Peratrovich is the granddaughter of Elizabeth Wanamaker Peratrovich. Her father is Elizabeth's elder son, Roy Peratrovich Jr.*