

BREAKING STEREOTYPES: REPORTING ON RURAL ALASKA

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by
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DEDICATION

To my partner, Ian Gyori: I couldn't have done it without your patient listening, advice and beautiful artwork. Thanks for keeping me warm, fed and watered throughout this project and for your endless support over the past two years.

To my wonderful mother, Mary McKinstry, for inspiring me with your poetry and your writing to pursue my own career as a journalist.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In 2013, I traveled to the state of Alaska for the first time. I was a year out of college, had just completed a Fulbright fellowship in Germany and had no idea what I was doing with my life. I took a seasonal job in Denali National Park and immediately fell in love with both the landscape and the people. I left in the fall to start an AmeriCorps VISTA position in Colorado, but my thoughts kept coming back to the state. I would bring it up constantly: the wilderness, the mountains, the feeling that you could do anything or be anyone you wanted. It was like nothing I'd ever experienced.

So, in 2015, before I was supposed to start graduate school at the University of Missouri's journalism program, I went back to Alaska to work a summer job at a historic hotel, this time to a place called McCarthy. I was looking for someplace remote, and McCarthy sits at the end of a 60-mile dirt road in the heart of the country's largest national park: Wrangell-St. Elias. Once again, when I arrived, I immediately fell in love with the place and the people. The people I met had built their own cabins and their own off-the-grid living systems. They were incredibly smart and resourceful and full of stories. They'd come from all over the country and even from other parts of the world to live together in this tiny town in relative harmony.

As the fall neared, I realized that I wasn't going to be leaving for graduate school after all. At that point, I'd met my partner Ian Gyori, who owned a local restaurant. We decided to spend the winter in McCarthy in his tiny cabin while he worked on building a new restaurant before summer started.

That winter changed my life. I learned a completely different way of living. I struggled with the dark and the cold, but I also felt empowered that I was learning to live

with less, to solve problems on my own and do things that I'd never thought I was capable of. And yet, I still longed for a real career and an opportunity to do good work that could, perhaps, have a positive impact on the world around me. I'd never been the type of person that knew from the time I was small what I wanted to be when I grew up. There were too many options, too many things that I wanted to learn about. After years of searching, I'd finally settled on journalism. I loved to write, to learn, to listen and to travel. My mother had also been a journalist when I was young, and I remembered reading her columns with admiration. As an introvert, I knew becoming a journalist was going to be difficult, but I also knew that some of those introverted qualities would come in handy. I wasn't willing to give up those ambitions.

So, in the fall of 2016, I reluctantly left Alaska at the end of July to start graduate school at the University of Missouri. But, like before, Alaska always stayed in the back of my head. I'd come in with an open mind, willing to work internationally, in a city or in a rural area. I'd thought about trying to get an internship with NPR or WNYC. But, as time passed, I realized that wasn't going to work. I wanted to be a journalist in Alaska and report on the state that I'd come to call home. There were plenty of intelligent and capable young people flocking to cities and hoping to work for big news organizations. And there were also plenty of young journalists coming to Alaska in search of adventure, working for a few years to get their foot in the door and then leaving. I wanted to stick around and grow roots.

Alaska is a huge state geographically. The divide between rural and urban can feel like a different country. Much of the state is only accessible by bush plane, and vast swaths of the Arctic and Western Alaska are still home to majority populations of Alaska

Native peoples. Many people in rural Alaska still practice subsistence activities like hunting, fishing and gathering, and it's in those places that climate change is perhaps most visible. It's impacting people's abilities to live off the land and to get around. And yet the state's economy depends on oil and gas extraction, mining and commercial fishing, all industries that can have dramatic impacts on the wildlife populations and ecosystems necessary to support subsistence activities.

Some of those stories have drawn national attention, but in several interviews with local journalists for my research, I was told that those outlets don't always get it right. They haven't taken the time to build relationships in those communities and to understand Alaska's complex history. The state needs more local, rural journalists to tell those stories. Several smaller papers have closed in recent decades as the newspaper industry has lost steam. And the Anchorage Daily News (formerly Alaska Dispatch News), the biggest newspaper in the state, recently laid off employees from every department and pulled a rural reporter back to Anchorage. There's no investigative non-profit or statewide news organization to fill the void.

There *is* public media. Particularly in rural Alaska, where the internet arrived much later than the rest of the country, radio listenership is strong. Alaska Public Media and the Alaska Public Radio Network have started innovate collaborative reporting projects that bring together reporters from all over the state. And they've started to pursue deeper, more investigative storytelling projects in the form of podcasts.

That's another reason I want to build my career in this state: Before starting my graduate education, I was an avid radio and podcast listener, but I didn't know if I had the talent or skill to pursue audio myself. And then, in January 2017, I took a radio reporting

class with Professor Sara Shahriari. There I learned all the basics: how to edit audio, how to produce a feature and a day-turn and how to conduct an audio interview. At the same time, I started working at Investigative Reporters and Editors as a producer for the IRE Radio Podcast. Both of those experiences made me realize that my true journalistic passion is audio. Audio allows me to paint scenes with sounds and add an extra dimension that's sometimes difficult to achieve with words. Because of that passion, it makes sense for me to work in a state where public media is valued and where audio jobs pop up often. This summer I'll be completing an internship at Alaska Public Media in Anchorage and hope to help with some of the innovative audio projects that they're working on throughout the state.

After the internship, my hope is to build a career for myself as an independent journalist in Alaska, rather than working for a news organization as a reporter. Then I'll be free to live in McCarthy and to live the lifestyle that I've come to love. I could potentially work with national journalists who visit the state for stories and continue to produce independent projects funded by fellowships. I could start a radio station or newspaper in the town, and I could freelance for news organizations around the state. My dream would be to eventually create a multi-media investigative non-profit in Alaska to help bridge the gap between rural and urban, cover Alaska's diverse population and fill the void that's been left by less newspaper coverage.

Given those goals, it only made sense to me that I would pursue an independent audio project about rural Alaska for my professional skills component and to focus my research on reporting on rural Alaska as well to help me make professional connections

with other rural reporters in the state and to prepare me to become an ethical and informed Alaskan journalist.

The Professional Skills Component

Before I even started graduate school, I'd thought about making a podcast about McCarthy. The people who live here are full of interesting stories: from their journeys to get here to building their lives here to, in some cases, raising a family here. Everyone lives off-grid, and most build their own cabins. There's an interesting dynamic between the park service and the community that's caused conflict over the years, and there's no local or county government or police force. Any community-wide decisions are made at meetings of a local non-profit where people vote by raising their hands. People help each other out here, even if they come from different political, religious, socioeconomic or cultural backgrounds. And there's a pervasive mentality that if you want something done, you do it yourself. There's been plenty of interesting examples of people building their own infrastructure or businesses against all odds.

The place has changed a lot in recent decades. The town's roots date back to the mining days. It then became a ghost town, attracted hippies in the 1970s, later members of the environmental movement and most recently groups of seasonal workers and mountaineers. Technology, access and exposure have shaped that change. In 2014, the Discovery Channel decided to film a reality television show here called "Edge of Alaska," and it promised local residents that the show would be a documentary series about life here. Instead, it became a sensationalized, scripted depiction that little resembled reality and relied on stereotypes and dramatic story lines.

Beyond the reality television show, there have been very few stories told about McCarthy. There's no local newspaper or radio station, and the location means that reporters from nearby cities and towns don't make it out much. Over the years, a few things like the murder of six people in town in the early 1980s or the story of a family called the Pilgrims have attracted attention. But, I wanted to tell the story of day-to-day life here — the joys, the triumphs and the struggles — rather than relying on the narratives of a few events or a stereotypical portrayal of life in the wilderness.

Additionally, as someone who hopes to become an independent journalist, I wanted to test myself. I wanted to see if I could research and buy all the equipment on my own to make a podcast. I wanted to try editing my own scripts because working as a freelancer means I won't always have an editor. And I wanted to test my self-discipline and learn how to remain productive without someone giving me deadlines or goals.

Especially since most people pursue internships for their professional skills component, I wasn't sure at first if my project would be accepted. But throughout the process, the graduate school and all the faculty I've talked with have been extremely supportive. I'm incredibly grateful that I was able to design a project that works for me and my professional goals and that my graduate education provided me with the tools to succeed.

The Research Component

Early on in my undergraduate education, I ruled out a career in academia. I wanted to write and produce work for a general audience rather than working within academic circles. Don't get me wrong: I think that work is necessary and important, too. It's just hard for *me* to write something and feel so far removed from its tangible impact

and readership. Therefore, I elected to pursue a professional analysis rather than a thesis or scholarly research for this project. And I also elected to look at a topic that could directly inform my work as a future journalist in Alaska.

My first semester at the University of Missouri, I worked as a teaching assistant for Cross-Cultural Journalism. I didn't expect that the course would also teach *me* so much. It made me think deeply about how to better cover groups of people who are marginalized by hegemonic identities. I'd always been interested in gender theories and did my undergraduate capstone project on feminist symbolism in Chicana literature, but this course opened up a whole new world of thought to me: critical-cultural scholarship. I've always been interested in telling stories that challenge dominant ideologies and narratives, often called social justice journalism, and to me, critical-cultural scholarship serves the same role in the academic world. After looking at several theories, I realized that I felt most connected to the work of critical-cultural scholars and wanted to use that framework as a background for my own professional analysis.

Then, as I was in the process of choosing a topic for my literature review for my mass media course in the fall of 2016, the protests at Standing Rock began to gain media coverage. I distinctly remember watching the now-famous Democracy Now footage in early September that eventually led to the arrest of Amy Goodman. It displayed a narrative that I realized I rarely saw represented in news in the lower 48: Native peoples expressing their concerns with complexity. As coverage of the protests mounted, I followed it and the backlash against it closely. Many journalists covering the protests had very little understanding of or exposure to indigenous communities, myself included. The Native American Journalists Association even released a guide for covering Standing

Rock, and initially I thought about evaluating coverage of Standing Rock and analyzing what journalists did right and what they could've done better for my research. But I wanted to pursue a project that could directly inform my future career, and I also remembered the idea of solution-oriented journalism. When there's a problem, look at someone who's solved it and analyze why and how that's worked rather than just displaying the negative.

Because, although I was rarely exposed to news coverage of Native American communities in the lower 48, in Alaska, I read and heard about Alaska Native peoples all the time. Native peoples make up a larger proportion of the population of Alaska than of any other state. They've retained economic power because of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act and the creation of 13 Alaska Native corporations. There are regions of the state where Alaska Native peoples are the majority and where the subsistence lifestyle rooted in Alaska Native cultures is valued and widely practiced.

Not to say coverage of Alaska Native peoples and communities is perfect or that there isn't a long, troubled history of colonization in the state. But still, Koahnic Broadcast Corporation was started in the state, and it produces all kinds of nationwide programming focused on indigenous communities. Several of the newspapers and media outlets are Native-owned, and the largest newspaper and statewide radio network regularly run stories about Alaska Native peoples and communities, many of which highlight the positive and the day-to-day.

So, I decided to look at coverage of Alaska Native communities as an example of what to do right when covering indigenous communities. I decided to analyze a sampling of coverage and interview Alaska Native journalists and rural reporters about what they

thought of current coverage and advice they had for other reporters interested in covering Native communities across the country with complexity and accuracy. In the process, I had the opportunity to make professional connections with reporters around the state, to grow as a journalist and to learn more about covering Alaska Native peoples and communities with accuracy and complexity.

Chapter 2: Activity Log

Week 1: January 12, 2018

Hi all,

I just wanted to give you an update before I hop on the ferry from Bellingham, Washington, this afternoon. I'll be on the boat for three days and then a two-days' drive through the Yukon and Alaska to Anchorage. I'll be back with reliable internet on the evening of the 17th.

The trip across the country has been great so far. I've had so much time and space to think and plan for the coming months. I'm excited to get my feet wet! I was fortunate enough to get a Duffy Fund grant for studio equipment, so I'll be purchasing that in Anchorage. Until then, I have my kit with me, and I'm going to start collecting audio and photos once I get on the boat for my first episode. It'll open with my own journey north.

I'm hoping to meet some interesting characters along the way! Wish me luck with the weather. I've got snow tires and chains, but you never know what could happen. Just trying to be prepared for anything and keep my eyes and ears open to absorb this beautiful landscape.

One thing I did want to say: I've been fortunate enough to be offered a position freelance audio editing for a podcast called LifeTK. I'll be working on that alongside my master's project podcast and research component. I already started working on it last semester. I don't know if that work could also count as part of the professional skills component since it wasn't in my original proposal. But, either way, it's one more way I'm building a professional network that can help me once I graduate.

Thanks again for agreeing to be part of this project. I'm excited to see where it takes me.

Cheers,

Erin

Notes: I conducted audio interviews with sources on the boat and captured audio and pictures of my own journey north. I also started reaching out to sources in McCarthy and researching contact info for my research project. I purchased studio equipment and started working with my partner on episode artwork and the logo and came up with a name for the podcast.

Week 2: January 22, 2018

Happy Monday, everyone!

I finally made it into McCarthy late last night after 21 days on the road. Sixty miles of unmaintained road was a bit rough, but thankfully my truck made it through. What an adventure!

It feels good to be here! The road out of Haines was closed for 2 1/2 days, which delayed me slightly, but I've been able to start working on the project and sending out emails in the meantime.

I did a few interviews on the boat, gathered some nat sounds along the way, and recorded my own impressions and descriptions. It was beautiful! I've also ordered my studio equipment, and it should be here in the next week. I started setting up interviews for the next few weeks, taking stock of who's available and who's willing to participate. And the podcast has an official title: "Out There."

I'm working on the logo, and a friend is composing an original piece of theme music. I'm so excited to get it off the ground. I'm going to start writing my interview questions today and do a practice run with a friend. And then I'll get going on the website and start reading through articles for the research project.

In other news, I found out that I got an internship with Alaska Public Media for the summer! I'll be a general assignment reporter in Anchorage. I'm hoping to make some statewide connections because they air programming across the state. I'm also working on getting a piece published from last semester with the Midwest Center for Investigative Reporting, and Harvest Public Media is interested in a piece I did about black farmers last spring.

I've attached some pictures from the trip. I'll send an update in a week with my progress. Please let me know if you have any questions! Hope the semester is going well.

Erin







Week 3: January 29, 2018

Hi all,

Happy Monday! Here's an update for the last week:

Professional project. I had my first two interviews for the podcast. One of them went so well that I had to stop the interview at two hours and schedule a time to come

back to get pictures and nat sounds. It gets dark here rather early, and I traveled 45 minutes by snow machine, so I wanted to make sure I got home before it grew too cold. It's been as cold as 20 below this week! Thankfully I've stayed fairly warm. I've been working on transcribing both interviews, and making notes for a blog post.

I've also lined up at least two more interviews for this coming week, and I've reached out to or met up with several community members to explain the project to them and see if they want to participate. I was a little worried that many people would be a bit distrustful (especially since a lot of people hated the reality television show and want to keep this place a secret), but so far, I've only had one person say they don't want to participate.

My friend is working on the theme music, and my other friend is working on the logo and episode artwork. I designed the website this past week using Square Space, and once I have the artwork and the episode descriptions finalized, I can publish it ahead of the podcast and post it on social media.

After doing the first two interviews, I did have one thought about a change I would like to make. I was thinking of releasing the podcast episodes all at once, rather than one at a time. This is for several reasons. First of all, I realized that many of my interviews could have pieces in each episode, so I need to complete all the interviews before I can publish. I also had a few people agree but say they won't be able to meet up until later in February or even into March for one reason or another. I'd like to start dividing the content and sound bites into each episode and writing the openings, but I don't want to actually publish until I've completed all the interviews and had time to do edits and spend time on production.

My thought was, what if I have an interview in late February or early March, and the content would've been more appropriate for the first or second episode, but they've already been released? I have the themes already picked out (I sent them to Sara and can send them to all of you if you like), so I feel solid with the direction and structure. Let me know what you all think about this proposed change.

Research project. I had my first research interview over the phone this past week. The woman I talked to is the only Alaskan journalist who covers the Arctic and the North Slope, which is crazy to me. She had some great advice for covering Alaska Native communities, from small details like appropriate terminology and names to bigger concepts like practicing patience and flexibility and taking time to gain trust. I'm also working on the transcription of that interview. The call did drop twice (probably because both of us are in remote areas), so I'll have to anticipate that better in the future.

She also offered to read over the piece when I have a draft and to put me in touch with members of the communities she covers who are Alaska Native but not journalists. So hopefully that lead will take me somewhere!

I have another research interview on Tuesday, and I ran my list of sources by my boss for this summer at APM. She's been the news director there for quite some time, and she knows everyone that I proposed to talk to. She's helping me get in touch with a few people that I couldn't find contact info for.

As far as reading through the articles, I have two proposed changes here. For some reason, when I used Google Advanced Search to pull articles from Alaska Dispatch News for my proposal, it only pulled 13 articles over the last two years that use the term "Native." But, when I went to their website to do a search, there were nearly 200. Also,

when I started looking in-depth at the Alaska Native News articles, I realized that very, very few of them were actually by the organization. Instead, they're more like press releases from the Office of the Governor or the Dept. of Labor. The articles they do write themselves are crime briefs.

Here's what I'd like to propose to fix it (and thanks to Scott for the advice):

-I'd like to switch Alaska Native News with the Cordova Times. They are owned by the Native Village of Eyak, and they cover statewide issues (and even national issues sometimes), even though they are a local paper.

-I'd like to narrow the timeframe from the last two years to the last year. For The Cordova Times, that means 25 articles.

-I randomly pulled every fourth article that focuses on Alaska Natives over the last year from Anchorage Daily News (they changed their name from Alaska Dispatch News in November when the paper was sold). That narrows their pool to 26 articles, and they're evenly distributed over the timeframe.

Let me know what you think of those changes as well. Sorry this is so long (I'll try to keep it shorter in the future), and I apologize for having to propose changes. Please let me know if you have suggestions there or any other thoughts.

Best, Erin

P.S. Attached are two pictures I snapped on my way to pick up mail on Thursday. Enjoy!



Week 4: February 6, 2018

Hi all,

Happy Tuesday! Sorry this is a day later than it should be. I was out reporting yesterday. More on that in a minute. First, here's an update on what I've accomplished over the last week:

Research. I did a phone interview with Sharon McConnell, the first Alaska Native news anchor. She was the news anchor when they expanded TV service to the villages. She no longer works as a journalist (she works with Native elders now), but she provided some great advice and perspective on how things have changed since. I transcribed her interview and the one I did the week before.

I also read and analyzed all the articles from Anchorage Daily News (formerly Alaska Dispatch News) and The Cordova Times. I heard back from Dr. Mislán about the changes I proposed, but I just wanted to confirm with everyone else that they're okay? I created a template to help with the analysis:

1. Name of Article
2. Paper
3. Author
4. Date
5. Category
6. How are Alaska Natives identified?
7. Short summary of topic
8. Are any Alaska Native words or names used?
9. Terminology

10. Stereotypes/Tropes
11. Sourcing (who's given a voice?)
12. Historical/cultural context (is it given?)
13. Other General Thoughts

I also made general notes along the way of questions I had and differences I noticed between the two papers. This week I'm planning to read back over everything and do a write-up for each. I learned a lot about terminology and cultural context. My first impression is that both papers are doing a pretty good job of covering Alaska Native communities with complexity.

I'm also hoping to do another interview this week.

Professional project. I interviewed four people this week! That puts me at six interviews total. My goal is to get at least 10 before the end of February, but I may get even more.

I spent a lot of my time transcribing this week (most of the interviews were close to two hours). I also starting collecting nat sounds (i.e. birds chirping, wood splitting, snow machine running, etc.). Another source did tell me that they didn't want to be interviewed (I think the reality tv show has turned some people off to sharing their stories...). And I reached out to two more interview subjects, and they're both on board.

I've also decided to change the title from "Out There" to "Out Here." And I've been thinking A LOT about structure and narrative and how each episode will open and be organized. My thought is that I can spend the whole month of March writing and producing. It's going to be a lot of work, but I'm feeling good about it at this point. I've got some great sound bites.

That's it for the update! Now for the story of my adventure yesterday (no need to read if you don't have time):

We had quite the cold snap over the weekend. It was 35 below for three days straight. It's hard to keep it warm inside when it's that cold, let alone staying warm when you head outside. Even just heading to the outhouse, it feels like someone is trying to steal your breath from you. I was supposed to make the hour-long snow machine trip on Friday for the interview, but operating any sort of machinery at those temperatures is iffy. So, I delayed, one, two, three days, waking up to 35 below every morning.

Finally, yesterday, it was 27 below, and I thought, okay, I can do this. It started to warm up a bit as the sun came up, and I started putting on layer after layer to stay warm. I got the snow machine started, crossed two frozen rivers and started heading down the Nizina Road. They live as far you can go by road here. And then, there was a moose.

The thing about moose is they're a lot more dangerous than most people realize. They aren't very smart, and they aren't very predictable. They'll run right over a snow machine and stomp you if they want to. And the thing about being on a snow machine without reverse is there's no way to retreat if they start running. So the moose and I had a staring contest for about five minutes, and then it started walking toward me. I turned the machine around by hand (no small feat) and started heading back down the road. He went in the woods, I turned the machine around again, and then he came back out of the woods.

Finally, when I was about to give up, exhausted and sweaty (which can be dangerous in those temperatures), he disappeared for good.

Thank goodness. I made it there later than I was expecting, and I made it back later than expected, but at least I made it! I'm a bit sore today from all that heavy lifting, but the good news is, it's 6 below and it feels downright warm to me! It's all relative, as they say.

Cheers! Let me know if you have any questions! Here's another picture for you to enjoy.

Erin



Week 5: February 12, 2018

Hi all,

Happy Monday!

It's finally warmed up here. I woke up to a couple inches of fresh snow and 20-degree temperatures outside.

This week hasn't been as productive as the last. I had to catch up on some LifeTK stuff (the podcast I'm editing) and start working on the piece about black farmers that I'm producing for Harvest Public Media. But, I'm still feeling good about where I'm at. Here's what I did this week:

Professional project. I caught up on all my transcribing, which feels good. It takes a while! Sometimes I wonder if it's worth it to transcribe everything, but I know I'm going to thank myself in the long run. Not only has it helped me ask better questions in subsequent interviews, but I've also been pulling some of the best quotes as I go along. And once I get to producing, it'll be easier to divide the information into each episode.

I also did two more interviews and finally finished reaching out to all my sources. All of my interviews are now lined up, and I'll be able to complete them all by the end of February, which feels good. I have one more tonight, one on Tuesday, two at the end of the week, two next week, and then two more couples I can interview if I feel like I need it. That'll put me at 16, which I think is more than enough. And then, I can start putting this all together!

I also chased two owls through the woods last night trying to catch their sounds. And my friend sent over the official theme music for the podcast that he composed. And, of course, more thoughts about structure. That's what keeps me up at night 😊 Oh yeah,

and I put my studio together. See the attached picture. I tested it out, and it sounds pretty darn good considering the cost and the tiny space I have to work with.

I've been thinking (and many of the people I've interviewed have said this too) that, depending on how the first "season" goes, this podcast could be an ongoing project. There's so many interesting people to interview and the place itself has such a fascinating history. I may even talk to the local museum and see if they'd be interested in collaborating to do some oral histories. We'll see, but just something to think about as I try to create a life here AND move forward in my career.

Research project. I did less here. I did review my analyses of Cordova Times and ADN articles and do a write-up of each. I haven't done any more interviews though. I followed up with several of my potential sources via email, but no responses yet. I'm going to have to re-think my strategy this week, and keep reaching out to various folks across the state.

Hope you have a fantastic week!

Cheers,

Erin



Week 6: February 19, 2018

Hi all,

Happy Monday again! Hope your February is going well. Here's an update:

Professional project. I was able to do three interviews this week: one with a couple and two individuals. I'm doing two more tomorrow and two later this week and then I'll be done! I'm also re-visiting the very first person I interviewed and getting more photos and nat sounds. I've been transcribing in between and working more on the

website. I have an official logo now, and I've been working with my boyfriend on the episode artwork.

I've also gone back and forth with my friend on the theme music, and I'm just waiting for a final mix down.

I went out with two of my interview subjects yesterday while they cut down a tree to get photos and nat sound. My goal is to really dive into the first script later this week.

Research project. Last week I was feeling a little roadblocked here, but I think I made some headway. I was finally able to talk to Edgar Blatchford, who used to own several newspapers, teaches Alaska Native studies and journalism at the University of Alaska Anchorage and is Alaska Native himself. We've scheduled an in-person interview while I'm in Anchorage, and he invited me to come speak to one of his classes about pursuing a master's degree in journalism (UAA doesn't have a program).

Beyond that, I was finally able to get through to several of the people I was hoping to talk to for the project. Here's the list of additional people that have agreed to be interviewed in the next week or two:

1. ***Christine Trudeau***, reporter for KYUK Bethel, a station that serves a majority Yup'ik part of the state and translates their programming into Yup'ik. Christine is Native American (she's a citizen of the Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation) but reports regularly on Alaska Native communities and several other sources pointed me toward her. I think it'll be an interesting perspective.
2. ***Diana Campbell***, who now works for University of Alaska-Fairbanks as an adjunct professor. She used to work for the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner and is Alaska Native

3. *Anna Rose MacArthur*, the news director at KYUK Bethel, who wrote [a really insightful piece](#) for Transom about reporting on Alaska Native communities and rural communities in Alaska in general
4. *Laureli Ivanoff*: She is NOT a journalist (which I know was one of the things we'd talked about adding in). She is Alaska Native and she wrote a column for Alaska Dispatch News in 2016 about the need for more accurate coverage of rural Alaska and how she doesn't see herself represented in the news. I think it will be an interesting perspective as well.

That will put me at seven interviews total, which is two more than I proposed. I think it's always good to have additional information. Christine also recommended this [great site](#) as a resource. It's about reporting on indigenous communities in Canada, but a lot of it translates to reporting on Alaska Native communities and its given me some great ideas about additional questions to ask and thoughts to include.

I also have an edit on my Harvest piece today. I know that's not part of the project, but I've admired Harvest forever, and I'm so excited to have something I made included! I'll send along a link when it publishes.

Otherwise, I've just been chopping wood and hauling water. I'll be headed to Anchorage at the end of next week for a few days to re-supply, but I can still work on this project from afar.

Thanks, Erin

Week 7: February 26, 2018

Hi, all,

Happy Monday again! I'm going to send out a doodle poll today to set up a time for my defense. Scott and I decided that I'll turn the final version into him on April 20th, he'll send it along to everyone on the committee shortly thereafter, and then I'll have my defense on April 26th. It's not a Wednesday, Sara, so hopefully that's okay.

If that day doesn't work, let me know, and we'll push everything a day or two sooner. I cannot do the defense any later than the 26th (that's when the paperwork is due), but the good news is it'll be before you leave, Dr. Mislan, so hopefully everyone can be there.

Here's an update on my progress:

Professional project. I finished all of my interviews this week! I interviewed a couple and two individuals and did a follow-up with my first interview subject, asking a few questions, collecting nat sounds and taking photos. I transcribed everything as well.

I have one additional follow-up interview that I can do if need be, and another couple that's willing to participate, but I have 15 interviews at this point, which is 5 more than I was anticipating. I'm thinking I'll play it by ear as I move along in the production process, and if I feel like I need either of those, I'll schedule a time.

I also got a shotgun microphone this week in the mail (I've never used one before), and I'm finding that it's a lot better for collecting nat sounds and wildlife and such.

I started on my first script (Episode 1: Heading North) that tells people's stories of how and why they ended up in Alaska and McCarthy. Structure is going to be difficult (which I knew from the get-go), but I've finished my intro part about the ferry and the opening to the podcast. I've chosen 4 stories to highlight and pulled all the transcriptions.

I'm just working on my narration to help tighten each story. My goal is to have the script done by the end of this week. My thought is that as I go along, the structure/scripts will come more easily.

I've also been re-visiting the website I designed. I realized that Squarespace wants to charge me \$144 to publish the site, so I might migrate to Wix instead (which is cheaper and is what I already use for my professional portfolio). That'll be a project for this week as well.

And I've downloaded Photoshop, and I'm going to start editing photos. I've always been miserable at photography, and one of my goals for this project was to get better and learn how to edit photos. So we'll see how that goes!

Sara, are you still willing to look at the script when I'm finished with it? Thanks!

Research component. I had two interviews this week, one with Laureli Ivanoff who was the news director at KNOM, is Inupiaq and now works as a freelance writer and columnist. The other was with Angela Gonzalez, who is Koyukon Athabascan, and runs a blog called Athabascan Woman that highlights prominent Alaska Natives and talks about her experiences growing up in rural Alaska. Both were incredibly insightful.

Angela brought up something I've thought a lot about: There's a tradition of white, Western scholars coming into Alaska Native communities; studying their culture, language and traditions; using that to earn their degrees; and then never returning or giving back to the community. She wanted to make sure that I wasn't doing the same thing and was happy to hear that my intention is to work in Alaska, to share my work with the community when I'm done, and to give voice to Alaska Native journalists and writers rather than adopting their words as my own.

As a white woman, I've been trying to navigate this project with as much sensitivity as possible and provide as much context as possible. Most people have been incredibly generous and open, but I've also faced healthy doses of skepticism. I think this is to be expected given the history of colonialism and the mistreatment of Native communities in general by the media. Any advice that any of you have on things to say as I continue to approach interview subjects or as I start the writing process would be greatly appreciated.

I'll be meeting with another former Alaska Native journalist, Joaqlin Estus, while I'm in Anchorage. And Diana Campbell, who used to work for the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner and now works in communications, just emailed me back to set up an interview today. With the KYUK Bethel reporters, that'll put me at 8 or 9 interviews now, 3 or 4 more than I was expecting.

Also, my piece about young black farmers and the upcoming Farm Bill for Harvest Public Media will be publishing on Monday, and I just found out that I'm a finalist for a FASPE Fellowship in journalism ethics. If I get it, I'll be headed to Germany and Austria for two weeks at the end of May with other young journalists and graduate students. I have a Skype interview tomorrow, so we'll see how that goes.

Thanks everyone and hope you have a wonderful week! I've attached a bird photo for fun.

Erin



Week 8: March 5, 2018

Good morning, all!

It's a balmy -2 degrees here this morning. I'm writing this up before I head out for Anchorage. It's always so much work getting organized--trash, recycling, laundry, and lots of lists. But we should be on the road within the hour, and there by tonight!

I feel good about my progress this week. I've moved into the production phase, and I'm happy to finally put pen to paper (or fingers to a keyboard...)

I went ahead and booked my flight and scheduled the defense for 2 p.m. on April 26 with Kaitlin. It'll be in the graduate studies office. Let me know if that doesn't work as soon as you can, and I'll schedule for a different time.

Anyway, here goes:

Professional project. I finished my first script and sent it along to Sara. My second script is finished as well, I just need to do a read-through and make some tweaks. My goal is to have the third done by the end of this week.

I also spent a day fixing the website and updating it. I now officially own the domain outherepodcast.com. It's still missing the meat (artwork, audio, episode notes) but that should be easy now. It's just a matter of plugging all that in.

And I started editing my photos in Photoshop. I realized I need to go out and take a few more, but in general, I've got some good shots (at least for me...).

Research project. I finished transcribing, and I did an interview with Diana Campbell, a former Alaska Native journalist and a current communications professor at the University of Alaska-Fairbanks. She had a lot of interesting things to say, but particularly, she talked about the fourth estate and how much she believes in it. She said, under most tribal governments in Alaska (and in the U.S.), the freedom of the press is not protected, and that was something that was difficult to navigate when she was working as an Alaska Native journalist.

She also told me this terrible story about how, in the '80s, her editor wouldn't let her cover Alaska Native communities/conventions/corporations because he said she would be "biased." And she said, well, what about white people? Are they biased when they're covering other white people? Sheesh...The good news is, she said things have changed quite a bit since.

I have two interviews on Wednesday in-person: one with Joaqlin Estus, who's Tlingit and a former news director of KNBA, and one with Edgar Blatchford, a professor of journalism and Alaska Native studies and the former owner of several small

newspapers. That'll put me at 7. I've tried reaching out again to KYUK Bethel. That sounded promising but now they won't return emails or phone calls. I'll just keep at it! And if I don't hear back as it gets closer to the end of March, I'll start the writing process.

Also, I got the FASPE fellowship! That means I'll be going to Germany and Poland for two weeks at the end of May for an intensive seminar in journalism ethics with 12 other graduate students and beginning journalists. It's going to be a whirlwind to get back in time for my internship, but I think it'll be worth it.

Hope you have a story-worthy week. Thanks again for all your support!

Erin

Week 9: March 12, 2018.

Hi all!

It's 24 degrees here. Spring is coming! It snowed almost a foot last night, and I'm looking out my window at snow-covered trees and a bright blue sky. Beautiful!

I survived a trip to Anchorage this week. A 16-hour round trip to get groceries (and other things of course) is a bit much, but we made it in and out within three days.

Here's the update:

Professional project. I put the finishing touches on episode two's script, and I finished episode three's script. This week I'm planning to finish four and five, go to mail to tape audio for the opening of episode six, and do one final interview with Stephens Harper and his wife Tamara on Sunday night.

Stephens is the head ranger for the park service, and I think he'll add some valuable perspective to the community and living with the land episodes (6 and 7).

McCarthy is unique in that it's one of the only places where individuals have private land in-holdings in a national park. That makes Stephens' position pretty unique and it means there's a long and interesting history of conflict between the people who live here and the national park service. I'm hoping to explore that in both of those episodes.

I'll finish the scripts for 6 and 7 the following week, and then that gives me a whole month to cut and assemble the audio and gather any last sounds I feel like I'll need before April 20th. Still, my goal is to be done a week ahead of that deadline, so you all have plenty of time to listen before my defense.

One exciting thing: I met with my internship supervisor at Alaska Public Media while I was in Anchorage, and she wants me to re-purpose some of the podcast episodes for a series about McCarthy for APM. Basically, I'll just need to shorten them. So, there's a big possibility that this will not only be on its own website and on iTunes, but that it'll also air on the radio across the state.

Research project. I interviewed Edgar Blatchford and Joaqlin Estus in-person in Anchorage. Joaqlin's interview, particularly, was incredibly helpful, probably my best one yet. It's amazing how different the dynamics are when you're able to talk with someone in-person. It was also just a great opportunity to talk about the history of public media in Alaska. She gave me some great personal and professional guidance. I tried reaching out to KYUK again, and still haven't heard back. Not sure what happened here, but I'm thinking I'll try calling and emailing one more time this week, and if I don't hear anything, I'll call it good with seven interviews.

Also, here's the piece about young black farmers that I did for Harvest Public Media: <http://harvestpublicmedia.org/post/young-black-farmers-will-be-affected-if-federal-funding-cut>. Thanks! Let me know if you have any question.

Erin

Week 10: March 19, 2018.

Hi all,

It's snowing again here. It's good news because it's been an unusually early spring and everything was starting to melt. I started to get a bit nervous crossing the river on the snow machine...That usually doesn't happen until April!

Here's my update for the week:

Professional project. I finished the script for episode 4 and started on episode 5's script. But, I started thinking about it and decided it would be wise to also start on audio production. That way, you all have time to listen to drafts of each episode over the course of several weeks rather than all at the end.

So, I did it! I produced my very first episode. I'd still consider this a draft. There's plenty of tweaks I want to make, and some of the audio quality is less than ideal because of some funky things with my recorder, so I'm still looking at ways to improve it.

It's longer than the others will be because of the introduction. Feel free to send along comments/suggestions/thoughts. Or not: whatever you have time for. I'm uploading it as a private file on Sound Cloud right now, and I'll share it as soon as it's ready to go.

I also did two more interviews last night with the law enforcement park ranger in town and his wife. It was fascinating and gave me a lot of great stuff for the last three episodes.

Research project. I did finally get a hold of the two people I wanted to talk to at KYUK Bethel. I did both interviews over the phone and just need to transcribe them. Now I'm at 9 interviews, plus the article analyses and I've been reading a book called "Fifty Miles from Tomorrow," a memoir about growing up as an Alaska Native in rural Alaska. It delves into a lot of important historical and cultural context that many of the people I've talked to have said is important to know about and keep in mind, like the history of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act.

I'm going to put the research project aside this week and just focus on getting as many episodes produced as I can. Ideally, I'll have 2-3 more for you all to listen to next Monday.

Then, I'll go back to script writing and start writing the research article next week. Hope you all have a great week!

Erin

Week 11: March 26, 2018.

Hi all,

Happy Monday. I can hear the birds chirping out my window. Spring is on the horizon! Here's the update:

Professional Project. I finished a cut of episodes 2, 3 and 4 this week! I need to re-voice a few things and put some finishing touches on them, but my goal is to have them all uploaded to SoundCloud by the end of the day. I'll share the private link with you all when they're ready to go.

I also decided to separate the intro and the first episode into two different pieces. It's something I've seen other podcasts do, and I think it makes a lot of sense. That way,

someone can listen to the intro and get a sense of the relevant context and then listen to any episode they want without feeling lost.

A friend listened to the first episode and had some great suggestions, so I've been working on those edits. I'd like to have a final cut of the intro and 1-4 by the end of the day.

I went out and took some more photos of Kennicott/McCarthy last week as well for the episodes.

This week, my goal is to transcribe the last interview I did (I've been using bits and pieces and it's annoying to not have a transcription) and work on the scripts for episodes 5-7. I'd love to have them done by the end of the week. And then, I can produce them the following week and have two weeks to finalize the episodes and the website.

So far, the episodes are around 30 minutes long. I'd like to keep the next three a bit shorter. More in the 20-25 minute range.

Research project. Like I said last Monday, I put the research project on the back burner this week, so I could focus on producing. My goal is to start the writing process later this week and have a draft done by April 6.

Thanks for all your support. Here's a photo of my dog hiding in the snow :-)

Erin



Week 12: April 3, 2018.

Hi all,

Happy Monday, and Happy April! Here's my update for the week:

Professional Project. I transcribed my last interview and wrote the last three scripts this week and started cutting audio bites for episode five. My goal is to be done with an audio cut of all three by the end of this week and then I'll have two weeks to polish everything. I'll send them along when they're finished so you all have plenty of time to listen.

I also edited and uploaded all the photos and started captioning them. I put some tweaks on the website as well. Hopefully I can share that by sometime next week as well.

I'm still waiting on some final touches for the episode artwork, but then it should be good to go.

Research component. I didn't do as much here this week as I would've liked. The podcast still took most of my attention, and I took the day off yesterday for Easter. It was my first full day off in a while and it felt pretty necessary.

I started transcribing my last two interviews and hope to have a draft of the write-up done by early next week.

Just a reminder, my defense is April 26 at 2 p.m. in the grad studies office. I'll have to turn the paperwork into Kaitlin that day. I'll have the project report out to you all by April 20 at the latest, hopefully sooner.

Thanks for all your support!

Erin

Week 13: April 9, 2018.

Hi all!

Happy Monday again. We're getting close to the end of these I guess!

So, I have some big news this week. The website is up and running with all the episodes uploaded. You can take a look and a listen here at www.outherepodcast.com. It is in no way finished. I need to fill in episode notes, a few episode photos and a lot of other details. I'd also like to do a final written post to reflect on the experience of creating the podcast. But, the bones are there. I also need to do final listens and fixes on the episodes and don't have plans to promote each episode on social media until after the defense so that I have time to make changes/ add suggestions. They'll be available on iTunes, stitcher and google play as well.

If I've learned anything it's that it takes A LOT of work to make a podcast. I mean, I already knew that. But still.

As far as research goes, this week will be all about writing. I transcribed the last two interviews and started the writing process. And I'm looking forward to compiling everything. I also have to edit an episode for LIFE TK this week, so I'll have to spend a bit of time on that. I'm really happy I was able to continue to do that alongside my work.

It wasn't easy to balance both that and freelancing another piece while doing my master's project, but the professional connections and opportunities have made it worth it.

Thanks again for all your support. I'll just stick this here, just in case: the defense is April 26 at 2 p.m. in the grad studies office. I'll have to turn the paperwork into Kaitlin that day at 5. Thanks again. And let me know if you have any questions!

Erin

Week 14: April 16, 2018.

Hi all!

Happy last Monday of the project! So, I finished the research paper this week, my project report and the episode notes on the website. I'll be spending the rest of this week gathering a few last nat sounds, doing a final listen and fact check on all the episodes and making sure the website is in tip-top shape. I'll also make sure everything is ready to go with iTunes, Stitcher and Google Play when I get ready to publish after the defense. I think I'm still going to promote each episode individually on social media throughout the month of May and into June. But people will also be able to listen to them all at once if they want.

I have to say, I'm pretty proud of what I produced. It's not perfect by any means, but I learned so much about staying motivated on my own schedule and how to set goals and stay organized. I'm also miles better at editing (and fixing audio), and I've learned a lot about audio equipment (and what can go wrong with it...). As far as the research goes, I didn't realize until I was actually putting the article together how much wonderful advice people had and how much I learned. I feel so much better prepared to report on rural Alaska and on Alaska Native communities now, and I'm sure that will come up in my internship this summer.

See you all at the defense on April 26 at 2 p.m.! I'll get the project report out as soon as possible. I'll be sending it to Scott either today or tomorrow.

Cheers! And happy spring finally!

Erin

Chapter 3: Evaluation

I set out to produce at least six 20-minute podcast episodes, interview at least 10 people for the project, evaluate 34 articles for the research, interview at least five people for the research, create a website, promote the podcast on social media, include photos and blog posts with each episode, purchase studio and field recording equipment and do freelance work, if I had time.

Over the course of 14 weeks, I produced seven 30- to 40-minute podcast episodes plus an introduction episode. I interviewed 18 people for the project; analyzed 51 articles for the research; interviewed nine people for the research; designed and built a website; included photos, episode artwork and episode notes with each episode; published a final blog post evaluating the process; published two freelance articles and worked as an audio editor for Like TK, another podcast. I'm happy to say I exceeded the set goals. The only changes that I made were that I waited to promote the podcast until after the defense and until all episodes were complete, so I could get feedback from the committee, and instead of including blog posts with each episode, I included episode artwork and episode notes.

Audio Quality

I'm most disappointed in the quality of the audio I gathered. When I first got my recorder in the mail (off eBay at a discount and a no-return policy), I realized that the audio was coming in too quiet unless I turned up the recorder all the way. But then, I would pick up a lot of floor noise (which is the fuzzy sound you get when audio quality isn't the best), and the person's voice would easily clip during laughter or louder

moments. The rest of the audio would still be a bit too quiet, even if I was talking directly into the microphone.

I tested the kit out on a story before I left, and I thought I'd fixed it with different presets, but once I got to McCarthy and started doing two-hour long interviews, I realized the problem was *not* fixed, particularly with certain voices. I couldn't take it to anyone here: there are no stores, no repair guy. I couldn't afford the time to send it to the company, and they wouldn't have fixed it anyway because I didn't buy it from an official dealer. Through internet research, I think it's something called DC offset. It causes the audio to be slightly offset from the center wavelength and it makes the audio do exactly what I described. It's a problem with the sound card in the recorder. I ordered a different microphone and that did seem to help some.

Because of the problems with the equipment, I learned a lot about working with poor quality audio. I did feel frustrated because I spent so much time researching ahead of time and spent a lot of money on the recorder. I should've taken it to someone before I left to get it fixed, but I didn't realize how much of an impact it would have on the quality of the audio. It taught me to always have a back-up and to make sure my equipment is solid before starting a project, and I learned a lot more about the technical side of audio production.

Additionally, in some instances, there was no way for me to control my environment. You can't tell someone to put their dog outside or make their wood stove stop running when it's thirty below zero. You can't go to a different room when you're in a one-room cabin if something's making noise. And you can't ask someone to turn off their generator when it's the only thing making electricity and lights for the whole house.

There were also times when I was interviewing two people at once, and I didn't properly explain ahead of time how sensitive the audio equipment is to outside noises, and then the other person would suddenly get up and start doing other things right in the middle of a great sound bite. And sometimes, I wouldn't hear an outside noise coming into my headphones and so I thought it was fine, but then when I went back to listen, the sound appeared in the audio recording.

I learned to get creative, to not be afraid to ask someone to take the batteries out of their clock or adjust their environment and to prep the interviewees more ahead of time. I also learned that I prefer using a shotgun mic for interviews because it's not always easy or practical to hold a microphone directly in someone's face for two and a half hours.

Editing

It would've been nice to have an editor or someone to collaborate with on this project. Sometimes I'd be working on an episode and wanted an outsider's perspective to see if something made sense or a second pair of eyes on my scripts to make sure I wasn't making any grammatical errors. On the one hand, having complete control and creative license was liberating. I'd never worked on a project like that before, and it allowed me to push the boundaries of the form and my own style. But other times, having someone to help me shape the narrative or to strengthen my weaknesses would've been nice.

The two people I'd asked about editing beforehand ended up being too busy to help with any of the episodes. I did reach out to a few friends to get their feedback, and that was helpful. In the future, when working on big projects, I'd plan to work together with someone else, at least in part. I think the overall product would've been better, but it

did teach me how to edit my own work, which is important, especially since I plan to pursue a career as an independent journalist.

Scheduling

Tackling such a big project did feel overwhelming at times, and I worried ahead of time about my ability to self-motivate and be my own boss. Over the course of the semester, I learned how to schedule my days and my weeks to stay productive. I would make lists and set daily and weekly goals for myself. I completed the project in phases rather than trying to tackle everything at once, which kept me motivated and kept me from getting overwhelmed.

If I could do it again, I would've given myself more time. There were voices that I wanted to include or follow-up interviews that I wanted to do but couldn't because of time constraints. Same thing with my research project: There were journalists and sources that I would've loved to have reached out to, but at some point, I had to start the writing process.

Personal and Professional Boundaries

Another thing I struggled with was walking the line between personal and professional. McCarthy is a small community, so I knew almost all the people I was interviewing on a personal level to some degree, and I incorporated my own perspective and experiences into the podcast. That insider perspective was helpful in some ways. It allowed me to ask deeper questions and make sure to represent topics with complexity. But it also made it difficult to not let my own perspective and biases color the episodes. Sometimes it was hard to know whether an explanation would make sense to someone who isn't familiar with this place. That's where an editor would've been helpful. In

general, I tried to keep my personal value judgments out of the episodes and let any opinions come from those that I'd interviewed.

Photography and Web Design

Two of my goals for this project were to get better at photography and web design. I'm not a visual person, but I think multi-media storytelling is incredibly effective. Throughout the project, I struggled with taking good photographs, particularly when the lighting was poor, and I would sometimes forget to take pictures. But, over time, I started taking photos before the interviews so I wouldn't forget. I learned how to use my camera better and to edit photos in Photoshop to improve the quality.

I've designed web sites before using various platforms, but I'd never used Square Space before. I spent a long time working on the simple design for the website. It's inspired by the winter landscape here. Working on the website, I learned how to use Square Space, how to connect a podcast to iTunes and how to build a clean and simple design. I still have a lot more to learn about photography and web design, but I feel like I'm better at both than when I started the project.

Navigating My Research as an Outsider

The final challenge I faced had to do with my research. As a white person conducting research about Native peoples, I understandably faced skepticism from many of my sources. There's a long history of academics studying Native communities, using that research to earn degrees and awards and then never returning or giving back to those communities. I tried to explain ahead of time who I was and what my connection to the state was and that the purpose of the research was to help reporters do a better job covering Alaska Native communities.

Additionally, Alaska Native communities and peoples are so diverse that I worried about generalizing too much. Reporting on one community may be very different from reporting on another. Telling a story of someone living in Anchorage is very different from telling the story of someone living a subsistence lifestyle above the Arctic Circle. I did my best to put myself in context, to explain the project and to include those nuances in the final article.

The challenges pushed me to evaluate my whiteness and my perspective, something that I'll need to do constantly as I move forward in my journalism career. The project challenged me to pick-up the phone when I was nervous to reach out. I realized that the research I'd done to prepare for the project was just the tip of the iceberg. It will be a lifelong journey to learn about the people that live in this state and the complex history that has shaped Alaska. But, I do feel better equipped to report on Alaska Native communities and rural communities in general.

I also wish that all of my sources for the research component could've been Alaska Native or Native and that I could've talked to more than one man for the project. There are currently so few Alaska Native reporters that two of the people I interviewed ended up being non-Native. One is the only reporter covering the Arctic, a predominantly Alaska Native region of the state, and the other is the news director for KYUK Bethel, one of the stations that other interviewees brought up as an example of great coverage of Native communities. KYUK does have one Native reporter on staff (she's not Alaska Native), so I interviewed her as well to make sure I was getting her perspective on the station's work. As far as the gender imbalance, I had a hard time finding working male Alaska Native reporters in the state. If I had had more time and could've interviewed

more people, I think I would've been able to get a more diverse set of perspectives. I still think I was able to provide a lot of geographic and professional diversity (not all of my sources were journalists) in my sourcing.

Overall, I'm proud of the work that I accomplished. I'm a better audio editor and journalist, I developed a system to work independently and to streamline podcast production, I made professional connections during my research project, and I learned more about the way journalism works in this state. I had the privilege of telling the story of a community and a lifestyle that I'm passionate about, collecting oral histories to record people's experiences and lifestyles, and sharing that insight and information with listeners.

Chapter 4: Physical Evidence

For the professional project, I conducted background research on McCarthy and the surrounding area, researched and purchased audio and studio equipment, built an in-home studio, interviewed 18 people, transcribed their interviews, wrote seven episode scripts and an audio introduction, produced seven audio episodes between 30- and 40-minutes long each, took photos, collected sounds of life in McCarthy, built and designed a website, collaborated with an artist for the logo and episode artwork, worked with a musician to create a theme song, wrote episode notes for each podcast and talked with Alaska Public Media about running portions of the podcast in the summer. To produce each episode, I had to write the scripts, cut the audio, edit and fact check the scripts, voice the episodes, mix the audio, add music and natural sound and do final listening edits.

I also published freelance articles for Harvest Public Media and The Midwest Center for Investigative Reporting and worked as an audio editor for the podcast LifeTK during this time. The project lasted 14 weeks, from Jan. 12 to April 20. I worked for 30 to 60 hours each week on the podcast. From Jan. 12 to Jan. 22, I collected audio of my trip north, reached out to interview sources, worked on the title and concept for the website and artwork and started honing the idea for each podcast episode. For the rest of January and February, I conducted two to three-hour interviews with sources all over the area, collected natural sounds, transcribed those interviews, designed the website and started working on the introduction episode. Throughout March and April, I wrote the podcast scripts and produced the episode audio.

Episodes

To view the website, which houses all the episodes of Out Here, episode artwork, photographs, episode notes and acknowledgements, visit

<http://www.outherepodcast.com/>. The episode artwork was designed and created by Ian Gyori with my input. I took the photographs, unless otherwise noted.

Introduction. To listen to the audio for this episode, visit

<https://www.outherepodcast.com/episodes/intro>.



The inside passage



Erin McKinstry on the stern of the MV Columbia. *Photo credit (above): Ian Gyori*



The Haines Highway

Script-Introduction

Introduction.wav/mp3

TRT: 12:04

OC: I'm Erin McKinstry

Soundofboat.wav

I'm on the stern of the MV Columbia. It's a big ferry boat: 418 feet long and room for almost 500 passengers. It makes me feel small and insignificant.

Soundofboat.wav down SlateTracker.wav

In the moonlight, I can just make out the outline of mountains. We're heading north. I can't see it, but I know that the further we go the more dramatic it gets. We're heading toward the land of extremes and toward the quiet.

By we, I mean my boyfriend and me.

The boat we're on is part of the Alaska Marine Highway System. The ferries connect parts of the state the way a road would. In Alaska, transportation can get creative. Sometimes it's pavement, but other times it's dirt roads, bush planes, boats, snow machine tracks.

The journey is often the story.

It's January and to some people, we might seem like we're headed in the wrong direction. Toward the dark, toward the cold, toward the emptiness. But here, people don't see it that way.

IntroTony.wav

My name is Tony Tanks. And I work for the Alaska Marine Highway.

Tony1.wav

Alaska still has an edge to it and I like that. I like it that um, it's a small fish bowl and you can be a bigger fish in a, in a smaller bowl. And um it tends to make people bigger fish I think, and you can become a bigger fish if you want to be

Tony's right, there's something about Alaska, something like an edge, a challenge, something that pushes you, makes you want to grow. It makes you tougher maybe. It makes you appreciate. And it makes you realize that you can when you didn't think you could.

You've probably heard it: Alaska, the last frontier. A place where you can live your own way, build your own life, leave it all behind. It's inspired books and novels and attracted hermits, outcasts and adrenaline junkies. It's big and dramatic and wild. And it's a place that's romanticized, for better or for worse.

But, a lot of that stuff is true. Particularly in the place I'm headed to.

Like John Muir said: The mountains are calling and I must go. Alaska calls, she puts a little hook in you. And when you leave, you always feel a tug. Or, at least, that's how I see it.

You're listening to Out Here, a podcast about life at the end of the road in Alaska, and I'm Erin McKinstry.

Slatetracker.wav ends
Outhere_mixdownwithallmusic.wav
Outhere_mixdown2.wav

I bought a red pick-up truck back in Missouri where I grew up, so that I could move my life north, permanently this time. I gave away anything that didn't fit in the back.

From Missouri, we headed across the country to the coast. On the ferry and off again. And then, we'll get stuck in Haines because of the weather.

Patience, that's one thing Alaska will teach you.

And then after two and a half days, the border opens, and we carefully traverse the 756 miles through the Yukon and all the way to Anchorage in just two days.

In Anchorage, it's a frenzy of logistics. Doing laundry, buying groceries and fuel. Double and triple checking lists to make sure we don't forget something.

And then, another long day's drive to the end of the road. That's what's tugging on me. That place out there in the middle of the wilderness.

It's called McCarthy and I've toyed with the idea of never even naming it for this podcast 'cause it's quite a gem--with a lot of warts.

It sits on the other side of a footbridge, surrounded by three mountain ranges and the country's largest national park. It's filled with relics of another era, when copper and gold mining fueled the population. That's juxtaposed with some of the most unadulterated wilderness I've ever seen.

I'll let my friend Ali Towers take it from here:

Ali_opening.wav

58:49 Imagine a place where dogs run free, where the sunshine, glistening off the glacier, shoots into your being and fills you up with beauty and glory... (laugh) um the paths are dirt, the people are dirty (laugh)

Okay, I love her laugh. But seriously.

Ali opening2.wav

And just the nature, you are with nature, and beautiful people. Some incredible people. It's amazing the people you meet at the end of a dirt road, huh?

I came out here to work a summer job like so many others, feeding off the tourism that swells in Alaskan summers. My story is not extraordinary. But I did decide to stay through the winter quiet and cold. And out here I learned a completely different way of life, where you meet your basic needs on your own and learn to live without.

And now I'm headed back to live it.

The Kennicott.wav starts

Some people stumble upon this place, others seek it out for its beauty. Some stay a year and others stay their whole lives.

Martin opening.wav

35:51 One thing they definitely all have in common is that the...society failed them in some way, like one way or another living in the cities didn't agree with them, their personalities wanted something more or wanted a lot less

That's Martin Robert Edelman Morrison. He grew up here, one of the few, and he's now 33. He says he's never leaving. His parents knew it was the best place and he does too.

Martin opening2.wav

It's a good place to become who you're trying to be instead of being who the world is trying to turn you, is trying to make you. Like the worlds they came from I've never been to, so I don't know. I only know who they are now, they seem happy, they seem happier.

There's a certain acceptance here of different types of identities. You can be religious, atheist, transgendered, absolutely introverted, sexist, an environmentalist...I could go on. I've seen all shapes and sizes.

The Kennicott.wav fades out.

But it's not all rainbows and butterflies. I mean I often feel like I'm living in a story book, but I know this place isn't for everyone. Most people live without running water or indoor plumbing. There's no grocery store or businesses in the winter. And weird things happen like plastic shatters and frost creeps in at 30 below. A lot of times it feels like everything is breaking. Here's resident Greg Fensterman.

GregF opening.wav

26:51 You want to have a cup of coffee, but you gotta, first you got to go hook up the generator so you can grind some coffee beans, so you go hook up the generator and start

that up except oh it won't start. So oh, now why won't it start, so now you've got to spend 27:17 half an hour troubleshooting your generator, get that going, you know that cup of coffee ends up taking like 45 minutes to make that cup of coffee.

ZigZag Heart.wav starts

The winter population can dip down to only 20 or 30 people in December and January. The isolation and the dark gets to some people, myself included.

Some would say there *is* a drinking problem here, and people do use this place to run away from the world. I've heard it called never, never land, a town full of lost boys building their own forts.

And there are loose cannons. In the 80s, a guy who'd been living here about eight months murdered six people in town. And it's still imprinted in the memory of this place. Here's Stephens Harper, the area's lead law enforcement park ranger:

Stephens1.wav

You know, that, that of course, weighs on a lot of people's minds pretty heavily. Um we want to, we want to believe that everybody in this community is happy and mentally stable and what not, but that's a...we all know that that's not true.

Plenty of people flounder here. There's no Alaska Native community, not a whole lot of wisdom that gets passed down through generations and less people live a subsistence lifestyle than in other parts of remote Alaska.

There was never enough game to support permanent settlements here. White people only came here because of copper and gold. And it's still pretty much just white people today: people that have been privileged enough to decide to live without.

There are people who burn plastic and leave their trash out and then bears get in it and then the bears end up getting shot.

Some people want more services, and some people want less. Some people want multi-million dollar homes, and some people want to live in yurts.

There's community and then there's rugged individualism, and they don't always mix well.

Here's Tamara Harper, who's married to Stephens and runs a B&B in town.

Tamara1.wav

It's an intense place to live. It can be intensely wonderful in any number of ways. And for us, over the years, more than once, it has been intensely frustrating.

There are plenty of people who come out here, build a house and then leave. This is how long-time resident John Adams describes it:

JohnAdams1.wav

it's the end of the road, there's a beauty here and a peacefulness and people want it, they build their cabin or whatever and then they move on. In the process of doing it, they lost what they came here for.

ZigZagHeart.wav ends

McCarthy is both close and far from progress. It's not exactly like you're walking back in time 100 years or something, although there are people out here who do live that way still.

It's seen a lot of change in recent decades as technology and tourism have touched it. It's a weird juxtaposition, sitting in your outhouse in the middle of the wilderness, using your 4G iPhone to buy things on Amazon Prime.

It's something some people only dream about: heading to the Alaskan wilderness, living in a cabin in the woods, growing a little garden. But what's it really like?

That's what we'll discuss on Out Here: How and why people ended up at the end of the road and what it takes to build a life, a community and relationships here.

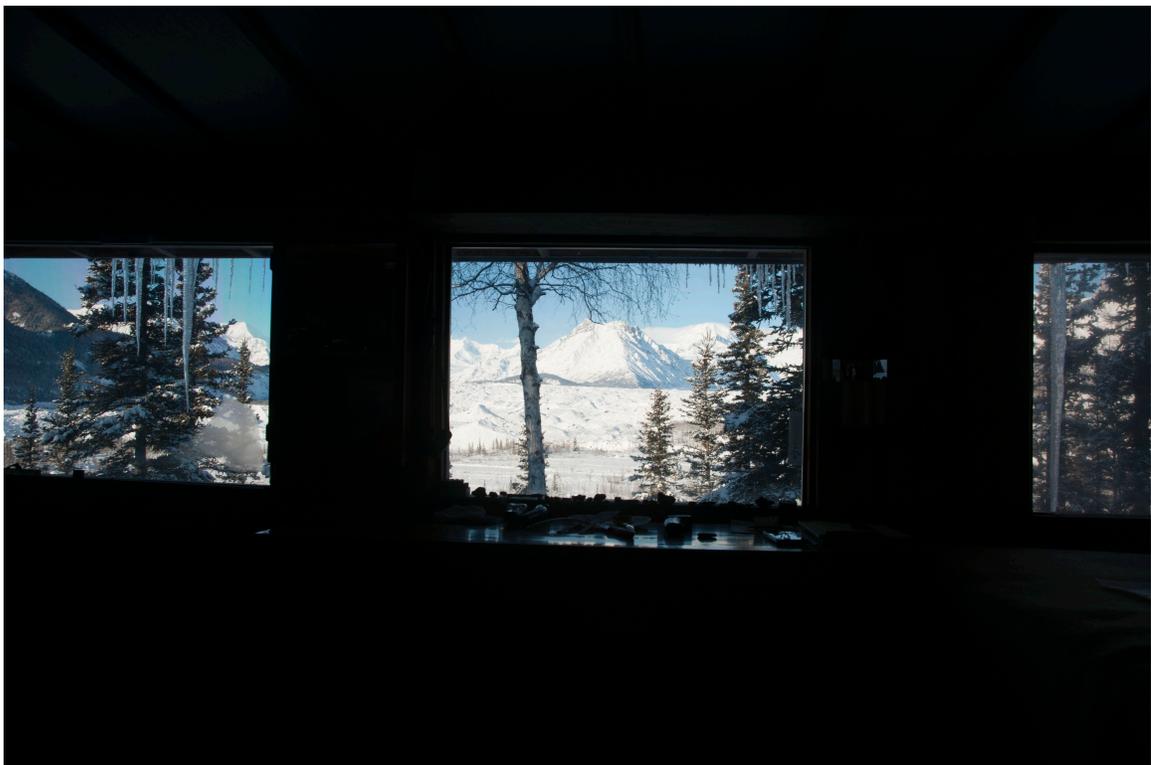
You ready for this journey?

For Out Here, I'm Erin McKinstry.

Airplanetakingoff.wav

Episode One: Heading North. To listen to the audio for this episode, please visit

<https://www.outherepodcast.com/episodes/heading-north>.



The view out Gary Green's window.

Script: Episode One (Heading North)

HeadingNorth.wav/mp3
**use explicit tag*

TRT: 34:19 **OC: the sound of wood splitting**

Outhere mixdown 1.wav

You're listening to Out Here, a podcast about life at the end of the road in Alaska, and I'm Erin McKinstry.

If you haven't listened to the intro, I'd highly recommend it. You'll be a bit lost without it. And it won't take too long, I promise.

On Episode One, Heading North, we'll start at the beginning, like so many stories do. The stories of how and why people ended up here. I have four to share. But there are so many more. And we'll start with the oldest, one that dates back to 1973.

Woodsplitting.wav

Ultimathule | violinlead.wav

Okay, so I've got a little bit of history and context to catch you up on so bear with me. I'll try to keep it short.

McCarthy and the neighboring town of Kennicott sit in a valley carved by the Kennicott Glacier surrounded by the Wrangell Mountains. The St. Elias range rises in the southeast, it's tallest peak reaching over 19,000 feet. And to the south the Chugach form a long wall. The park has the largest concentration of sub-arctic glacial ice in the world. It's a pretty special place.

The human history of the area dates back at least 1000 years, probably longer. The Ahtna people traveled through in small groups, living in semi-permanent camps. They used the rich copper deposits found near McCarthy for tools and for trade.

The first white man came to the area in 1885, led up the Chitina and Chitistone Rivers by Ahtna people. More came when they caught wind of the rich copper deposits. That led to commercial copper and gold mining. In 1911, a railroad was completed to Cordova, where the copper was shipped south. And today there is no road that connects the two.

That's where Kennicott and McCarthy come from. Kennicott was the company town. Copper miners lived and worked there, coming and going in seasonal stints. McCarthy, five miles down the road, popped up as a supply point for all the other mining in the region. It was a real frontier town. As one local historian Patt Garrett puts it, at one point there were 11 bars and no churches.

South of McCarthy, there was also a road and a bridge across the Nizina, a wide braided river and from there, gold miners traveled to the mining camps of Dan Creek and Chititu.

But in 1938, when the copper was no longer profitable, the area was more or less abandoned. All that infrastructure stayed behind and started to crumble. And that's how Gary Green found it in 1973.

Ultimathule | violinlead.wav

Gary5.wav

There was no road to McCarthy then it was just the old town and three couples living here. When I arrived, I became number 7...Every road around the McCarthy area was just a two-wheel mark road with flowers growing down the center, wild flowers and stuff.

Gary wears cowboy hats and flies bush planes. He says he's lived in McCarthy longer than anyone else at this point. When he was younger, he lived on a farm in Kansas.

Gary2.wav

I used to take my baths in a round galvanized tub just the same way as my son has. I guess I'm not very progressive really (laugh).

Then, his dad moved them north to Alaska. They lived in Anchorage, but Gary pined for someplace more remote.

Gary3.wav

02:44 When I was uh growing up and watching TV as a kid, I mean, all that was on in those days was westerns...I loved westerns and I loved the west...I've never been attracted to where it was busy and lots and lots of people, I was attracted to wild lonely places

So, two years out of high school he...

Gary4.wav

I decided to take the summer off to go gold prospecting and uh...01:03 I was always intrigued by the Wrangell Mountains, just the wild aspect of the Wrangell's so I ended up in McCarthy.

He moved out in the winter, hauling his supplies by snow machine across that old bridge across the Nizina.

Snowmachine.wav

Gary6.wav

And I didn't come back until May when uh break-up was just about over...everywhere I went prospecting had mining activity, old cabins, 05:32 ghost towns...and they had only been abandoned for 30 some years at that point which means they were still in pretty good shape...The first three years I was here I lived at the mining town of Chititu, which was another ghost town...And it was my own town, I was the only, only resident.

If he got lonely, he'd make the half a day's walk to McCarthy, crossing back over the now crumbling bridge.

Gary7.wav

It was roller coaster and twisting sideways, the approaches to it. But it was still crossable on foot. When those sections 07:10 actually washed out within the first couple years, the main structure crossing the main channels was still intact so you could wade smaller channels and then climb the caissons, so you didn't have the danger of fording a deep river.

That danger is what eventually lead him to flying.

Gary8.wav

I got my first airplane mostly so I could cross the Nizina River because the bridge did eventually wash out. And that was the most dangerous thing I did in this country was wading big rivers, and I survived it but I figured if you, if you do this year after year eventually you'll just wash away. 33:2... I took to flying pretty well, and it's opened up the world, now just rather than the local area being mine, I had the whole Wrangell's

Gary spent two winters near Chitina, about 47 miles from McCarthy. And after his third summer gold prospecting, he decided to build his own cabin in McCarthy and spend the winter.

Gary9.wav

It was, it was nice. I had my kerosene lamp, because I would wake up quite early in the mornings, I don't know what time it was... 14:05 and I could read by the by the stove until it turned daylight and by daylight time I was ready to charge off and do things and I would be outdoors running around until dark and then back at the cabin and, uh I think it was a full-time job just existing and uh with the running around getting firewood and hauling water and...

McCarthyLighter.wav

He'd found his home.

Gary10.wav

When I first came out here, I only planned to take a summer off and go gold prospecting and the life absolutely agreed with me more than I ever imagined it would and I just never left um, there's more adventure out here 04:15 every day is your own if you're not punching the clock going to work on a schedule every day

McCarthyLighter.wav

Gary11.wav

This is God's country, I can look out my window right as we speak, and this is what I drink my coffee to every single morning and when I go outdoors from my cabin here, I can, I can pee in the yard, I can shoot a gun, I can go snowshoeing, skiing, snowmobiling or go climb in my airplane and fly away without dealing with um traffic 29:59...and everybody makes their own level of noise, but there's just not that

many of us yet making so much noise, when I step outside, it's mostly quiet and it's something I, I appreciate.

For a picture of the view out Gary's window, check out the episode notes. It's pretty epic.

McCarthyLighter.wav continues

Next, a story that might make you believe in fate. Or at least letting things happen. This one starts in 1979. By then, the state had turned the old railroad track that led from Chitina to McCarthy into a road, against the wishes of some of the residents. Here's Gary again:

Gary13.wav

It was a mixed feelings on, on the road at that time. Some of the old timers wanted it, they wanted easier access. I was new and young and I loved living in the wilderness and the road was counter to that. But it's, uh, I, I liken it to trying to hold back the tide, it's hard to do.

McCarthyLighter.wav ends

They called it the worst road in Alaska. Gary said the Sierra Club tried to stop it. People like Gary tried to stop it. But they built it anyway.

Gary14.wav

there was no economic base out here that needed the road at that time. 22:17 But it just was progress.

The road was prone to mud slides and washouts. And getting to McCarthy proper was still tricky. Only a hand tram ran across the river. Water pooled on the roads and froze, forming something called road glaciers. Don't worry we still have them today.

Gary15.wav

And it used to be the glaciers would get really thick and people would get stuck in 'em and if they did there would be no one to help you out and your vehicle could be froze in for the entire winter and actually get engulfed in the ice um. You just sometimes didn't make it, or if you did it might be a 13-hour drive from Chitina to McCarthy. It was just...

Full of challenges. So, a lot of people used sled dogs like Carole and Daniel Morrison. They raised five kids at Crystal Creek about 20 miles from McCarthy.

Wood_splitting.wav

Careless-Morning.wav

Carole1.wav

01:17 Well my name is Carole Morrison, and I live at 41.5 mile on the McCarthy Road between Chitina and McCarthy in Alaska...I came up here from Colorado to see what

Alaska was like. Uh my husband, at the time, was not my husband but we were together. And we had our truck all camp styled and hit the road...in October of 1979.

Careless-Morning.wav

Carole2.wav

Jennifer slept in the front seat, she was 8. And then Adam was four so he 21:51 fit in the floorboard on a really thick foam pad, he had the best bed of all (laugh)... Carrie was a baby and she slept with us in the back in our sleeping bags. So, it was compact but it was adequate and comfortable for everyone.

Carole3.wav

Everyone had sled dogs in those days, there was mushers everywhere.

They ended up in Palmer, about an hour outside of Anchorage, the biggest city in Alaska. And they found a cabin and started getting sled dogs.

But Carole's husband Daniel wanted something more, he wanted to be out further, to be out in the bush.

One day, he headed out on a dog mushing trip with a neighbor. They loaded the dogs in the back of a pick-up.

Carole4.wav

04:16 One of the dogs jumped out unbeknownst to them in these people's yard.

Those people were Buzz and Alma. And meeting them changed Carole and Daniel's lives. Daniel was a carpenter, and when he and Carole went to get the dog, Buzz and Alma asked him to do some work on their house. And they started talking.

Carole6.wav

And we never would've met them except the dog jumping out in their yard.

Careless-Morning.wav ends

What follows, a seemingly random chain of events, is what landed them here.

While Daniel was working at Buzz and Alma's, he told them he was looking for a place to live out in the wilderness. A friend of theirs came passing through, and Alma asked him:

Carole7.wav

Daniel is looking for a place to live in bush, do you know, um, any place out there by Chitina? And he said well yes, there was someone that needed a caretaker and his name was George Nelson.

Alma went to tell Carole the news.

Carole8.wav

The lady came into my cabin and said 06:48 get in the car we're going shopping you're moving to the bush and I was like what? And so, I did and we bought some groceries and Daniel and I the next day or so we drove over to Chitina

They met with George Nelson, who lived at mile 11 along the McCarthy Road.

Carole9.wav

08:14 It was just beautiful everywhere, it'd just snowed, it was gorgeous, he lived on a lake he said, yes, you can have my cabin for free for the winter, and you can watch it for me, you can bring your dogs. And so you know that's all it took for me to see the beautiful scenery. And even though it was cold, I was already prepared for that.

They went back to Palmer to get their dogs, left their kids with Buzz and Alma and headed toward their new life.

Carole10.wav

December 17th, we moved into the cabin at Sculpin lake. We started cutting firewood because he didn't have any firewood there, but we had a dog team and so we could go out on the lake, cut the firewood, haul it back over... it was about a week we stayed and did that until he left and went and got the kids. And brought them and it was Christmas

The oldest started correspondence school and they started to realize they never wanted to leave.

Carole11.wav

That winter also Daniel took off on the dogs up the road to visit McCarthy and he got as far as Crystal Creek 10:42 and then there was a sign there that said lots for sale and so he camped out there, came back the next day and we got a hold of the guy and in May we came out to look at the land, actually bought a piece of property here...one thing followed the next to where, you can't deny that, you know, uh, this is the place for us (laugh) and we've been here since then, 38 years.

Two more kids followed, both born in their cabin. And that's a story for another day. Carole had read everything she could get her hands on about midwifery and delivered both with only her husband there to help. I cannot imagine that. Anyway, she wouldn't have had it any other way, she said. None of it.

Snowmelt.wav

Carole12.wav

23:30 I guess we just learned that we could live without a lot of things that's tied to city living. When we were moving, we sold everything we had...so we didn't have to mess with anything except uh his carpentry tools and his climbing gear and uh 24:08 the kids had a

little suitcase...And then I just bought clothes for 'em at other garage sales and rummage sales in cities as I passed through them...I didn't have a whole bunch of stuff packed, I just lived day by day and after a while you sort of get used to that and go, I don't need all that stuff...I learned so much about my own resources and if you run out of something, you'll think of something else. If you don't run out of it, you never will...26:59 If you don't have something to cook with and you just say okay well, what else is there then you'll say well maybe I could do this...the more you use your resources, the more you have, and it's kind of fun to live like that.

Snowmelt.wav continues Bird4.wav

Next up, the story of Mark Vail. He's an environmentalist with a big white beard and a house full of books. He's made his living as a cook, a craftsman and a fisherman.

Walking up to his house is a bit like walking into a fairy tale. Um it's tucked in the woods and surrounded by gross beak, grey jays and chickadees. Even the occasional owl. There was one there when I visited. He knows more about birds than anyone I know.

Mark's story isn't one of chance. He didn't fall into McCarthy. He was looking for it. He wanted a way of life that was full of wilderness and freedom and adventure. And he wanted to live off the land, to leave as little of an impact as he could. When I asked him, what made him look north, he said:

Mark1.wav

I think it's the undeveloped space. It's kind of oxymoronic that I'm coming here to develop my own little lifestyle. But my own little lifestyle's pretty low impact compared to what my lifestyle would be if I lived in the city. 48:49 I could die, and my house would pretty much molder away except for the tin roof.

Snowmelt.wav continues

Mark2.wav

I grew up in a rural area, we had dogs, we gardened, we hunted, we fished, so a lot of the stuff I still do today, I was exposed to as a kid. My family was entrenched in the county where I grew up since the 1680s. I was like 5th generation in the same place...and I wanted to go north. Any stories of the north woods intrigued me. You know we had hunting and fishing magazines and I'd read articles about going fishing in Canada on the big lakes. And hunting for moose and grizzly bears all those things that were enchanting and then...

Mark went into the air force as an opportunity to get away from where he grew up and to make money instead of paying money to go to school. He got stationed in Louisiana, but he would not stand for that. He wanted to go north, remember. He found someone with an assignment in Anchorage and convinced them to switch. And then he...

Mark3.wav

landed on Valentine's Day in Anchorage in 1976 and fell in love immediately with the state. It's like the first time the mountains were real...

Mark4.wav

In '77 a friend invited me to go dip netting... I'm like what's dip netting, he goes 04:13 well you get this long-handled net and you stick it in the river and you pull fish out, I'm like well where do you do that? He goes Chitina. I'm like where the hell is Chitina? And he goes oh, it's on, it's like 6 hours, 7-hour drive from here, over in...the eastern part of the state

Mark and two of his friends headed out to Chitina and walked five miles down a canyon to catch fish.

Mark5.wav

And we took turns with the net and every time I got the net there were no fish, and 04:51 every time they got the net they'd each catch a couple of red salmon. And finally it was my last turn, and I put the net in the water. And a big old king salmon swam in my net and it weighed like 37 pounds. And I'd never even dreamt of catching a fish that big. It was a beautiful sunny day in July, and I'm sitting there on the bank of the Copper River, looking across the river, up the Chitina Valley going, oh my God a person could live out there and eat fish from here. That's what I want to do.

Up that valley and out there was McCarthy. Mark got out of the air force in 1979 and started looking for land. He found some in the early 80s when the state was selling land out here.

Mark6.wav

05:44 So I bought sight unseen...The McCarthy Road at that time had, a treacherous connotation about going out it. 07:52 The travel log said you know don't go out there without two extra spare tires cause...there's railroad spikes in the road bed

Mark didn't drive a car at the time, so he decided to ride his bike to McCarthy instead.

Mark7.wav

08:09 I convinced a friend...to come to Chitina to a music festival and give me a ride with my bicycle, went to the music festival and the northern lights were out and it's the third week in July so it's still light out at night. And there were streaks of green in the orange sunset up the valley. And the whole crowd...just, howled like a big pack of wolves and the guys on the stage had quit playing music 09:57 because no one could hear 'em, the howl was so loud. He goes well we're bringing you the music, but we're not bringing you the light show, and when we said light, the full moon came up over the mountain behind the stage. And it was just this big white ball, you know, and I thought wow, this is a pretty auspicious way to start my adventure on what I was considering to be the rest of my life. Tomorrow I'm going to 10:43 ride my bike 50 miles down the McCarthy Road and see the land I bought sight unseen. And that's what I did...10:51

It took him 6 hours to go around 50 miles, and he saw 2 cars.

Mark8.wav

There was a car that passed me that had turned around at the Kuskulana Bridge because he wasn't going to go across it because in those days it was the railroad bridge with just planks across the railroad ties. Like two, two by 12s for each tire over this open span of railroad trestle. And they 11:26 were kind of rotten in places, you know there were spikes sticking up and stuff...11:35 I figured if nothing else, I could pick my bike up and walk.11:46 I biked across...and you could stop in the middle of the bridge and look straight down and see the river right through the holes in the bridge.

Okay, I just have to stop him right there. It's a 238-foot drop to the bottom of the canyon. People used to drive across it. In the winter. With two rotting planks spanning the 525 feet from one side to the other. Just saying—not for the faint of heart. I still get vertigo when I go across it and nowadays it's a regular old bridge.

Mark9.wav

And 12:07 I remember biking down the road, and getting to the Gilahena trestle and thinking wow this is pretty wild country 'cause right after the Gilahena the brush on the road overarched the road and closed the road in a tunnel and...I remember coming out of the wilderness and all the sudden there's this little trailer...I thought oh, civilization, you know, there's a building. You know and there 13:22 was no one around and then I rode another couple miles and got to Long Lake and there was this beautiful homestead on the lake...So 13:57 then I rode and found the little sign in the...on the side of the road that said state land survey. And I hiked in and found my property, which was quite the adventure in itself. But yeah that was uh my first time in. And then it took me a couple more years to grubstake enough to be able to build a frame house.

A Rush of Clear Water.wav

Mark10.wav

I've practiced my lifestyle so that my impact is not a detriment to the wider society so that when my time on earth is gone. 02:59 People won't say well look at the huge mess he left behind. I want to leave the world a better place, and it starts with the environment I live in

A Rush of Clear Water.wav continues

Finally, let's hear a story that brings us closer to the present.

By the time this story starts, tourism had started to increase in the McCarthy area. There was talk of putting in a bridge across the Kennicott River, so people could walk or drive across instead of having to pull themselves with a hand tram. And the old timers were starting to fade into a new generation: a generation of mountaineers and adventurers. Not to say that the old timers weren't adventurous and a few of them were mountaineers, but

these folks had more of a traveling bug. Coming in and out, working seasonally, living a seasonal lifestyle, drawn to the dangerous beauty of the Wrangell's.

This story's also a love story. It's the story of Greg Runyan and Kristin Link. Greg's a mountaineer and carpenter. And Kristin's an artist and a scientific illustrator. We'll start with Greg:

A Rush of Clear Water.wav continues

Greg.wav

I came to Alaska in '94 with a buddy. We just uh decided to drive up here and see the state for the summer...and we ended up staying we never left and spending the winter in Girdwood which is a ski town outside Anchorage. 14:27 I had a 67 palomino pop up camper, like an old camper, back at the end of the woods, put a blue tarp over it, put a mister heater in it and lived in that for the winter. Stevie and I did and seminal winter of my life, changed my entire existence....and that spring he and I and our friend Koby came out to McCarthy and flew and tried to climb mount Blackburn which is the highest peak here in the valley. I'd never climbed a mountain in my life, never done any of that stuff, neither had they really but we tried

For the record, Mt. Blackburn is 16,391-foot tall, taller than any mountain in the continental United States. It's glaciated and technical. And not usually someone's first pick to start climbing mountains.

Greg3.wav

So we drove, I had a '72 Volkswagon van, we drove that down the McCarthy road, got stuck to the front windshield in a mud glacier because it was like end of April, got it out some people came and helped us, 15:11 I think it must've been the Morrison's, I don't know I didn't know anyone back then. Got to the end of the road, there was a tram, an aerial hand tram across the Kennicott...Kelly Bay flew us in 16:04 and dropped us on the Nabesna glacier for three weeks

A Rush of Clear water.wav continues

17:33 We did not summit Blackburn, we got up to about 12,000 feet and were smart enough to turn around and go down. Um, I'd never put crampons on in my life or knew how to tie into a rope. My friends would tie me into the front of the rope because I was the biggest guy, with the theory that if I fall in a crevasse they'd pull me out which is not the way to do it...

A Rush of Clear water.wav ends

Sweetly.wav

Greg4.wav

the plane Kelly flew us in a Sesna 185 can only take two people 17:58 out in the first flight with gear...It was probably like an hour and a half I was there by myself on the

Nabesna glacier with my little kit, my little stove, some coffee and stuff. I just remember feeling this really inner peace and being in this big glaciated wilderness and it really drew me in.

Greg5.wav

18:58 I'd met these great people in Girdwood.... They were all coming to McCarthy...I followed the hippies to McCarthy and that was a good call. Always follow the hippies they know where to go.

Sweetly.wav continues

Greg6.wav

16:43 I wanted the freedom to buy land and build a place without any constraints, I wanted to do it raw, raw land, raw building... I didn't have much money. And McCarthy was working out, I liked the people here, I had a little bit of work her...so I bought ten acres on the south side of McCarthy Creek ... and cleared it by hand and built a 14 by 16 log cabin there with some of my buddies and it was working out pretty good out here and yeah then I met Kristin and then we stepped up a lot

Enter Kristin. I debated whether to include this story but it's um it's so sweet so please indulge me.

Kristin and Greg met while climbing Denali, the tallest peak in North America. The 20,310-foot peak is nothing to scoff at. Altitude sickness, weather, avalanches, all of it can keep even the most experienced climbers from summiting.

But at 22 and without much mountaineering experience, Kristin summited. She'd come up to Alaska in the fall after graduating college. She wanted to experience a winter. And she ended up getting a job as a dog handler in a town called Willow. She spent all winter staring at the Alaska Range and its queen, Denali, staring back at her. So, she decided to climb it.

Kristin1.wav

I was like okay, I'm gonna do this thing and then I'm gonna leave. That was my plan, I was gonna go back to Vermont where my parents live now. 09:39 And one of my guides on that trip was Greg

Greg7.wav

19:31 Kristin shows up for the climb and it's like right on, you're, you know, you've obviously been around, you have a lot of skills, you're very confident, you're very quiet. And you just kind of have this inner peace.

Kristin3.wav

I was just focused on climbing the mountain or whatever, but we, I think we were the only who like seriously drank coffee on that trip, so...

Greg8.wav

I have this rule as a guide where you can't talk to me 'til I've made coffee for myself. I'll bring you coffee in bed, I'd love to bring it to you, tea, hot chocolate, you tell me what it is I'll bring it to you in your tent, I'll bring it to you anytime. But if I go in and start the stoves don't come in and ask me questions that I answered last night, like where we going, what time are we leaving, what are we doing where, I'm like look I need to drink my coffee. Kristin would come in and she would sit there and not say a word. And I'd pour the water in mine look at her 20:35 and she just had her mug so I'd give her a little water, eventually we got this little routine down where you know, I knew she was gonna come in and it was fine, we just shared coffee together and it was really nice...

Greg9.wav

I remember holding her head as she was puking out the back door from altitude illness, at 17,200 feet at 30-below zero. Didn't sleep at all that night but then she got up the next morning 20:55 and summited with the summit team. So, I was like that's a lot of fortitude. To be up all night puking and get up and fire the summit of Denali like that. That's no easy feat I don't care what anyone says, it's hard.

After the climb, they spent a few days together. And that was it. It was time to go.

Kristin3.wav

My friend molly and I tried to leave, my car ended up exploding...I remember like standing there with my car broken down. 11:19 And like not knowing what was going on, I was like this is a sign that I shouldn't leave Alaska, I should go back

Kristin ended up spending a few months in McCarthy that summer. And then, she started graduate school in California.

Kristin4.wav

And it was so funny because I was there in Monterrey which is a really, really beautiful amazing place to be, but I had just like fallen in love with Alaska, so I think that all my illustrations and all of my work had to do with Alaska, and I think I was in my mind very much thinking about getting back here.

UltimaThule.wav

Alaska put a little hook in her. She was calling her back.

Greg10.wav

After she graduated she moved up here and 25:17 never left it's been good.

UltimaThule.wav continues

Kristin5.wav

You have a lot of flexibility as far as like what your lifestyle is like and how expensive your lifestyle is. I can afford to do my artwork which is really valuable to me right now.

You have a lot of like personal space and ability to you know decide what you want to do each day. So yeah, I think kind of like that freedom and flexibility is what I love about it.

UltimaThule.wav continues

You've been listening to Out Here, a podcast about life at the end of the road, or at least along the McCarthy Road in Alaska.

On the next episode, we'll hear about what it's like to build a house and a life in the middle of the woods.

Malcolm_teaser.wav

Everybody's always worried, how am I gonna build this house, I don't know how to build a house. And you're like of course you don't know how to build a house.

Thanks to Galen Huckins and Blue Dot Sessions for the music and to the one and only Ian Gyori for artwork. To my University of Missouri Master's committee members for their support: Scott Swafford, Sara Shahriari and Dr. Cristina Mislán. And to the Duffy Fund for the money to buy this audio equipment. If it weren't for them, my voice would sound a lot scratchier.

If you like what you heard, please, please, please, don't forget to subscribe wherever you get your podcasts and share with friends or family. You can find all the episodes at www.outherepodcast.com.

For Out Here I'm Erin McKinstry.

All right, I'm gonna go chop some wood.

Woodsplitting.wav

Episode Two: Building in the Wilderness. To hear the audio for this episode,

visit <https://www.outherepodcast.com/episodes/building-in-the-wilderness>.



Malcolm Vance's log cabin

Script: Episode Two (Building in the Wilderness)

Buildinginthewilderness.wav
**put explicit tag*

TRT: 29:04

OC: See ya next time

Okay, so if you haven't listened to the intro episode, I'm gonna to ask you to press pause do that and come back, or you might be a little bit lost. Okay, here goes.

outhere Mixdown1.WAV

You're listening to Out Here, and I'm Erin McKinstry. On episode two: building in the wilderness.

Sawnat.wav

Valantis.wav

Martin1.wav

00:23 My name is Martin Robert Edelman Morrison, I live on the McCarthy Road and I'm a carpenter wildland firefighter

Karla1.wav

01:14 My name is Karla Freivalds, I live in McCarthy, Alaska, and I am a television producer.

Karla2.wav

02:00 The story of how I ended up here began with producing a show called Building Alaska, the show was about building in remote areas. And um the first thing that struck me about McCarthy was how beautiful everything was...And the second thing that struck me was the lifestyle. 02:46 And I started to become friends with people, the guys that were building including Martin...

Martin3.wav

00:23 We had already had plenty of after work parties where we just hung out and talked about life and the world 00:50 and she was clearly interested in living out here, and I already lived out here so I could tell her a lot of the things she was asking me

Karla4.wav

The whole lifestyle out here of kind of less is more...was so appealing to me. Um It was like what I was looking for that I didn't know what I was...that I didn't know I was looking for. But I was really definitely burned out on high heels and, you know, spending an hour getting ready for work in the morning and 03:41 all of these trivial things that are so important in the modern world, so we wrapped the show, I left, Martin and I were seeing each other by that point. I came back in the spring and decided I wanted to try um living out here for the summer and so Martin and I made a deal that if he could teach me how to live out here I would fix his editing software (laught) so um that's what happened that summer. 04:23 But then we just ended up together that two years later we're still together so...

hammeringnat.wav

BurrowBurrow.wav

They're kind of an unlikely pair, I'd say.

Martin grew up outside of McCarthy the longest he's ever been away from rural Alaska is two and a half months. And Karla leaves all the time. She travels the world for her job as a TV producer.

BurrowBurrow.wav continues

Building is what brought them together: building knowledge, building a partnership, building systems.

Because out here, a lot of people have to start from scratch.

BurrowBurrow.wav up

It's not like there are Craig's List postings for rentals or real estate here. There are temporary solutions like Martin and Karla's. The cabin they live in belongs to Martin's brother. And it's actually the one that Martin helped build for the TV show, ironically.

But they're not going to stay here forever. They want to build their own life and their own place. They just bought a piece of property with friends.

Karla5.wav

You know I want to do all those things, have a big garden, and build my own house and you know, just set up a life on your own, you know.

But, that's gonna be a while because building a life out here takes time and that key word again: patience.

Nowadays out here, you can totally pay someone to do all that work for you. I'm not gonna pretend like you can't. Um but a lot of people still don't. It's a trade-off: rather than working to earn a paycheck to then give that paycheck to someone else to build your life for you, you put your own blood, sweat and tears into building it all yourself.

And that takes time and just a lot of like figuring stuff out. Here's resident Greg Fensterman:

GregF1.wav

49:01 You get into things you don't know how to do and you just learn. If you're not willing to do that you're not gonna to survive out here. That's for sure. You have to be willing to figure stuff out and flounder a little bit.

Take a log cabin, for example. First, you have to cut down the trees. Then you have to haul the trees to equipment that can strip them of their bark, something called peeling. Then you have to scribe and notch the logs, so they fit together like puzzle pieces—think Lincoln Logs. They get stacked and then you have to wait for them to settle before you

can sand them and fill in the cracks in with something called Perma-Chink. It's this grey putty that keeps out the cold. And until then, it's really pretty cold inside.

And then not to mention the inside shelving and furniture, the infrastructure for electricity, heat and maybe water. You'll need an outhouse and a chainsaw and a generator, maybe solar panels and batteries. It's no wonder most people live in a dry cabin out here—which means without indoor plumbing or running water if you didn't know.

And then there's just the acquisition of all that information. How do you even *do* those things? I still don't know a lot of them.

But the reward is that everything you do, everything you've built, is yours. Here's Martin again talking about his land.

Martin5.wav

It's completely natural, it's in its natural state so everything that gets done there will be done by us. It's kind of an enlightening experience to carve a place to live out of nature

Out here, in general, you can build your house and your life your own way.

For better or for worse. Here's Greg Fensterman again:

GregF4.wav

There's no building codes out here, so which is both good and bad. It means there's nobody to say uh yeah that's not gonna work, your house is gonna fall down if you do that. There's all this like substandard construction that you know people get away with it. 49:01 There's also, though, there's also a lot of really good work out here. So, it kind of runs, runs the gamut.

On episode two, we'll talk about what that's like to build a life in a place where there's no public utilities and where the nearest Home Depot is an 8-hour drive—if the road's in good shape

drillnat.wav

clubcount.wav

Part one: Building a cabin.

sawnat.wav

When I first realized that a lot of people's cabins out here had been built by the people who lived in them even though they weren't professional carpenters, I was like, wait, you can do that? You can wire your own electricity without being an electrician? Or you can figure out how to set up a solar panel system with an average IQ?

Out here it's like a given that you know how to build things.

Greg1.wav

26:28 I mean there's different ways to go about it. Um apparently the way I go about it is to spend a lot of money and get really worked up over and get stressed out, so you know (laugh). It comes up usually pretty quick and pretty good, it's just kind of epic.

Greg Runyan's right, there's a lot of different ways to go about it.

Some people build the biggest shack they can afford. And then they just keep adding on to it. We call them moron houses. And I say that endearingly.

And then there's the way we're doing it. I'm currently living in a tiny cabin with my boyfriend while we, and by we, I mean he, builds one that's three times the size next door. And it's still 4 and a half times smaller than the average American house. Less square footage means less to heat.

And before I came along he'd already built a rough road in, cleared the land using pigs, built a shop, shed and wood shed, and dug a root cellar by hand. At this point he's been working on the new place for seven years and we still haven't installed the windows. Granted he's built a new restaurant in the meantime where he spends his summers working non-stop. But still, that's a while.

But, what I've learned is that for him, it's all about the process.

Ian1.wav

I knew how to build but also treating it as a learning project, so I would try things and you know mess with the design and see what would be efficient and what wouldn't be. So, I built this tiny little house for less than 2,000 dollars...I love coming home to this place that I built. This custom little cabin where, you know there's no factory-manufactured door. The windows I did buy from elsewhere but everything is pretty much custom about it. And now...I've been working on the bigger project which is a timber frame cabin again, custom and designed by myself and also a big learning project and so far so good.

Clubcount.wav ends

And then there's people who've paid other people to do part of the work. Like Tamara and Stephens Harpers.

Stephens2.wav

We did what you can do in McCarthy now which is pay somebody else to do work for you, which you know a couple of decades ago basically that wasn't much of an option

But they still spent five years after that putting all the finishing touches on and building all their systems.

Stephens1.wav

I think what was really hard is the amount of planning that has to occur. There's a lot of different parts and the place that you're getting those parts is Anchorage, which is a 7- to 8-hour drive away. Um and you buy 97 percent of what it is that you need and you get back and you start trying to put that system together, whether it be electrical system or a water system or what not and you don't have everything and you can't buy it here.

Tamara1.wav

We did a lot of hard work, and dirty hard work, but it was satisfying and gratifying and it was, it was the top priority for five years and we're super proud of living in a comfortable space now so...

Their house is modern and beautiful and looks completely finished. And that's because they lived in a tiny 11 by 13 cabin for 10 years before they moved into the new place. That takes self-restraint. Here's Mark Vail:

Mark1.wav

The one thing about building houses is like you either have to finish it before you move in because if you move in and it's in the comfort zone when you move in, you never get it done (laugh) you know... Once you move stuff in, to do anything, you got to move stuff out of the way... like I've got thirty years of craft work and canning jars you know it's like there's a panel of interior wood that should be up there [1:29:05](#) behind those jars you know but I'd have to take all them down, find a space for them, which would be in my way because it's only a cabin it's not that giant space ...and then when you finally do do it, you're like why didn't I do this earlier, it only takes like an hour and a half you know

Mark basically built his in one go, in a summer, expanding it later.

Mark2.wav

I hired uh, neighbor kid, who's now in his 40s (laugh) to help me haul the materials in. We spent two weeks hauling the materials in over a rough trail that I'd [15:20](#) spent the previous three summers, cutting a trail in and making it smooth enough to use

He framed up the whole thing and had a friend help him put the plywood on the roof.

Mark2.wav

it was in September before I got it, late September before I got it all insulated and a wood stove in but um as soon as I got it built then, I drove to anchorage and got all my worldly goods and loaded them in my 54 pick-up truck and drove them out here and hauled them in and spent my first winter in '87

Then there's people like Gary Green who's built tons of cabins. I envy his nonchalance.

Gary1.wav

11:42 I suppose everybody builds their first cabin but uh mine is just over the hill right down here And I used a dog team to drag all the logs in and haul them to McCarthy. 12:08it's definitely a nice little log cabin. Very rustic. And not overly well insulated...building it wasn't that hard, it's just like putting together a Lincoln Log kit. And 12:47 I was able to do it, yeah it was, it was a fun project actually.

For most people, there's plenty of hardship. Like Carole and Daniel Morrison. They put their first cabin up in four days. One wall a day. But it was far from perfect at that point.

Carole1.wav

29:44 16x20, framed and insulated building uh with no windows that first year...And then it snowed so he took plywood and scooped the snow out of the building and made a step out of it. And then we put the flat roof on it the first year. And then we put the peaked roof on it the next year.

Okay you can't really hear him on the tape, but Daniel's cringing in the background cautioning against the flat roof solution. He's actually an amazing carpenter. But that was all about speed. That fall it rained and rained and rained and eventually the water...

Carole1.wav

05:02 worked its way into a hole in that black tar somewhere and we had insulation and visquine so the visquine would come down filling up with water you know you'd have to poke a hole in it and hold a bucket up there and drain it out and scream a little

They now live in a beautiful log cabin that they built themselves, hauling the logs by dog team, but I'm sure that time in a 320-square foot windowless house with four children, one a baby, would be trying for anybody.

Live and learn. That's what it's all about I guess. Here's Greg Fensterman again:

GregF2.wav

I mean how 04:39 many cabins have been built out here by people who never built a doghouse before. I mean I'd never built anything before I started building this place uh but you know you learn and there's people around who will share their own experience and knowledge and uh and then there's the internet and Youtube and everything you need to know in life, you can learn from watching Youtube.

SwappingTubes.wav

Youtubemixdown.wav

Part two: learning how to live.

I always excelled in school. The structure, rigidity. I could do what I was told and listen. I could fill in the bubbles the right way on standardized tests.

And I thought that meant that I'd be pretty good at life. And, in certain environments, it does mean that. But, out here, not always

What I realize now is that just because I knew how to take tests and solve math problems, doesn't mean I was good at learning in an uncontrolled environment. No, that kind of learning, it takes creativity, patience and resourcefulness.

And it takes a willingness to be less than perfect, to confront a fear that contemporary society has embedded in many of us, myself included: a fear of failure.

In trying to build my life out here, I've had to confront a daily enemy: perfectionism. It's insidious and inhibitive. Because you don't get learning how to live in McCarthy right on the first try. Or the second. Or the third.

You see, when people start building their life here, building a cabin is only a sliver of the battle.

Malcolm1.wav

Everything I thought I knew about living 37:25 in that I'd lived in cold climates, I'd lived in like I say adventurous places, mountains skiing, all that stuff. It didn't even begin to prepare me for becoming a dog musher and realizing that I didn't know shit about anything.

Meet Malcolm Vance, who's been coming and going from McCarthy since the early 80s, mostly spending winters here. On this half of the episode, we'll learn his story of learning how to live out here.

Malcolm is magnetic. He's full of quips and smiles and laughter. An adventurer at heart, in his younger days, he mushed the Iditarod twice and traveled the northwest passage by dog sled. He also used to run a bungee jumping business off the Kuskulana Bridge.

Sometimes I spot him paragliding over the valley in the summer, a valley he stumbled into in 1982 with the help of what sounds like an extraordinary woman named Bonnie Morris. She helped him build the foundation for the rest of his life.

SweepingTubes.wav stops

Malcolm2.wav

05:23 My name is Malcolm Vance. I live in McCarthy, Alaska. And I'm a commercial salmon fisherman in the summertime and a restaurateur in the summertime.

Malcolm3.wav

05:42 I came here to McCarthy in 1982, in the fall of '82, in August after a fishing season in Bristol Bay....And a friend of mine named Botchie Parada and I found an old 1969 Volkswagen van, like a classic with the lowered windows and a little camper for sale from a guy sitting in the Sears Parking Lot. 06:27 And we started driving around the

state of Alaska...And as we were cruising through, we...just talking to people we said we were on the way out the Alcan and they said you should stop into McCarthy.

That's the highway that runs from the lower 48 through Canada to Alaska.

Malcolm4.wav

And so we did... and 07:06... we met a guy named Gordon Burdick who ..was an old miner, little bit of a shaded past but also a good guy in his own way. A veteran of WWII. And uh07:32 he...befriended us and he was squatting and living at what is now the museum but it was the old train depot

This is back when McCarthy was pretty much a ghost town. People squatted in many of the structures left over from the mining days.

Malcolm5.wav

It had just become a national park out here in 1980. So, McCarthy was very on edge about the whole park service and the whole diatribe that was going on about it. And definitely park service was claiming different lands and things that were now rightfully theirs but people like Gordon had been squatting in places before that during the 60s and 70s. Anyway, he had what he told us was claims up at the Green Butte Mine.

That's five miles north of McCarthy to Kennicott, over the top of a ridge and into a creek drainage.

Malcolm6.wav

And go check on his things is what he needed us to do. You know, he's got us rallied up. A couple of young guys, a couple of 20-year-olds. Oh, we're gonna go for this for you.

This was back when there was no vehicular access to McCarthy. People had creative ways of crossing the river, waiting for it to freeze or building makeshift bridges when the water was low. But, you had to use a hand tram and your own two feet if you wanted to make it to town usually. So, the local lodge ran a shuttle. And Malcolm and his friend got on.

Malcolm7.wav

That's when we met Bonnie Morris.

Bonnie had known Gordon for quite some time.

Malcolm8.wav

And asked us why we were staying there with him for starters. But then wondered what we were doing, if when we come back down from our hike 09:48 if we would help her, build, or finish off a cabin that she had started. She had the walls up and that was all and it was August and she needed to finish it off before winter, and we uh came back down from that hike and started helping Bonnie with her cabin and one thing led to another

and she asked if I wanted to stay the winter. I had nothing else going on at the time, and I said goodbye to Botchie and he drove away and I stayed.

She was a dog musher. And she'd already been out in this area for about 10 years. She was 18 years older than Malcolm.

Malcolm9.wav

You know at 20, I thought I was confident and everything else and I wasn't. And essentially my older girlfriend allowed me the arena to fail. 38:04...and she definitely knew how to a. live without running water, dish pans, at that time we didn't have a sauna, so you know taking baths and showers in a, in a washtub, all those things that are a...for lack of a better term, a pioneer lifestyle. I did not know. And as I look back on those challenges, that I finally learned how to do that 38:44 and it so intrigued me that you don't need much

Malcolm10.wav

12:24 I was a traveler at the time I'd already traveled to Europe and a couple other places as from 18 and 19, been working at canneries and things and Bonnie said to me, which gave me probably the biggest direction of my life, to this day, 35 years later, I'm still in McCarthy and she said you're gonna get tired of living on people's couches. Just buy this little piece of land, build a little cub scout den of a cabin. And fill up buckets with some you know rice and beans and some other staples, and no matter what happens in your life, you can always have a place to come back to

He bought a small piece of property for 1300 dollars and started building his very first cabin. Just so you know, you wouldn't be able to buy anything for that price nowadays, so don't come rushing out.

Malcolm11.wav

I had a lot of energy at 20, she would get me up, I like to say a kiss on the cheek and a bologna sandwich and I was out the door in the morning. And she kept me busy, we'd go, went up 2 miles up McCarthy creek, cutting down trees to build a log cabin. And we hauled every log for that cabin with eight dogs.

But then, that winter um everything changed.

Malcolm12.wav

On that first winter, is when then tragedy struck in March of that year. 14:16 And the murders happened out here

The-One-Shot.wav

A man with a gun and a sick, sick brain killed six people. He'd been living in the area for eight months. And it rocked the town.

Bonnie and I were actually two of five people that lived through that day...those were most of Bonnie's best friends out here that had gotten killed, so she didn't feel and want to be out here anymore. 14:51 So I have no idea where our life would've gone or what if that didn't happen, but as it was, I decided then to keep staying out here, keep working on the cabin, the new cabin and she started going back to school.

TheOneShot.wav up

Malcolm13.wav

And there was moment of me with all the other you know, call it, 30-40-50 year olds out here. And here I was 20 years old with all these things. I didn't feel like I had earned it, 42:00 so I felt like I needed to kind of grow into my own confidence with it. And I felt like I needed to come up to that level or they were my heroes. And so, I said there's no way I'm leaving here. When Bonnie wanted to go to school I was like no I'm staying here. And that was definitely that moment of me saying, I'm gonna, I'm gonna learn this lifestyle, earn it and learn it

There was no internet, no YouTube. Just library books to be ordered from Juneau and flown in on the mail plane. And, asking questions.

Malcolm14.wav

26:42 The knowledge comes from experience and that's the point. You start frostbiting your cheeks or something. You learn why where and how not to do that again. You know with any luck 27:15 it's not severe. You don't have, you know, but you definitely learn along the way. And I actually appreciate people that just go and try it. Don't be afraid to just go fail, is the whole thing. And that's kind of the thing I feel out here, is it's just a lot of mini failures. How to build. Everybody's always worried, how am I gonna build this house, I don't know how to build a house. And you're like, of course you don't know how to build a house. 27:40 ...You build a log cabin, those first three or four rounds are gonna be a learning process. But everybody else is 27:56 gonna look up and see everything from their waste up and they're not gonna see all your mistakes down below.

The-One-Shot.wav

Malcolm15.wav

I always knew in the back of my head that there's a place that I can go. And that is my identity of home, of community, of where I'm gonna live and how I'm gonna live, or where am I gonna get the money for such a thing, or I'll never be able to own my own home, and that I see so often in like say 20 30 something year olds that I never had to contend with.

The-One-Shot.wav continues

Thanks for listening to this episode of Out Here. If you liked it and you think someone else would too, share it, please. And if you haven't subscribed, you can from the website, www.outherepodcast.com, or on iTunes, Stitcher or Google Play.

The next episode delves into the day-to-day. What's it really like living in the middle of the wilderness without running water or indoor plumbing?

Ian2.wav

the way you live out here, or can live out here, made a lot more sense to me, you know. Why not appreciate the fact that water doesn't just come out of a spigot, you have to work to get it.

Thanks to Galen Huckins and Blue Dot Sessions for the music, to Ian Gyori for the artwork and to the University of Missouri School of Journalism, Scott Swafford, Sara Shahriari and Dr. Cristina Mislán for the support. This podcast is supported in part by a Duffy Fund Grant.

For Out Here, I'm Erin McKinstry, just enjoying life in the middle of the woods.

See ya next time.

Episode three: Living It. To listen to the audio for this episode, visit

[https://www.outherepodcast.com/episodes/livingit.](https://www.outherepodcast.com/episodes/livingit)



Greg Fensterman's wood shed

Script: Episode Three (Living It)

LivingIt.wav/mp3
**put explicit tag*

TRT: 30:59

OC: I'm Erin McKinstry

Ali Towers and Scott Anthony first came to McCarthy in the summertime, like most people. Ali came to visit her mom, who worked for the national park service.

Ali1.wav

Having to walk across the footbridge, it's kind of like all the sudden you're walking through the gate into Narnia kind of like the wardrobe, is the footbridge for me. And 05:10 you're stripping yourself of this ego and you're kind of like vulnerable in a way

She got a job and stayed the summer. And kept coming back. A few years later, Scott's friend got *him* a job here.

Scott1.wav

Driving from Anchorage to McCarthy is what really, really got me. It's just so big, you can look forever and never see another house or a city and just mountains and trees as far as you can see. It's great. 07:06 And then I woke up the next morning and I remember sitting on the porch and I was like, I want to buy land here guaranteed.

Ali and Scott met that summer, fell in love and had plans to head to Hawaii come September.

They lived a seasonal lifestyle, one where weather and money dictate migratory patterns.

It's a world I didn't even know existed when I was growing up around images of doctors and lawyers and business executives.

LittleBoxes.wav

And it's a lifestyle that fits right in in McCarthy. People are constantly moving in and out of the valley, following jobs, adventure and opportunities. But something about the way people live life out here made Ali and Scott pause. Maybe, at least for a minute, they didn't want to migrate anywhere. They wanted to stay right here.

Ali3.wav

But I remember I was writing in my journal about it 15:43 like trying to sort through my thoughts on it, I was like is this the right decision, should I do this, and just then, a bird flew into my room and twirled around three times and flew out. And I was like, oh yeah, we're staying, thank you universe.

LittleBoxes.wav ends

Everyone has their own way of living out here. Some people have indoor plumbing, some don't. Some run refrigerators and blenders off their generators. And others use only hand tools or live off of canned spam. People living here may be republicans, libertarians, environmentalists, gun nuts, intellectuals, anti-intellectuals, atheists, devout Christians--the list could go on and on.

But there is something that binds them. Something that stands in the face of the houses made-out of tick-tacky and the clock punching and the first comes love, then comes marriage, then comes the baby in a baby carriage.

The lifestyle is unconventional. And sort of rebellious. Here's resident, Ian Gyori, who also happens to be my partner:

WinterTheme.wav starts underneath bite

IanBite1.wav

I had always had a sense that there was a problem with the direction that humanity was taking in general as far as just the blind adoption of technologies and the ease with which life can be lived...how 04:44 mindless life can become. It just wasn't very satisfying to me just sort of keeping up with the modern world and being a part of it didn't make sense to me. And the way you live out here, or can live out here, made a lot more sense to me. You know why not appreciate the fact that water doesn't just come out of a spigot, you have to work to get it, or to heat your place you don't just pay a bill to some company 05:09 you go out and cut down wood and then you chop it and then you burn it in your wood stove. Um all of those things...felt like a far more rewarding way to live life.

That was also really attractive to Scott and Ali. So, when a couple needed a caretaker for their cabin for the winter, they said yes.

ScottandAli1.wav

Then it went from taking all of our money that we had saved up to you know, we were planning on going to Hawaii, and turned around and spent it all on cold weather gear, chainsaw, generator, snow machine and all the, all the things that we needed to survive. Lots of beer. 48 cases from the bar or from the grocery store the town was livid. 15:06 (Ali) Uh 44, it was 44 cases (laugh)

Because it's an eight-hour drive round-trip to get beer in the wintertime. And Scott and Ali haven't had the best of luck with vehicles.

On episode three, Living It, we'll hear how they fared that first winter.

And then Mark Vail will give us a sense of what day-to-day life out here is really like in the wintertime. We'll answer the question that resident Greg Fensterman said he gets all the time from tourists in the summer.

GregF1.wav

30:52 What do you DO out here all winter. Because they can't imagine that there's anything to do besides uh sit in front of the fire.

Finally, we'll delve into surviving in a place with only a seasonal economy.

And we'll answer the question that's perhaps, most intriguing, why the hell live life this way if it's so much more difficult?

Well, I guess it depends on how you define difficult.

Ali4.wav

38:43 You know some of my family is like you're crazy what are you doing. Living all the way out there. And I'm like you're crazy what are you doing living in scary society

You're listening to Out Here, and I'm Erin McKinstry.

Wintertheme.wav stops Outheremixdown 1.wav

Okay, so, I love this place and I fully acknowledge that I chose it, but I also don't want to romanticize it.

Living out here can be really fucking hard. There's no way around it, I get depressed when it's dark a lot. It's totally unglamorous to not take a proper shower for months. And I've had mornings where I scream into the woods.

Generatorwon'tstart.wav

Because it's too cold and the generator won't start and I forgot to bring it inside the night before.

Or because the fire died after I spent twenty minutes splitting wood and getting it going and then got distracted just long enough for it to burn out.

Or because my hands hurt from ringing out a whole load of laundry. Or because somehow it takes an hour to do something that should've taken twenty minutes or ten. Or because I forgot all the eggs that were supposed to last me three months in Anchorage at a friend's house.

Ali5.wav

*we came back and we forgot hot sauce and that 12:18 was so sad. It was so sad. (laugh)
uh so...*

Their first winter here, Ali and Scott lived on the other side of a lake from the road. In the summer, you take a canoe across. In the winter the lake freezes over and you travel across by snow machine or foot. But in those in between times, things can get a little tricky. There's a bushy trail that goes all the way around the lake, but it takes a while. And patience is not an easy lesson to learn.

Ali6.wav

One time, so this was actually the night the lake froze. Kaleb Rowland actually was coming in and 17:43 he was gonna drop off some whisky on the other side of the lake. We ran out, you know, we didn't have any, hadn't had some for a while and we were waiting for him and he didn't end up showing up until early, early morning or something and so we're like okay let's go. And we take the canoe out and the lake is frozen, it's pretty, it's

on the verge of freezing. I had this machete and you can hack through the lake and so create a little path, and so Scott was in the back paddling us and I was in the front with a machete just hacking away

Canoe.wav

Icehacking.wav

Scott2.wav

Ali's machete was nothing to joke at it, it wasn't a little one it was like an extra-long one and she's like leaning over the front of the canoe with both hands just bashing this thing like we get to the other side and her hands are so cold 'cause they're covered in water just like her gloves are so wet. And like we got over there and we were so happy and then getting back was no easy task either because all the ice started to fill back in from the channel that we had created

Ali7.wav

it probably would've been faster just to walk around, but we 18:32 had our mind set on that. There was also eggs and cheese. You know it wasn't just whisky. We probably would've done it just for whiskey too. Anyways, I can only imagine like if somebody had been driving by and seeing that like what are those two crazy people doing (laugh) 18:37

No-Smoking.wav starts

Those are the kinds of moments that living in McCarthy gifts you. They're absurd. And they require a certain sense of humor.

That first winter taught them a lot about living in the woods. Like, how to shop for food. Some people live off the land here, at least in part, but most get the bulk of their food from a run to Costco every couple months. That's a 614-mile round-trip.

Scott3.wav

You do your Costco run and I don't know after your first few times you kind of realize like oh I bought all of this stuff and we didn't eat a single bite of it. You know we've literally been living off cheese and tortillas even though we have this plethora of other food. That's one of the harder things is knowing what you need and what you don't... because if you don't need it then it just sits and you have to dispose of it somehow and there's no convenient trash man to just float it away to wherever all the trash goes you know and the dump and 10:26 you gotta, you gotta handle your stuff.

Tree-cutting.wav

And then there's the physical demands. Like carrying the generator and five-gallon buckets of water collected from a nearby stream up a set of stairs and into the house. They both learned how to use a chainsaw to get firewood. And they learned all the little things.

Ali9.wav

Don't leave water, in a glass cup if you're leaving the house for a day and it freezes. 'Cause it'll just, the bottom will come right out (laugh)

For Scott, this way of life had always been a dream.

Scott4.wav

34:10 It's nice living out here. Mostly it's because I'm kind of cheap and I don't want to pay for utilities, so I mean you still do you pay for gas for the snow machine and the four-wheeler you know, to go get water and go cut down your wood and your chainsaw maintenance and this and that but I'd rather spend those monies then just give them to somebody else and have no control over I don't know my life...

Scott5.wav

if you want to live out here you can but...you have to live, you can't just sit in your house and have people deliver you pizza and just do what you have to, to live. 08:00 You can't just ignore it and let life go by.

No Smoking.wav ends

Ali10.wav

Growing up I wasn't like yeah, I'm gonna live in the middle of the woods. Um but it just sort of happened, I didn't even realize how much I would enjoy it too. Just being able to see your carbon footprint basically. Like how much trash do I accumulate, how much water do I need and it's amazing how much you don't need too. You know, and the more time that I spend out here the bigger of a difference I see between mainstream society and living in the middle of the woods. Especially with the mindless consumerism. Just there's ads everywhere and people they want the next best. There's so much stuff to spend your money on and it's just 36:24 these useless shiny objects. My priorities have shifted greatly 'cause I used to live out there and want those same things like the next best iPhone or whatever it may be. But it's just nice how simple it is out here.

Rapids.wav starts underneath Ali10.wav

In case you were wondering, they made it through their first winter unscathed. They moved into another cabin when the couple they were caretaking for got back from vacation. And then, they stayed. And, stayed and stayed. They left for brief stints of travel, for a family emergency, to make a little money here and there.

But, every time, they came back. And then this past fall, they bought their own piece of property with a group of friends on the other side of the lake this time, the side where the road is. They're already planning the road in, the land clearing, the house building, all of it. And they already got through the hard part, the learning how to live this lifestyle because they're already living it.

Rapids.wav continues

Unless you work remotely or are brave enough to do construction at subzero temperatures, there's not usually a lot of work here in the wintertime. So, my first winter here, I thought a lot about how I would fill the empty space.

And I also thought a lot about how I'd be really cold and miserable all the time. Like, I worried about this:

Rapids.wav fades out

Malcolm1.wav

Just the act of going to the bathroom is going out to the outhouse. You gotta put on your clothes to go to the outhouse. When it's 25 below zero...you don't just go jumping out there in your skivvies you know what I mean.

But, most of those worries ended up being unfounded actually. The cold wasn't really that bad. And my days felt too full rather than empty. I learned how to do things that I'd always wanted to that winter, like sewing and knitting. Um and I read a lot of books and just spent a lot of time living. Here's Malcolm Vance again:

Malcolm2.wav

Even if it is just go outside and chop wood, at 30 and 40 below zero. Just that alone is an adventure...Just daily living becomes an adventure enough. Which gives yourself a sense of accomplishment.

On part two of Living It, Mark Vail walks us through a typical winter day and shows us how easy it is to fill all that empty space.

Birds.wav and Birds4.wav

Mark1.wav

On a typical day, in the middle of winter, a couple things happen so...your your circadian rhythm changes because of the daylight. When there's only 58:51 five hours of daylight your frame of reference shifts if you don't live by a clock, so I usually rise with the sun...first thing you do is stoke the fire

Fire.wav and fire2.wav

You know get the fire going 1:00:13, do your morning ablutions, feed the birds, as soon as I walk out the door in the morning, I'm surrounded by a flock of grosbeaks like hey, hey you got any seeds

Birdseed.wav and birdlivingit.wav

Coffee.wav

Typing.wav

Mark2.wav

I like to have a couple leisure cups of coffee. With the advent of access to the internet now. I go on the internet in the morning and check my emails, see what the news of the day is... radio's on, typically I live with the radio on all the time...

Radio.wav

Mark3.wav

Watch the sun come up and so the little pleasures are things like that and it's psychologically healthy if you're affected by SAD, seasonal affective disorder, to see the sunrise and see the sunset every day because even though you may not consciously be able to acknowledge the amount of daylight from day to day your mind or your body can and it just automatically knows that the daylight's returning and it makes you feel better because it can record that 1:04:22 and and birds are the same way

Birds4.wav

Mark6.wav

It's like they're singing to the sun that's coming back in day length every day, they note it, they can tell, and it makes them happy, so they do their little spring song like (ooh hoo) you know

Mark7.wav

And so you get to 1:06:19 see these small little changes in all of the life that lives here

Then, the chores. Chopping firewood, cutting down trees, hauling water, fixing things that are broken.

Wood_splitting.wav

Mark8.wav

If it gets, you know, up to 10 below then I'm gonna go cut firewood

Treefalling.wav

so that I'm not losing ground cause a cold wave might actually happen from Siberia or from the high north up in the Arctic and drop down here and it'd be 40 below. Well, when it's 40 below you go through twice as much wood as it is when it's 20 below.

Okay, 40 below isn't something everyone's experienced. So, I asked Mark, what does it feel like?

Mark9.wav

1:08:00 Crispy. The snow squeaks when you step on it,

bootstomping.wav

um it's a great time to split firewood because firewood just pops apart when you whack with something when it's that cold.

Wood_splitting.wav

There's a crystalline feel to everything you know even the air it's like it's dense and heavy and you can hear forever it's like ...I can hear 1:08:37 planes take off in McCarthy, that's nine miles away. And hear the rr somebody's flying you know.

Plane2.wav

the intensity of the quiet, it's like I remember thinking one time it's like my radio inside my house is the loudest thing in the landscape for a hundred square miles

radio.wav

And then there's basic things like exercise because you can't just head to the gym and a treadmill here. So, Mark has to maintain trails for skiing and fat tire biking and access to the road in general.

Mark13.wav

When we had this weather event, all the trees laid down out in the trail like they tipped over because of the frozen ice and snow on them, so I had to spend a whole day trimming brush on the trail just to get to the mailbox and my car

Mark also makes things. He makes furniture, all kinds of woodworking. And he makes tapestries. They're these really beautiful depictions of the local landscape. He makes the yarn for them himself.

And then there's just daily living. Making dinner. Cleaning. Doing the dishes, which is a special thing in itself here.

Sweeping.wav

Dishes.wav

Waternat.wav

Mark12.wav

So wood and water those are the two key elements of life if you have a, a heat-able space and then all the other time is uh, either recreational or creational. You can you know use your time to make stuff.

Martin.wav

When I was growing up, I was always worried about what I was going to do with my life and not who I was gonna to be or where I was gonna to live or what kind of lifestyle I would lead.

I didn't realize until later that what you do to make money doesn't have to define you. That, making things doesn't always have to have economic value. And that success can be defined through happiness or conscientiousness rather than through salaries or professional achievements.

Some people who live out here are lucky, their careers and this lifestyle align. But for many, they live here because they were always seeking something different. They always believed that what you do doesn't define you and that we have a lot more freedom about how we go about walking down life's path than most of us really think.

On part three of living it, we'll hear from several residents who are well, living it. Living life out here off-the-grid, many without basic amenities or a year-round profession.

Karla.wav

I've never had a moment where I regretted the decision to come here. I've had scary moments, there's been a bear that visited the cabin once, when it's 30 below, you definitely question your sanity a little bit, um, those experiences, those struggles, just amount more to living a full life in my opinion. They're real struggles, they're not the trivial struggles that you deal with in the modern world or that 06:41 a lot of people focus on in the modern world you know like shopping and having the right duvet cover. (laugh)

I fully acknowledge um that plenty of people in the U.S. don't have the option to care about the right duvet cover or not. It's a privilege to be able to make the choice to live without and run away to the woods. But, it is one alternative way of living, and I think that's worth highlighting.

Karla has one foot in the modern world still. Before she found McCarthy her life was her work. She worked as a television producer and that work took her all over the world. She still works as a television producer surprisingly, um but now she works remotely from McCarthy and occasionally travels to film. That's how she makes her money.

Others have found a need in the community and met it with their skill set. Some work hard in the summer and that keeps them through the winter.

And some just live really frugally. Like local pilot Gary Green.

Garyl.wav

09:23 If you want to make a living in a place where there's very little economy you got to live economically. Um living in a log cabin without electricity or oil heat I mean if you haul your water out of the creek in buckets. If you burn wood for heat. Run a kerosene lamp or nowadays we've got little LED flashlights, um, all that doesn't cost very much.

And if you buy food in bulk and food that doesn't spoil uh it's pretty easy to get by in that manner...I came out prospecting for gold and I made enough to get by on um and then I worked for hunting guides during the, the hunting season and that paid enough to get you through the winter, after I was out here for a few years I got involved in commercial fishing, so I'd be gone for three weeks or a month or so in the, in the summers..so, if you live cheap and work at whatever jobs you can get um if you have a cabin out in the woods you're gonna get by.

For some, living without is part of the challenge. Here's Mark Vail again:

Mark14.wav

And I've never been into making money, that was one of the things I wanted to come to the north and move to the wilderness to test myself against the economy, how close to the bone could I live without having to make money. It's hard to escape, especially this far remote or north to live without any money. I mean your life span would be shortened by your lifestyle if you lived totally without money 'cause you'd have to handsaw everything, you couldn't use gasoline cause it takes money to buy gasoline. You know, so there's trade-offs. The only technology I came with was a radio and now I've got rechargeable batteries and solar power since 1990...You know and I lived for the first 20 years on an average of under \$3000 a year.

When he was younger, he made his tapestries and went away to work as a fisherman or cook in the summer when he needed it, but otherwise, he wasn't beholden to anyone. And that appealed to him.

Mark15.wav

And I realized that life wasn't necessarily on that predictable schedule that mainstream America lives on where you work 8 hours a day, day in and day out and you get your two weeks off every summer for your vacation...And so over the course of ten years I always sought out jobs that were like that, where you could accrue money and then have major blocks of time off. For many years, I just worked three or four months a year, but it was steady, but that three months would pay all my bills for the year and then I could garden and fish and bike and hike and hunt, and do all the other things that 03:35 life entails and not be, you know, um, trapped in this round the clock you know scheduled living

Hammeranddamper.wav

John Adams owns a seasonal bed and breakfast in town. He's worked as a contractor over the years, but he's generally avoided the punch-in, punch-out 9-to-5 lifestyle.

John1.wav

And as a little kid, when my dad was around the other guys he worked with. 30:36 I can only remember them talking about one thing: retirement... if the best thing you can say about your job, is your retirement, it being over, you've wasted your whole life.

Hammeranddamper.wav

He says the drawback is that when it comes time to retire and you've lived this way your whole life, sometimes you can't. He's 70, and he and his wife don't have any plans yet.

So then, why do it? What is it that is so attractive about living this lifestyle? Obviously, the answer is different for everybody, but for a lots of people it boils down to the privilege of being able to live on very little and still build a life for yourself. Here's Greg Runyan, our favorite mountaineer:

Greg1.wav

I'd rather drive my snow machine or my four-wheeler and have it be bumpy muddy, buggy, beary, snowy, cold versus sit in another red light in traffic. I feel 02:03 like I'm wasting my life. Um so yeah, It's deliberate. We know it's a luxury, it sounds weird but to me it's a luxury to live like this, but I really do feel like it's a total luxury and we're really lucky and blessed to be able to do it. We're healthy, we're young, we can handle this lifestyle. Um and yeah, it's not for everyone, I wish more people could experience it once and a while I think it'd be good for them to take a step back.

By luxury he means.

Like you look out the front window of our house here, that's the Wrangell-St. Elias national park, there's nothing, it's all wilderness, I mean we have this 03:09 unbelievable opportunity here, the few of us who are living out here right now, that you know even, if you want it you can't have it in most places, even if you have a lot of money you can't have it, but here we do. At least for me, I recognized that opportunity at least when I first started hanging out here and recognize that in my lifetime, this is like my opportunity to live this type of lifestyle and who knows we might sell our place here in 20 years and buy a condo in Palm Springs, (laugh) I don't know something like that become golfers. I don't know it might be fun. People seem to love it.

Martin.wav ends

Thanks for listening to Living It, episode three of Out Here.

And thanks to Martin Robert Edelman Morrison for that beautiful song.

Intrigued? Want to know more about living life in McCarthy? Head to www.outherepodcast.com to listen to more episodes, read our episode notes and check out some photos. There's some great ones of Ali and Scott logging. Man, they are efficient.

Don't forget to subscribe on iTunes, Stitcher or Google Play, and you'll never miss an episode if or when I decide to make a second season.

Thanks to Galen Huckins and Blue Dot Sessions for the music, to the lovely Ian Gyori for episode artwork, to Scott Swafford and my University of Missouri master's

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Thanks for listening to Out Here. I'm Erin McKinstry.

Episode Four: Building Relationships. To listen to the audio for this episode,

visit <https://www.outherepodcast.com/episodes/building-relationships>.



Martin Morrison and Karla Freivalds standing outside their rented log cabin.

Script: Episode Four (Building Relationships)

BuildingRelationships.wav/mp3

TRT: 35:00

OC: SOC

OUTHERE MIXDOWN 1.WAV

You're listening to Out Here, and I'm Erin McKinstry.

LeadIn.wav

On episode four, building relationships.

Building a family.

Gary1.wav

39:26 Raising a kid out here is uh is I don't know if it's easy but it seems natural.

Building a partnership.

Martin1.wav

You can't just retreat to somewhere else you have to let the other person see you fail or see you in shame or whatever and be comfortable with that.

And building a relationship with yourself.

Because sometimes it's just you and a whole lot of quiet out here.

John1.wav

The big thing is just being content with yourself. It's easier to get lost in a crowd than it is to hide when there's nobody around.

LeadIn.wav continues

Part One: Solitude

The other morning, I woke up and was like what is that noise?

LeadIn.wav down

Wind2.wav

It's nothing more than a breeze, actually, pushing through the tops of the spruce trees. It's something I would never even notice most places.

But out here, everything is so quiet in the winter, muffled by blankets of snow.

Tiny sounds grow big.

There's an occasional chainsaw or snow machine or airplane.

Bird sounds pepper the mornings and owl hoots the night.

Owl1.wav Owl2.wav Owl3.wav

But that's it. Otherwise it's silent.

Silence.wav

Here's Mark Vail:

Mark1.wav

You have to learn to live with yourself. When you live remotely. You know and it's like it's not always easy. I find that the more aged I get, that I have a, an accumulated wisdom on how to deal with not feeling lonely. You know, aloneness and loneliness are two different things and trying to suss out and deal with that, you know. The psychological impact 1:31:49 of being lonely is, it's devastating. But if you can turn that around and largely being creative, you know, being productive with your time helps with that.

The isolation is both mental and physical.

Like one time my boyfriend almost chopped his finger off with a hatchet and I had to bandage it in the middle of the night and hope and pray he didn't need stitches kind of isolated.

We're four and a half hours from the nearest hospital.

Here's Greg Runyan.

GregR1.wav

You always gotta feel like you can leave whenever you want because what if there's a medical emergency or even just for psychological, you can't feel like you're trapped, we don't ever want to feel trapped out here.

Because cabin fever is very much a real thing.

And the winter blues take on an entirely different meaning here. After the midnight sun chaos of the summers, my body often feels like it wants to hibernate. And that can be hard when hibernating is not what you need to be doing. I mean come on body, I'm not a grizzly bear.

But if I've learned anything about learning to live with yourself and the quiet, it's to let yourself feel it, sit in it and move through it.

Here's Kristin Link:

Kristin1.wav

You can feel pretty isolated and a little bit lonely especially like when it's dark and raining.

Kristin2.wav

Sometimes you just need that space to kind of let yourself like have some down time... I'm okay with where I'm at with my mental health and getting a little bit depressed in the winter is like, it kind of feels like a good balance to the mania of the summer.

People used to be more isolated here. Old timers holed up in cabins for months on their own, without a chance to re-supply. And there are still a few who do that.

But in general, nowadays, we have poker games and we can drive in and out on the road. We have the internet, social media, telephones.

But still, in most places, even if you live alone, you go to the grocery store, you go to work, you drive through traffic. But here in the winter there's none of that. You could spend a whole winter without seeing someone if you wanted to.

Here's Greg Fensterman:

GregF1.wav

Sometimes socializing or activities are kind of just filling space, keeping you busy, kind of a distraction and I think it's interesting to spend some time in an environment where there aren't all those distractions. 34:54 I don't know, I think you feel a little more in touch with the realities of your existence. Your mortality...um

Bell Solo.wav begins

And Malcolm Vance:

Malcolm1.wav

More often than not, I'm here mostly in the wintertime so I could even throw one word out there is tranquility, this has always been a calming place for me...and it has always been a time 09:29 to regather up my strengths. To go back out. I don't know how I could live in a frenetic situation year in and year out but for me it definitely, it calms my spirit to stay here in the wintertime. And even if I'm only out here for a week, if I'm out here for a month, if I'm out here for six months. I feel that it gives me that sense of shutting down the, the machine for a little bit.

And all that time on your own, doing things making things, trying to shape your own life, it forces you to stare yourself down. To examine your faults and your strengths and to face your fears. I mean there's no running and hiding here. I think Karla Freivalds said it the best.

Karla_fear.wav

One thing I've learned about living out here is I can't just talk myself out of being afraid, I have to face a fear, work through it and then it's behind me permanently. There's no way around it, there's only through, you have to go through.

Bell Solo.wav ends

Okay, all that time alone is great. But it actually is really nice when it's super cold outside to have someone to help you split wood and get water and basically making it so you don't have to do everything on your own.

Nuthatch.wav starts

Part Two: Love Confined.

Nuthatch.wav pause

Tamara.wav

(Laughing) There would be times when I definitely wish there was another room that we could have our separate spaces in there. But most of the time it worked fine, you know, we just made it, we made it work. Yeah, it was cozy.

Tamara and Stephens Harper spent more than ten years living together in an 11 by 13 cabin. I'm impressed.

StephensandTamara1.wav

Basically, like living in a tiny little space like that and not having the ability to walk out when you get in a fight and leave. If it's 20 below zero, okay well, I'm gonna walk out for a little while but then I'm gonna get cold and come back inside. That's what I mean there's no other room to go to and slam the door. I think it was, whatever, I wanna be positive about this and I want to say I think it was helpful in our relationship in that it forced us to talk things out. And actually come to...eventually yeah, Eventually come to a compromise and like get it figured out as opposed to just I'm leaving and heading to the coffee shop. Or I'm gonna go to the other side of town and go spend the night with my friends. But I definitely think a smaller space and if you're having issues either with something's personal relationship or things aren't going right, or something's broken or the system's not working, the smaller space makes tensions flare sometimes more quickly. Sure. Maybe it makes things more volatile sometimes. More intense. Mmhmmm. Mmhmmm.

Nuthatch.wav starts again

Spending a winter in a tiny cabin in the middle of the woods may seem romantic, but in reality, it's a pretty big test that a lot of people don't pass. Here's Greg Fensterman, who's seen a lot of relationships start and stop at the hands of this place:

Greg1.wav

Some guy and his, his girlfriend will uh spend the winter in McCarthy and...the vaguest odds are always against them. Everybody always assumes ah they're not going to make it...you know, nobody ever thinks the people know what they're getting into because they don't...37:54 You know suddenly 30 below is more than just a number, it's like a feeling in your fingers... A lot of relationships break up right about the same time that the road clears. It's like you know honey, I really don't think I can spend another day with you, in this cabin. I'm out of here.

Hey, some people do make it through though.

Like Ali Towers and Scott Anthony.

Scott1.wav

29:46 When we decided to stay it was like all right, well we just got together and it's either gonna make or break us living in a 12x16, not super well insulated and kind of had a janky stove when we moved in so there was a lot of things I was like I don't know if we can do this, then hell we can do this anywhere. If we can live in a tiny little cabin, for days on end and not kill each other 30:17 then we nailed it.

So, how to pass that test?

Here goes:

Boardwalk.wav (PODINGTON BEAR)

Step 1: Start from Scratch

Like Greg Runyan and Kristin Link.

GregR1.wav

32:11 So this place, was like a raw start for both of us. I had a plan for this property because I'd owned it for a while, but as Kristin and I spent more time together and she spent more time living like this, we you know, collaborate, and it becomes like our place versus like mine

Step 2: Figure Out How to Fight

Because when you live in a one-room cabin and you get in a fight, there's like not really anywhere to go. So, you've gotta get creative, like Scott and Ali:

31:16 you know this is what my grandma and grandpa did, is every time they'd start to get in an argument, you have to hold both hands. If you're holding both hands with somebody it's really hard to be in a fight with them. Like sometimes I do not want to hold your hand. No but once you hold 31:30 hands like you both kind of get this little stupid smirk on your face...It makes you be like ok, we're both being a little bit ridiculous or sometimes it's just me and I'm just like but I just want to be stubborn

Step 3: Get comfortable

‘Cause the thing is, you don’t have a bathroom.

Karla.wav

07:52 It's definitely hard to be ladylike in a small space. I'll say that like you know, when you need to, you know, things that you would prefer to have a bathroom to do but don't require an outhouse to do. 08:06 Are difficult and I'll just ask him for privacy and then he just knows by certain body language like if he needs to walk away. it's hard to keep the mystery alive while your washing all your underwear in a bucket. You definitely have to be comfortable with yourself first

Step 4: Respect each other’s space. Okay, this is like totally normal stuff guys.

Like don’t run a chainsaw while the other person is trying to concentrate.

Boardwalk.wav stops

Audio of Ian coming in and interrupting my voicing

Boardwalk.wav starts again

Step 5: Divvy up the Chores

Cause there’s a lot of them. From hauling water to splitting wood to doing the dishes, chores can feel like a full-time job out here. And, no one wants to be the person who has to wake up at 3 in the morning to feed the fire when it’s 30 below. It’s always me. Anyway, somebody has to be the one.

Ali.wav

Scott and I have this deal where I take the generator out and fill it up and then he has to turn it off and takes it inside. Because I don’t want to go out there. I’m tired. Unless I have to pee. (Laugh)

Step 6: Take Time Away

Because there’s a whole lot of wilderness out there.

Or you can just be like David Rowland and his wife Hannah.

David.wav

We love each other so we like being close to each other.

Boardwalk.wav ends.

Part three: Raising them wild

Laurie1.wav

28:25 A few years ago, Keith and our youngest son Jubil were doing a winter moose hunt. In order to get to where the moose are, you have to cross the Nizina River.

So it was december mid-december and the problem with that is the river isn't completely iced over at that time. And they were coming back, they had had no luck...and 28:54 um Jubil made an attempt at crossing the open river...with his snow machine with a sled behind him. Things went haywire.

The snow machine went in the drink and he ended up in an open lead that was over his head and of course he was in body armor and full uh winter gear. He had a loaded rifle strapped to his back, he had bunny boots on, helmet on his head, I mean he must have been 300 lbs with all of us his stuff on all water logged like that. And the river was washing him towards the ice, where the ice had healed over.

Deathly Recitation.wav

He ended up throwing his hands out right at the edge of the ice. His sister had made him beaver fur mitts and that's what he was wearing...and so his wet beaver fur mitts adhered, they stuck to the ice there, 30:12 froze to it, immediately and so he was able to kind of hold himself up there just...less than a yard from the, where the open lead went down under the ice. We'd have never seen him again.

Deathly Recitation.wav

Miraculously, 30:25 I'm not really sure how this happened because humanly or physically speaking, it's not really possible, but at some point he was able to just heave himself out on the ice. Here he is sopping wet, miles and miles from home, many many miles from home...so Keith asked him, well ...should we make a fire, should we try and dry you out and warm you up or should we just beeline for home. Jubil said 31:03 well right now I'm not feeling very cold so let's beeline for home. So, they did, they came all the way home, sopping wet, um, I don't know how far that is, probably close to 20 miles um.

31:16 So yeah, those are the types of things that, that happen when you live in a remote place like this and your kids are out there exposed to whatever nature can hurl at them and uh you have to be okay with that as a mother, you gotta be all right with we've taught them how to deal with it, we've taught them how to stop and build a fire or whatever it is they need to do, we've taught them to be prepared.

Laurie18.wav

You know my kids grew up doing really dangerous things, where any, any mother in her right mind, would just be sitting home biting her fingernails off and tearing her hair out going are they gonna 27:45 come home in a body bag and uh I just you know, you gotta

let that go, you gotta realize that I can't protect them anyways but God can, so let him do it and don't get in the way. And don't worry about it.

Villager.wav

Gary2.wav

39:26 If you go back 100 years in the United states everybody was raised like this... Um kids got to do chores whether it was gardening, going out and gathering firewood, splitting wood, uh hauling water, uh doing their part to keep 40:07 your existence going. And that's better for a kid than not having to do those things.

Like Gary Green, my mother grew up on a farm. She was one of nine children. Her parents installed indoor plumbing just before she was born, and they all used to run free. My aunts used to climb on top of the silos.

It's funny because there's only a generation between her and my nieces and nephews but it feels more like a couple of lifetimes.

There's no doubt that changes in child rearing between then and now have brought a lot of good. Kids used to do really dangerous things, and they didn't always survive them.

But that doesn't mean that everything from the past should be left in the past. At least that's how some of the people who've raised kids out here see it. Here's Carole Morrison, who homeschooled her five kids along the McCarthy Road:

Carole1.wav

Sometimes I think school and the education process and the intellectual side of it is so overwhelming for kids that they don't really get the chance to do and be um you know who they are

Villager.wav ends

Laurie Rowland and her husband Keith also raised five kids here. Back in 2000, they decided to uproot their life in Fairbanks, buy property outside McCarthy and build a home. Keith had spent summers here as a kid. They were both born and raised in Alaska. And they saw value in the freedom and frontier lifestyle their childhoods had given them.

Laurie13.wav

23:54 his family especially, was a very can do family, anything that there was to do they could pretty much do it for themselves, they didn't lean on the city or society or 24:31 or the gov't or neighbors or other people to do stuff for them. They kinda had that last frontier type mentality.

Tidal Foam.wav

Laurie2.wav

We wanted our kids to be not just educated, but we wanted them to be competent

On part three, we'll hear the story of Laurie and Keith's first winter and what it was like for Laurie raising kids in the middle of the wilderness.

Laurie3.wav

01:28 My name is Laurie Rowland and um I live in McCarthy, Alaska. And I've lived here for, I like to say since the turn of the century. I've been a wife and mother and a homemaker and the other half of RowCon services construction company.

Laurie5.wav

We had five children, mostly boys and you know how boys are they need space to roam and run and be boys.

Laurie12.wav

we 20:00 really wanted our kids to grow up not just kind of in the backcountry where they could have mountains to play on or whatever. But in a type of setting where they would learn to be competent, that they would learn to do things, they would learn to build things. They would learn to fix things, they would learn how to deal with the wilderness and be able to come out on top.

Tidalfoam.wav up

Laurie15.wav

As far as my part of raising kids, it was mostly just school school school. And 22:13 I didn't have any help. I didn't have like a homeschool co-op where I could lean on other people for places where I was a little bit weak in teaching. So, you have a tendency to do a lot of studying yourself, fill in those gaps, you know I didn't take calculus in high school, but I took calculus three times with my kids (laugh)

Laurie14.wav

20:26 I always tried to make sure school was done at noon, so that our kids could go, they could go to work, they could learn to build things, do things, go trapping, go snow machining. Whatever it is you know that they needed to do.

Laurie17.wav

44:17 So one day at about 11:30, uh Daniel came up to me and he was early teens at the time probably. He had been kind of getting into shooting a bow and arrow, archery. So he come up to me, he says mom I'm done with school and i'm gonna go get lunch. And I'm like oh what do you mean are you gonna make quesadillas or something in the kitchen. And he's says no I've got my bow and arrow I'm gonna go get lunch and cook it over a fire. And I'm like okay, so it's 11:30, lunch is at 12, oh yeah sure you're gonna get lunch right and I said well come home when you get hungry. 45:37 And he goes out it wasn't half an hour later he comes back in the house. He's got a rabbit, he'd shot it through the neck with his arrow. And he's like I told you I was getting lunch. Okay, well have fun eating that, I'm not gonna cook it for you.

45:58 Yup he went outside built himself a fire and ate his rabbit. That's what he had for lunch.

Tidal Foam.wav

Laurie8.wav

10:12 Yeah when we moved it was lock stock and barrel. We put our house up for sale in uh Fairbanks, which that was a little bit hard for me because we had built that house together, my two hands and his two hands and our two strong backs...so to just walk away and think uh yeah we might not be able to ever go back there and see that place again. Um, that was a little bit hard for me. I got over it, it's all right not to be able to go back. It's okay.

Colrain.wav begins

Laurie9.wav

My parents-in-law owned or still own, it was a historic railroad building, which I think in the past had been used as a cafeteria. So, when we picked up stakes from Fairbanks and moved here. We lived in that house for the winter while we built our house...

we had an amazing year that year for northern lights. And so it was kind of fun to be here in the mountains and be able to look out at night and just see God's handiwork in the heavens. 07:02

Laurie10.wav

Jubil our youngest was a baby in diapers. 07:22 And then our oldest Kaleb mmm must've been around 10 that year... The house of course that we were staying in that winter...the historic house, not very well insulated, hadn't ever really been used in the winter time. So it was pretty cold down by the floor, with all the fires going as hot as we dared. And um I remember that my husband decided one day to measure the temperature in the house, and he came up with close to zero on the floor, where our baby was crawling around in his diapers and close to 80 at the ceiling. 08:10 Not very good heat distribution.

Laurie11.wav

As soon as school was done in May... We packed up our few belonging from the other side of the river and started shuttling and we moved into our basement here which was pretty much all that there was at that time. With 12:45 just a log shell above it. Kind of like a concrete cave. 12:46 And I cooked meals for family of seven on a two-burner propane camp stove and uh we got busy building

Colrain.wav up again

Laurie16.wav

32:06 Our kids didn't have a lot of the same social type things as they would've had in a town or whatever... We had to be intentional about family relationships, you know, you

couldn't just run off to your friends when you're sick and tired of your brother or your sister or whatever, you have to make it work. You have to realize these are my people, I've got to make whatever relationship I have work with them, it has to be right (laugh) otherwise I'm kind of by myself.

Colrain.wav ends

Laurie19.wav

You know a lot of people sort of think, oh those Rowland kids, they've been operating equipment and running snow machines since they were in diapers. Well, that's true but that's not true. In a sense. Yes, we allowed our kids to do things very, very early, and drive things and operate things and use tools and chainsaws and things like that. 34:52 But it was with training and oversight and then ... when we felt that they were competent, that you know we would trust them as much as any other adult in the area. Um then we for to let go a little more and said, oh, um yeah you want to go cut down that tree go ahead, you know and we kind of keep an eye from a distance. 35:20 and at some point, it's like they're fine, let them go.

Flagger.wav

There were moments though.

Laurie20.wav

We were way back in the Mentasta mountains, uh, moose hunting... course there was a wood pile there. And David was just attracted to that wood pile, he was three years old at the time. So he was out in the wood pile with the axe trying to split kindling like he'd seen the big guys do. 36:16 And I actually, shame on me, probably, I don't know, someone should turn me in for this, I actually hadn't really thought much of it, I thought well he looks like he knows what he's doing so fine, and everything little while later, he comes up to me, you know, Mommy I got hurt. 36:34 and uh I saw he had, he had uh nicked his knuckles on his finger and skinned his pad on his other finger with the axe. And so you know I'm sitting there, my stomach's doing flip flops right. I'm going. I got to fix this up and um I have no idea how we're gonna keep it dry ...37:03 because there's grass all over the place and it's over the top of his head...So I soaked it in some 37:17 I don't know antiseptic something or other, bandaged him and put a big mitt over top of it, of course he never cried, the whole time he just sat there with these big blue eyes like saucers while mom fixed his finger and tried not to faint or something.. . 37:37 And um I said now David, you're gonna have to hold your hand up whenever you walk around, I don't want your hand to get wet, you need to keep it dry so that it'll heal really good. And I'm thinking, it's a three-year-old, sure he's gonna keep his hand dry... You know like hold it up over his head every time he walks around in that we grass or something 38:08 And but he did. He kept it perfectly dry for the whole week that we were out there. And I have never seen a wound heal that well, it was beautiful.

That little incident foreshadowed David's interest in running his own firewood business.

When he was twelve, he saw a need in the community, bought a chainsaw, chaps and a helmet, the whole bit and started cutting trees on his parent's land to sell to people. At 15 or 16, he used his money to buy a sawmill and expand his business.

Laurie20.wav

That's the type of thing that you know we wanted to see with our kids that they would be entrepreneurial, that they would be, you know, that word keeps coming back, competent.

Laurie21.wav

We weren't gonna just force them into a mold or anything you know to give them the opportunity to be free to do stuff like that. ...40:52 we looked around at I guess what I would call maybe city values, how kids are growing up in the towns and cities and stuff. We thought mmm that's, that's stuff, those kinds of values, those kinds of things you know activities and things that they do and trouble that they get in and what not. That doesn't really set well with us. We have this idea of how we want to raise our kids. You know and that doesn't mean you're gonna get perfect kids right, 'cause nobody's kids are perfect, including ours, probably especially including ours, but um it does sort of set a trajectory for them and gives them an opportunity to be in a place that where you can you can really 41:49 just kind of grab life by the ears and go for it.

The Kennicott.wav

Okay, before we end this I have to share one more little story. It's just too much of coincidence for me to keep to myself.

Carole and Daniel Morrison also raised five kids along the McCarthy Road, if you remember. And the whole wood chopping thing when your tiny must come with the territory because when Carole's son Adam was four...

Carole3.wav

He wanted to split wood so bad 'cause he wanted to help. Daniel would split the wood and then he would let Adam, and he showed him how to 29:50 holding the wood, set the blade into the wood and then tap it down holding the hatchet and then he just pointed his finger at him and said that is the only way you can do this. If you do it any other way, you can't do it, you won't be able to help. So, he split wood when he was four years old and he always did it that way....30:45 he learned right then that that's how you do it is how you're told to do it safely

The Kennicott.wav continues

Thanks for listening to Out Here, a podcast about life at the end of the road in McCarthy. Okay, at this point, I gotta say, this whole thing is a lot more about winter than summer. Because summer, it's a whole different ball game. Maybe season 2?

Don't forget to subscribe on iTunes, Stitcher or Google Play. And find all the episodes on www.outherepodcast.com.

Next up, Living with the Land. We'll learn what it's like to be a private land owner in the middle of the country's largest national park. And, a little about our dear friend the grizzly bear.

Karla_teaser.wav

I thought bears would come around the corner like and surprise and be like, boo you know

Thanks to Galen Huckins and Blue Dot sessions for the music, Ian Gyori for the artwork, and Scott Swafford and my University of Missouri master's committee for the support. Also thanks to the Duffy Fund and the University of Missouri for providing me with funds to do this thing.

All right that's it, I'm gonna go for a ski. Alone. And I'm totally okay with it. Well, maybe my dog can tag along.

Episode Five: Living with the Wild. To listen to the audio for this episode, visit

<https://www.outherepodcast.com/episodes/livingwiththewild>.



Wolverine tracks run alongside the Kennicott River.

Script: Episode Five (Living with the Wild)

Outthere mixdown 1.wav

You're listening to Out Here, and I'm Erin McKinstry.

GlintingGiant.wav

Karla1.wav

23:12 I think out here when it's quiet and there's no one here, you definitely feel your relationship to the world more and how kind of small you are and how insignificant all the little problems of the world are. Um, you know, there's nothing to distract you so you're just sort of looking at nature and you can sort of feel your place in it more... 23:48 People don't like to talk about that, you know, about how we're on this spinning planet just alone in space, but I think out here people are more apt to talk about it... And it's hard to describe in words but when you're looking up at the moon, you just can, you feel your spot in the world a little bit more.

I remember the first time I climbed a mountain here. It was a bluebird day. The kind that sharpens everything around you.

And climbing through overgrown willows, I sang to myself and the bears checking a few piles of scat to see if they were still warm. And they weren't.

And then I got above tree line, crossed a bit of snow, scrambled to the top of a ridge and looked out over the edge.

No more singing, no more boot stomping, no wind to speak of and the quiet was immense. Before me stood Mt. Blackburn, rising above 16,000-feet. And everywhere I looked there were mountains.

Suddenly, I understood in a way that I never had before how landscape is formed. I could see how the Root Glacier spilled off of one of the world's largest icefalls, converged with two other glaciers, and pushed down valley to form the Kennicott River.

Everything here is so raw, so new, that geological history hasn't yet been weathered away. You can see it in action.

Sitting on that ridge line, I felt so alone and yet so full. So much a part of something greater. I started to cry, actually, and that's when I fell in love.

This place had fished me out of a sea that I didn't even know I was swimming in.

Malcolm1.wav

And the more you're around the mountains, the more you get a feeling of comradery with for and want to live near them. ...you cannot talk to one person who doesn't say something about the mountains and the glaciers and the bigness, the broadness of it

A lot of people's relationship with McCarthy and the area starts with the natural surroundings.

Stephens1.wav

And I saw McCarthy on a map in the middle of a huge national park at the base of a glacier in the Wrangell mountains 03:25 and I thought hmmm I gotta go check that out.

Stephens2.wav

There are places in Alaska where you can live in ways that are very akin to a time gone by that is so foreign to modern life but is so much more connected to the land around you in a physical and a spiritual way that...

GlintingGiant.wav ends

Stephens3.wav

The, the clean air, the clean water, I mean you, these basic things that we take for granted in Alaska, when you travel outside of Alaska, when you go to where there's a lot of people, you're...the air's not clean, the water's not clean, the sky is not clear. The star's aren't as bright

Unfortunately, there are remote places in Alaska where the rivers have now been spoiled at the hands of mining. Big oil has spilled itself around the state. And climate change is making human influence almost impossible to ignore.

And yet, at least for now, we still have wildness out here.

We still have a connection to the natural world that's easy to escape in other parts of the United States.

The landscape, the weather, the wildlife, the changing seasons: it's all in your face.

Lauriel.wav

26:30 Just all the beauty that God has put around us, I don't want to ever become inured to that, I don't want to ever become where I just don't see it anymore.

On episode five, Living with the Wild, we'll discuss the relationship between the people who live here and the natural world. What's it like carving a space in a place surrounded by 13 million acres of preservation, a place that's harsh, remote and full of things that remind you that you aren't always the biggest, baddest kid on the block?

Gary1.wav

If you run around the hills prospecting and then as a guide or you just live remote like this, uh wildlife is a factor in uh maybe not everyday life, but it's a regular occurrence, encounters with bears, wolves, moose, and you can have a hard time with any of 'em.

Kalloloe.wav

Part One: Awareness.

Mark11.wav

I had a friend once who hiked from the house here out to the road. And got warm going up the hill to the road. Well there was a stiff breeze blowing...And she took off her jacket 'cause she'd gotten warm and she jogged a mile and a half down the road, but the wind was at her back. And when she turned back into the wind to come home, the wind was at her face, so the wind chill got her, and she got hypothermic and fortunately she made it back to her jacket, which she'd left on the trail and she got her jacket back on but she was so exhausted she laid down on the trail and took a nap which could've been deadly 1:17:03 you know 'cause often times they'll find people frozen to death without their full gear and it's because they've done something like that where they made the mistake and then gotten super chilled...I mean there's this edge about living out here that you have to be careful of. You know you don't want to go over that edge.

Kallahow.wav continues

Out here, you live so much of your life outside, trudging to the outhouse, going logging, spending time in the garden. Even just going out to the freezer.

And because of that, because so much of your existence is with the natural world and sometimes even depends on it, you have to be more *aware* of it.

You definitely need to be prepared for all kinds of situations, that's something I've learned through experience.

And you have to *pay attention*.

Here's Kristin Link:

Kristin1.wav

You're really connected to your surroundings because that's where your resources come from, so you know how much water you use, and like, what the water supply is, you know like 04:21 when all the snow melts, like the water gets dirty and so I try and like get water before that happens. Or I try and use electrical devices while the sun's out so I always know when the sun's out and how powerful it is. It forces you to be in sync with your surroundings and that's important to me

Obviously, people feel seasonal changes everywhere where there's seasons. Um you might switch from hiking to skiing. Or you might have to switch from regular tires to studded.

But here, almost everything you do, your daily existence is shaped by those changes.

The way I refrigerate things changes from summer to winter because I don't have an actual refrigerator.

When spring break-up comes, my mode of transportation switches from snow machine and river to three-wheeler and road. And when the daylight wanes in December, I spend more time inside, reading, writing, inside my own head. 'Cause there's no street lights, no coffee shops, no bars to escape to.

We adapt our lifestyles to fit within the cycles of the outside world.

Mark1.wav

if there's a really good raspberry year, I'll make a lot of raspberry jam, more than I can eat in a year. But, the next year the rabbits might come back and have eaten all the raspberry tips so there are no raspberries the next year. So, it's like when there's an abundance you learn how to preserve that abundance

When so much depends on life outside, climate change becomes inescapable.

The rivers freeze later and break sooner. We've had strange rain events in the middle of December and many of the glaciers all over the park have shrunk incredibly. The wild fire season is longer and more intense now too.

Kristin2.wav

10 years isn't really enough time to say if the climate's changed or not but it seems like the winters have gotten warmer and we've had these crazy Chinook events more often um than we used to. And it's it has huge impact, it impacts our ability to get around, our ability to get water, to go to town. To see other people.

That awareness makes me question my part in all of it.

What can I do to be better, what can I do to waste less, to use less gas, to use the resources around me rather than bringing things in?

Kristin3.wav

I think the more that you're connected with your surroundings and the resources around you the more that you're interested in conserving them

But, even out here or maybe especially out here, I don't know, that can be hard. It's easy to click that button on Amazon and, if you need to re-supply, that takes 16 hours of driving.

Decompression.wav

Which leads to part two: Subsistence...or not

Decompression.wav

Here where climate change is visible, where the natural world creeps inside even if you don't want it to, and where stores and modern conveniences are far away, it would only make sense to try to live off the land.

Here's Stephens Harper:

Stephens5.wav

And I love the concept of using resources that are close to where you are to sustain your life. There's a sustainability beauty to it, but there's also very much a personal satisfaction and a spiritual beauty to living like that. It's I think it's very fulfilling

And yet...

Stephens4.wav

22:32 I used to hunt for meat, for food in the fall and now I'm a park ranger and so during the hunting season I am out actually contacting hunters and making sure they're following the state of Alaska and hunting and fishing regulation and so I'm busy, I'm too darn busy to go to Chitina and dip net you know for several days and put up a bunch of fish, smoke fish, dry fish, you know can fish, but I love doing those things

A lot of people here do have gardens here and many of 'em catch salmon or hunt an occasional moose. A few raise chickens or ducks, and most of us have compost piles. We pretty much all harvest local wood to burn as well.

But, on the whole, the idea of living subsistence is more of a goal than a reality, especially as access has become easier and the economy has shifted. Here's my partner, Ian Gyori:

Ian1.wav

Ideally, you move out here and you think about the romantic idea of having this massive garden and going out and shooting a moose or getting some sheep and catching a bunch of salmon and putting all of that up for the winter and just sort of sustaining yourself but that is way too much work to sort of pull off if you actually have a job in the summer.

There's poor soil quality, a short growing season, and a lack of generational knowledge to contend with. It's mostly a bunch of transplants here.

Like Kristin and Greg:

Greg1.wav

39:52 *Do you guys hunt or fish at all?*

39:53 *Yes, we hunt and fish very unsuccessfully.*

39:57 *A few spruce hens have been killed for sure. We've definitely killed a few of those.*

40:01 *We've killed a few salmon.*

40:06 *We've killed a few salmon. Um I'd say the larger hoofed animals have pretty much escaped unscathed...I grew up hunting white tail deer and I grew up fishing but we just we haven't prioritized it and we haven't been successful when we have tried but it's room for improvement.*

40:26 *But the animals are doing good. No animals were harmed in the filming of this show.*

Decompression.wav ends

Okay, don't get me wrong.

It certainly can be a comedy of errors, a whole lot of floundering and wishing and dreaming for a romantic vision that will *probably* never happen. Maybe it will.

And there's plenty of people who don't have that romantic vision at all. They're out here to live frugally and escape taxes, and they don't really think about their impact on the environment that much.

But there are certainly people out here who successfully live off the land, at least in part.

Like David Rowland and his wife Hannah. David grew up here and his father taught him to hunt. He and his wife just built their house and their planning to grow their own garden, raise honey bees. Partly because it's affordable and partly because...

David1.wav

22:05 *we're called to be stewards of the land. If you look back in genesis...so I believe that good conservation does include harvesting some animals but it has to be done in a way that's, that sustains the herd numbers so it like..like if there's too many bears and they're killing off all the moose you gotta take some of them too. So, it's important to me to, to help the wildlife out and it provides food if done in a proper manner.*

There's also people here who identify strongly with the environmental movement. People who've done everything they can to avoid consumer culture and to leave as small of a footprint as possible.

Like Mark Vail. He has a huge garden, cans and preserves, fishes and hunts.

And that's not to say he doesn't buy anything from elsewhere.

Mark3.wav

I eat chocolate, you know, and it's like I know that chocolate's not even coming from the United States... 15:28 It's not like I'm a purist, but that doesn't mean I still can't work to the extent I can. Same thing with coffee beans. You know there's certain things, it's like you get a taste for it...And there's certain things, you can't grow mass grains here, so my grains come from elsewhere. You know I like to say I buy beans: coffee beans, dry beans, cocoa beans...They're small and transportable.

He lives his life based on a philosophy:

Mark5.wav

00:30 Because of where I live in the subarctic, I see global climate change in action, and I can see the impact that humans are having on the natural environment... I was coming of age as the environmental movement started...and it had a big impact on my thinking about what I could do as an individual...I've always had this lean towards conservation, which is conservation of resources, like using them wisely. 01:48 And preserving you know the natural environment because I, I myself recognize that my existence is due to the natural environment, that the natural environment isn't due to me...We have to get our perspectives straight about how we exist in this world. It's like we could easily leave this world, and the world would be better for it, to some extent. But we 02:22 could also live here and, and use the resources wisely and have a good life.

For 20 years, he lived on less than \$3,000 a year.

Mark6.wav

In America that's poverty level, other places in the world where they live on a dollar a day, that's richness. You know, and for me it was richness you know

Mark7.wav

But slowly I realized that when I ate from the land, when I ate from the garden that I grew and I picked berries and and fished and hunted from stuff that came directly out of my environment, close by, that I was part of the environment where I lived. Where if you live in the city and you're eating cantaloupe in January, your body is actually part of the environment of Mexico or Chile. And so, your network is so stretched out and thin that most people can't picture what their actual impact is.

Snowcrop.wav

Mark8.wav

It's looking at how that whole system works and trying to shorten the cycles. Because if you can shorten the cycles, you can make it a looped system. Like you can compost and put it back in the garden and grow more vegetables from you know the waste materials

Mark9.wav

I've learned through practice that, the easier you are on the environment the more likely it is to stay the same and that people following you will be 03:31 able to have the same kind of experiences I've had

Snowcrop.wav down

Stephens and Tamara1.wav

42:36 You chasing that bear out of the yard with that shovel was a pretty good story.

42:41 Uh...no I mean, my first summer is the only brown bear that I've seen in the yard. And he was just on the other side of my burn barrel. And he was just doing his thing, snortling around and I just came out of, out of my cabin and saw him and I mean I was right there by my cabin so I had a place to go to if it wouldn't have gone right, but I don't even think I had a shovel, you 've made that up.

43:10 No you did

43:12 I just yelled at him. And he did the right exact thing he ran off

43:13 She chased a grizzly out of the yard with a shovel

43:19 He's embellishing the story.

(laugh)

TheBigTen.wav

Part III: Wildlife

AnimalSounds.wav

In January, I was heading out by snow machine to do an interview for this podcast.

Miles from anyone's house that was inhabited anyway, I came to a screeching halt.

Because there, nibbling on some trees, was a moose.

They look a lot like teenagers that haven't grown into their limbs yet. They're kind of cute. But, they aren't quite as harmless. They can be unpredictable and can stomp you if they want to.

And so, I shut off the snow machine. The moose stared at me. I stared at him. And then, he started walking my way.

Which could be no big deal in this situation, except for two things. The road I was on was a single snow machine track wide. And the snow machine I was on didn't have reverse. Snow machines are the same thing as snow mobiles.

And so, began a dance. Me turning the thing around by hand, which is no easy feat for me anyway. Then driving back toward home a bit. The moose going off in the woods. Me turning it back around. The moose coming back out of the woods.

I called Kristin, the person I was going to interview, to let her know I might not make it. And she said she usually just revs the engine a bit and scares them off.

But I still had Greg Fensterman's story playing fresh in my head at that point:

GregF1.wav

I mean saw a video once of a guy...I mean this guy was on a snow machine riding down the trail, pulls up short there's a moose just like 20 yards away on the trail. Instead of just like backing up or whatever, he like slowly, advances on, he keeps advancing on the moose. Eventually he got so close the moose just charged him and like just ran right up the hood of his snow machine and over the guys' head...It's like well of course, you're an idiot, you know what do you think was gonna happen, you're crowding him.

The Big Ten.wav comes back up under bite

Okay, I did actually rev it a bit but apparently not enough to scare it off.

And then just when I'd called to say the interview was off, the moose disappeared for good.

That's the thing about living with wildlife. It can be unpredictable. And it takes patience again.

Sometimes, things just have to wait.

Here's Gary Green:

Gary2.wav

I don't think I would ever want it any other way because that's, is a spice of life. If you live in what would be a absolute total safe environment where nothing could ever go wrong to you and all that, and you accept that every day nothing can go wrong, you lose feeling. 08:23 Um but if you go for a walk down a trail through the woods or on a river bank and you might encounter a grizzly bear walking the other way...your body's charged up and prepared, your adrenaline flows differently and I feel that a person...08:46 is supposed to have, a certain amount of threats, and uh, and keep your senses sharp. That's why I live in the wild too is because it is wild. It's unpredictable. And wildlife bigger and more powerful than myself is part of that.

Because he's had plenty of encounters, much more interesting and probably terrifying than my little moose dance.

Gary3.wav

06:43 I've been charged by bears a few times. I've had to shoot bears opening my door on my cabin. I've got bullet holes in the front door. ...and I've, was in a prospecting cabin one time when I was reading an old magazine with a an old captain's chair leaned up against the door because the windows were on both sides of the door. 07:14 And, my chair rocked forward while I was reading and I just what's that and I turned my head to just look out the window. At the same time the bear that was trying to push the door open, had moved over to look in the window too and we're just like 07:29 nose to nose looking through the glass. I don't really think he saw me. I recognized him, but he just turned and walked away

Much more often than not, wandering through the woods, you don't actually encounter anything here.

But occasionally, I will get that pins and needles feeling that people associate with ghosts. Like something is *out there*.

One time, it definitely was a bear on the other side of a tiny creek staring at me. I didn't have bear spray or a gun or a dog or another person.

But even in those situations, it usually goes fine. You make some noise. They run one way and you walk the other. Here's Ali Towers:

Ali1.wav

I went hiking one time with a group of people and we saw this black bear right on the side of the trail and all of us just stopped and like started backing away. 45:01 And I was like oh yeah, I'm supposed to scare it, so I was like hey bear get out of here. And then this one guy, this random guy was like no don't scare it away. I'm like are you crazy you want this bear to come up to us? But that bear didn't care at all. He just looked at us and took a big dump and then kept walking. (laugh)

If you watch reality television, wolves hunt people on a regular basis in Alaska and surviving an encounter with a grizzly bear is rare. But, in reality, Kristin says:

Kristin5.wav

09:32 Our culture kind of sensationalizes them, I know so many people come out here and they're just like terrified of bears the whole time. And I think that's a shame. And it's not like something you shouldn't be mindful of. But I don't know that's part of the magic of being here and being close to the wilderness is that there are those animals around, I love animals

It's about learning how to live with them.

GregF2.wav

You can usually avoid, serious entanglements with bears, by just understanding some basic things about their behavior and what makes them tick. I mean I remember my first ever close encounter with a bear which was pretty horrifying, 38:12 uh, you know, since then I've had dozens of close encounters with bears and you know once you get familiar you feel more secure. And you know you have successful outcomes, you know you start to understand.

Greg F3.wav

38:56 When you think about living out here and the risk factors, say they're not really even on my list much.

He's more terrified of a house fire, of a medical emergency, of sliding down a rocky slope on a hike through rough terrain.

Kristin6.wav

So, your chances of getting killed in a car accident are way higher than getting mauled by a bear.

But still. Here's Karla Freivalds:

Karla1.wav

People would always say yeah but...you're so much more likely to get in a car accident in somewhere else. I was like that doesn't matter, I'm still scared of them. Yes, that is a very logical explanation, that's a very logical thing to say but I still 16:40 need to get there on my own.

Gondola Blues.wav

Karla3.wav

13:32 The first summer I was out here, a bear came to the we had salmon outside in a cooler. And so it was you know a dumb thing, like I would never do that now knowing what I know...but the bear came and it jumped on the porch, it was 14:03 looking in the windows, I called Martin, I was like there's a bear, you know, and he said can you go outside and shoot and maybe that will scare it and. So, I'm new to bears and I'm new to shooting and I was like I'm gonna kill someone. He's like just point it off over the road, you know, no one lives over there, just don't point it at Juergen's house. So, I fired and the bear went away and I was definitely a little shaken up but um last summer I was here alone for the first time for an extended period of time. 14:44 And I swear to God at first I did not even want to go outside because I just didn't have enough experience. Like I thought bears would come around the corner like and surprise and be like, boo you know (laugh)...I needed to see more bears ironically, to see like...they almost always run away anyway

Ian3.wav

I think over time the more familiarity you have with the landscape and the animals the better that becomes but still walking around in the dark, you hear things you smell things,

and they get to your head and you know it can be scary. And I think that in some regards I could be a little more cautious than I am. I think that sometimes you can fall into a false sense of security about it because you don't run 40:55 into bears or moose every day.

Ian4.wav

41:44 Um so one year there was one that just would not leave the neighborhood. It was getting into people's stuff. People were chasing it off, dogs were chasing it off, people were shooting guns in the air to chase it off, and it would always come back, and one day, after a number of us had discussed that it just had to be dealt with I woke up to it rooting around in my storage shed. And uh it was a grizzly and I shot it. My neighbor's dog was about two feet from its head barking at it wildly, and it was just ignoring it so I felt like there was really no choice and it was unfortunate, super unfortunate, but it had to be done, we decided and I did.

Those are the unfortunate situations that we can find ourselves in out here. The demise of these beautiful creatures that really deserve this space more than we do.

Stephens6.wav

32:51 Living around bears there's a level of responsibility that you have to take on, that in this community is a source of conflict uh for sure um. There's a lot of new people that come to live here and they've not lived around bears and you...can't leave your 33:23 garbage out on your porch, you can't leave your cooler out on your porch, you can't leave your dog food out.

Stephens is the area's law enforcement ranger for the park. And he's really the only regulator around. He can enforce state and federal hunting regulations and he can try to educate people in the community and visitors about bear safety. But he can't really go up to somebody's private property and tell them to put their salmon back in their house.

Stephens7.wav

35:40 If you aren't living in a way that ensures that bears aren't going to get food or garbage from you, then you're disrespecting the community because 35:57 we are a group of people that live out here together.

When in the West.wav

Stephens8.wav

40:21 nobody wants to be the cop of your neighbor. That's the issue. Is when somebody that lives down the road from you for the second time had the bear get into the cooler on the front porch and eat the ham... and the first time they told you about it and you're like well dang, that's a bummer. But what you were thinking was, well what the heck were you thinking, you can't leave your cooler with the ham on your front porch in August, when the bears are cruising around. And then it happens again, you've gotta say, hey you know, this is a problem, because now you've fed that bear two hams 41:32 and it's gonna (laugh) walk down the road and it's gonna come on my porch looking for my ham which I don't have a ham on my front porch but I've got a window that a bear can push right in

and waltz right into my living room while I'm in the bed and then I'm shooting it, you know, a bear breaks into my house, that's gonna be a dead bear and it might not be because I attracted it but it's because it associated my cabin with the potential,

42:03 For a ham

42:05 Of a ham. Yummy. Or even cottage cheese which is quite a bit less yummy but still pretty tasty to a bear if they're hungry.

That's the thing. In this place, where there's no local governance or city ordinances, where many people would not call it a community, the bears might lose. It's the price you pay for freedom I guess.

When in the West.wav

You've been listening to Out Here, a podcast about life at the end of the road in McCarthy.

Next up, on episode 6, Making Community:

Laurie2.wav

When you live in town you can choose your friends from your small little pool of people that are like you...49:25 Well you can't do that here because really, nobody's just like you (laugh).

If you like what you heard don't forget to subscribe on iTunes, Stitcher, or Google Play. You can look at the episode notes, and some photos of the beautiful landscape at www.outherepodcast.com.

Thanks to Galen Huckins and Blue Dot Sessions for the music, to Ian Gyori for the artwork and to Scott Swafford and my University of Missouri master's committee for the support. And to the Duffy Fund for giving me some money.

For Out Here, I'm Erin McKinstry

When in the West.wav ends

Animal2.wav

Episode Six: Making Community. To listen to audio for this episode, visit

<https://www.outherepodcast.com/episodes/makingcommunity>.



Erin McKinstry receives a package from the mail plane. *Photo credit: Dave Hollis*

Script: Episode Six (Making Community)

Makingcommunity.wav/mp3
**explicit*

TRT: 35:41

OC: I'm Erin McKinstry

OutHereMixdown1.wav

You're listening to Out Here, and I'm Erin McKinstry.

MailPlane1.wav

Greg1.wav

38:49 The town of Glennallen which is like 150 miles away or whatever, the mail goes there and then Mondays and Thursdays the mail plane flies it in

MailPlane1.wav

Greg2.wav

This is a few things this means, one when you give a person your address, you're like oh hey, I want to send you, what's your address, and I'm like oh my name is Greg Runyan 39:07 P.O. Box MXY and they're like what? It's okay, Mary, X-ray, yellow, MXY, next line McCarthy number, and they're like what, and I'm like it's okay McCarthy number 62b okay. Glennallen. I thought you lived in McCarthy? Yeah, it's okay, Glennallen, Alaska 99588. And they're like well what, and I'm like look all the mail's gonna go to the Glennallen post office. P.O. Box MXY is the box for the entire town of McCarthy. 62b is my own little box within that group. So that helps the people sort stuff right. Oh okay, sweet. Done.

Maildance.wav

Greg3.wav

40:12 Then you order your things off amazon prime or whatever and you're like excited to get them. It shipped on Tuesday, delivered to Glennallen on Friday, you're like sweet it'll make the Monday mail plane, I'm ready. Now it's an hour drive from our house to the mail shack to meet the mail plane to get the mail. But the nice thing is the new people who run the mail plane who are doing a phenomenal job they send out a text when they're gonna fly or not fly

40:29 oh ding, ten o'clock in the morning, oh foggy in Gulkana can't fly. You're like okay. We're gonna try again at noon, so you've waiting all day cause you want to go get this package. Ding couldn't fly gonna I'll try again tomorrow. So, you're like uh 40:45 Next day you're up, you're drinking your coffee, you're waiting for the ding not gonna do it. Really again? Damn, it's nice here, it's foggy there, too cold who knows and get all these ding ding dings and finally the mail plane, oh they came all right sweet so then you zip into town and you get your mail and you're really excited and you put your Netflix movies back in the bag and you know you're like well you know, turn around time, three weeks you know, by the time the mail plane finally comes and gets them someday... 41:19 These are the traumas of living in the wilderness today in the modern world. Slow Netflix delivery and terrible Amazon Prime. So bad, so bad.

MailPlane2.wav

On Episode six: Making Community

StephensandTamaral.wav

We are a, a far-flung, loosely dispersed bunch of people. Um but...

36:43 I think it qualifies as a community.

I think it qualifies as a community, yeah

36:48 Whether we like it or not. (laugh)

Cash-cow.wav

We sort each other's mail. And entrust each other with it.

Mail day binds us. A former ghost town binds us. The challenges of life out here bind us.

Greg4.wav

And here we all are, and you know we're all doing our own little ways, we're all in different stages of development, some of us are much more skilled at it, some of us are new to it, some of us don't care and we're happy to have a tepee in the woods. That's fine. Some of us want to build an amazing modern house with flush toilets and in-floor heating. And it's all really cool. And we all kind of get together and share parties, share dinners, share birthdays, share Christmas, Thanksgiving, New Year's, share snow machine expeditions, um it's really magical like that.

But, we're far from traditional.

Malcolm1.wav

33:45 *We don't have any schools, we don't have garbage pick-up, we don't have a lot of these things, especially in the winter time*

Malcolm2.wav

There's only a finite amount of land here for sale so we give it the word community, but in reality it's this little island of privately-owned land surrounded by 13.5 million acres of a national park

It's actually 13.2 million acres, just to be perfectly accurate. Anyway.

After the landscape bit me, then came the community.

At first, I looked at it kind of like a utopia. This place that almost everyone had chosen, in the middle of the wilderness, with no local governance, no property taxes, no violence, no crime. It was like the intentional communities that people had been trying and failing at forever.

And this time it had worked.

There's freedom, self-regulation, a diversity of ideas, a respect for the natural world, a duty to help your neighbor. And a sense of openness.

Even after trauma.

Here's Mark Vail:

Mark1.wav

The McCarthy massacre happened while I was working on the north slope...saving money so I could build my cabin out here, and when it happened my friends are like, you don't really want to live there, I'm like yeah what are the chances of it you know ever happening there again

The next summer I came back for three months and started getting mail at the mail shack in McCarthy and I got to know the community 'cause part of my deal was I'm going to live here you know so I need to know who my neighbors are, I want to introduce myself. I want to be helpful to the extent I can. 51:41 And I remember going back to the city at the end of that first summer and they're like, well did they treat you strangely because you're going into this community that just had this massive traumatic incident happen where a third of the town was killed by a crazed gunman, and the fact was, it's like, the people that were here 52:03 were glad to see me because it was a sign that life goes on...

As time has passed, I have realized that this place is not a utopia.

The murders are definitely one example of that. Um but there are plenty of others.

Also, the fact that it's pretty much just white people means the community is missing the richness and benefits of diversity.

And everyone doesn't always behave. Rarely people do get too drunk and out of hand. Here's Greg Runyan:

Greg5.wav

I really don't like violence in McCarthy. We've had a little bit of it occasionally over time and I think, all of us need to take a step back and this is not the place for violence, this is not the place for assaulting people or making people feel uncomfortable. 17:40 Everyone has to be cool here, you have to leave all that shit behind. 'Cause it's kind of like living on the moon, you know, like you're in your own little community out here, like there's no one else to help us, it's just us. We all gotta get along or yeah. It'd be really bad. Throw you off the Kuskulana, I guess.

People argue. It can be hard to get things accomplished. And there's certainly a fierce rumor mill.

Also, that rugged individualism means occasionally someone doesn't take care of themselves or their property or the natural world around them and it falls on their neighbors to intervene.

Openness has its limits.

Here's Ali Towers:

Ali1.wav

I like to view McCarthy as a, kind of a sentient being actually. And I'm like well, if McCarthy wants you here, you'll know. Like you will feel the magic and all of these possibilities and opportunities will open up to you. I mean it has a lot to do with your mindset and how flexible you are and everything. But then there's some people that they just come here and they just can't handle. Like they're faced with their own ego, there's no distractions from what's going on, you are all up in it. And McCarthy sometimes, she she gnaws on 'em a little bit and spits them out, and they're like I'm out 1:08:56 of here and that's great. Like I'm glad that this place isn't for everybody

The community lives in flux. It swells in the summer and dwindles in the winter.

Which means basic questions like how many people live here don't really fit.

It's like a couple hundred at its highest peak in the summer and in the winter, it's like maybe 20-30-40-50.

GregF1.wav

Well, what part of the winter do you mean and how big of a radius are you drawing around McCarthy to consider like people that live in McCarthy, you know

Who lives here? Also, a good question.

Pretty much everyone is a transplant. There are exceptions.

There's more single men than single women. And people come from all over the country and some other countries as well.

But the defining stops there.

So, let's start there.

Sunday-Lights.wav

Part I: The McCarthy community is...

Tamara1.wav

44:13 I always say it's an intense place to live, it can be intensely wonderful in any number of ways and for us, over the years more than once, it has been intensely frustrating, annoying maddening. It's intense naturally, seasonally. It's intense because there's tons of people here doing all super 24/7 busy in the summer. It's intense in a different way in the winter when it's dark and cold and.

Stephens1.wav

We're bound together by common experiences, and that's what I think what makes this place a community, there are specific events that have occurred over time in this place that have affected every single person that has been here, some very intense experiences, some of them good, some of them extremely bad

Malcolm3.wav

We've had calamities out here happen, whether it be the murders, whether people's houses have burned down and things, and yes people rally up. Rally up. People you wouldn't choose as your friends anywhere else become your friends here. 34:33 Because they're the people you see, they're the ones you see at mail day or at bonfires or at people's dinner parties or whatever.

Greg7.wav

it's a place, because it's semi-affordable, that has allowed a bunch of us to buy land here and produce a a self-reliant lifestyle.

Greg8.wav

13:40 And we also have this other group of people here that sometimes I think get forgotten by some of us, like all these people who have vacation homes, vacation land out here, or maybe were out here back when they were younger have moved on but they still maintain a place here that they come back to and

Gary1.wav

12:03 So you'll find that people in this community do more, travel more, they come from all walks of life and you don't know where you're gonna find one of 'em tomorrow.

Karla1.wav

it's a very transient community too people are coming in and out all the time, so I mean the term like locals, like who knows what that means I think because people have to leave all the time to make a living.

Mark2.wav

23:48 There's a, an economic system that goes with the community that is richest during the summer. And direst in January right now

Kristin1.wav

11:34 there was like someone who was like taking pictures or a documentary maybe someone was making, they were like describing the McCarthy community as diverse, but there was like all these just pictures of white people. And we are like very homogeneous

in some ways, but at the same time, there's a lot of different opinions and people who live here are very quirky.

Lauriel.wav

when you live in town, you can choose your friends from your small little group of people that are just like you. 49:25 Well you can't do that here because really, nobody's just like you...so um, you do business with them and interface with them and be friends. And uh um you know be be kind of in a sense dependent on each other for daily life but in another sense, there's, there's of course a very strong sense of independence

Mark3.wav

there's no social services here, there's no health care here, there's no plug and play here

Scott1.wav

it's the kind of community you can call people out when you know they're not doing something right. Because 58:10 it does affect us in such a big way. Don't throw your trash here. Don't do this, you can't just be building fires everywhere you want when it's high fire danger you know.

Mark4.wav

we don't care what you do on your individual level. That's between you and your maker, unless you're impinging 33:24 on someone else's space or rights. You know if you're making noise to where the neighbor can't sleep, they're gonna to shoot your generator you know or pour sugar in the gas tank or whatever.

David1.wav

So, I would say it's more close-knit, people are less selfish I think. And more willing to help others in need. If, if the needs arise.

Greg7.wav

We've picked up our neighbor's groceries in Anchorage, we've given our neighbors a ride to the airport, we've fixed their cars, they've fixed our cars, they've helped us out...

Mark5.wav

When I moved 29:33 out of the city the last thing I expected was that I would be intimately knowledgeable of all the people in my community.

Kristin2.wav

If I got in a situation that I didn't feel safe whether it was because there was an animal hanging around here or if it was a person I felt uncomfortable around I know people would help me.

Ali OutHere.wav

We take care of each other out here. it's nice.

Sunday-Lights.wav ends

Part two: Governance, McCarthy Style

Gavel.wav

Jackbird.wav

GregF2.wav

05:16 There's sometimes disagreement about how things should be done in the community or you know like you got the MAC or McCarthy area council, uh, which some people don't even like the idea of its very existence. It's kind of like anti-government in any, in any form.

So, obviously, this place falls under federal and state law. There's no escaping that.

But it's looser out here.

The state troopers are four hours away. There's no borough or municipal governments, no one to make city ordinances or regulations or to bring in infrastructure.

The Department of Transportation maintains the road...sometimes. The National Park Service maintains and regulates their land. And the federal government subsidizes mail service twice a week.

And that's it. Otherwise, it falls on private individuals.

Mostly, people just fix things themselves. If there's a tree in the road, someone who passes by cuts it up.

When people break unspoken norms, like cutting firewood or trapping in a place that's already been claimed, someone in the community tells them and they usually listen.

But, especially as the summers have gotten busier, there are times when things *don't* get fixed.

And then we talk about it as a community. In a formal way.

That's what the McCarthy Area Council or MAC is for. Mark Vail's the president.

Mark6.wav

06:17 We were starting to realize that our community was located inside the largest national park and being in that park it was going to have impact from outside interests. 06:50 And when I moved here everybody was individually doing their own thing...

Mark8.wav

But on the whole the visitation was a different story because no individual business was responsible for every visitor because every visitor didn't go to any one point in town. 11:51 But they still had to find someplace to go to the bathroom, they wanted to know where to get drinking water

Mark6.wav

07:20 you know so we had a town meeting I think it was in December of like 1990 or something and and we decided to have an organization to at least have some place to have a forum to discuss issues as they arose

Mark7.wav

The organization was a voice that could react to 11:18 outside entities.

Like the national park service, the department of transportation, the forest service and the state.

They've served as a liaison for road maintenance projects, for example.

Or like right now, the park has been working on a new wilderness management plan that could restrict activities in the park and effect residents. MAC meetings are where they presented that plan to the community, responded to comments and eventually decided to go back to the drawing board.

MAC is now a non-profit. They get some money from the state, some from donations, some from dues. Voting members pay five bucks a year and can present proposals to be funded.

The only stipulation is that they maintain a residence in the area.

So, six months out of the year, 10 to 20 people show up at meetings and vote on whatever people bring to the table. There's lots of discussion, lots of ideas that never come to fruition. But sometimes, problems do get solved.

Greg9.wav

15:54 it's like the most like grassroots gov't I've ever seen in my life, people just raise their hand to vote it's pretty cool.

Malcolm4.wav

Every one of these people in this room, is thinking for themself. How they're gonna do it, how they're gonna get their own trash out of here, how they're gonna get their own cars in here, how they're gonna get their own gas, how they're gonna do everything on their own

And as the organization has grown and summer residency has increased, it's started to address internal issues too. They've discussed what they want to preserve long-term for

the community, like access to safe drinking water or the ability for kids to play in the streets without getting run over.

And they've also helped fund all kinds of projects like road improvements for a private subdivision or helping another non-profit buy a building or pitching in for community yoga mats.

Tamara Harper is the secretary and treasurer of MAC.

Tamara2.wav

56:47 I like the idea of working together for the betterment of the common good, I'm a common good sort of person. And a lot of people that live in rural Alaska are not common good people and I understand that, and we certainly have people in this town that aren't interested in working together with a larger group 57:04 on community projects and that's fine. I do think that's really important and I do think we are a community. And so, I've done what I can to help facilitate those sorts of common good projects.

MAC is like a bad word for some people. Just the idea of a formal organization makes them cringe. And I've heard plenty question the way they spend their money.

They argue that we're not a community and so individuals should take care of their own problems.

Mark12.wav

We have positions that some people think are powerful 20:03 I I personally don't think they're any more powerful than anyone coming to a meeting and stating their personal positions.

The membership encompasses a lot of different facets of the community, politically, seasonally, environmentally, economically.

Um and they act as a fiscal agent for the EMS as well, which provides very limited medical services and supplies for the community.

And they do a lot of other stuff. Like helping facilitate the eradication of a family of beavers that was threatening the cleanliness of the town's source of drinking water

Or like this. Here is a sampling of my favorite meeting minutes in recent years:

Patched In.wav

June 30, 2016: A new, metal-sided outhouse is in place, replacing the old one that was destroyed by porcupines.

July 27, 2017: Motion was made to request in these minutes that locals remove their plastic toys from the swimming hole when they are not being used.

April 30, 2015: Discussion informed the membership about an excavator parked near the Nizina River, that is leaking various fluids into a clear water salmon stream used by locals for drinking water.

Yikes.

May 28, 2015: New mailboxes are in short supply....anyone willing to share half their box for newcomers? Who's in charge of mailboxes now?? Nobody seems to know...volunteers?

August 28, 2014: A member talked about his idea of constructing a community fish wheel in the future. Also, mentioned the ideas of creating an art gallery, a community radio station and how we might continue the Wrangell- St. Elias newspaper. Could all these entities be contained in one building?

Patched In.wav ends

Ok, there's no fish wheel yet. Or any of those other things actually. Um because what they do tackle is still pretty limited.

And a lot of people want to keep it that way.

Here's Kristin Link.

Kristin3.wav

18:06 if you go to the MAC meetings in the summer and people will talk a little bit and people will be like oh you know it would be nice if we had this service...and then 18:21 you note that leads to like then you have to have a real government and you have to become incorporated or become a borough and then you have to pay taxes. I think it's really special right now that we can operate in a zone where we get together and decide what we want to make happen. 18:51 And you know maybe it's not, everyone's not involved in that process, it's kind of your choice whether you want to be or not.

Vernouillet.wav

Part three: Law and Order

Mark10.wav

One time I was mushing my dogs down the road 34:30...and a snow machine came around the corner going so fast he couldn't stop until he got right next to my sled. And he had to squeeze between the berm and my side of the road. 34:53 And he pulled up to a stop and he was completely chagrined because he knew that had my dogs blinked

and moved out of the way he would've wiped out my dog team. He stopped and he swallowed. And he goes how's it going. And I looked at him, I said too fast. And he nodded and drove away much slower. And the next time I saw him I was coming out my trail...and I heard a snow machine coming ripping down the road (reeee) coming out to the corner just before my mailbox and slowed down, came around the corner put put put put and went past my driveway and looked up the hill and saw me and gave me a thumbs up like, he remembered that Mark still drives dogs and he 35:56 has just as much right to be on the road as you do with the snow machine and so he curbed his behavior because of an incident that happened between us. And there was no bad words, no bad feelings just this intimate knowledge of each other respecting our boundaries and and moving forward.

Vernouillet.wav ends

There's a wild west mentality here. Like we can take care of our own. We don't need someone coming in with laws and fines and police cars. Here's Ali Towers:

Ali2.wav

Let's say someone's dog is misbehaving, no one's afraid to be like, hey don't do that dog. You know like yell at someone else's dog, basically. it's like the whole town is helping raise this dog...um just little things like that, even up to the big things. 1:05:50 Like that summer when Neil's life was threatened and the community came together and bound the guy and waited for the troopers to show up

Yes, that story is now legendary. A seasonal employee lost it on his employer. And by the time the troopers showed up, the community had already zip tied him to a tree and was just waiting for the guy to be hauled out.

Greg10.wav

The thing about it now is there's no crutch, you can't be like, well I can do whatever I want, if it's a problem, they'll send the sheriff over to deal with me or the whatever the constable. Here it's like no we kind of 16:36 are going to gearn you ourselves. if you're gonna push that boundary and become an ass or endanger us, we give people a lot of free rides here but like I think it's just been peer pressure that's kept people out here to be like realize what we have and don't be the one to spoil that don't be that person.

There's instances of people passing through and stealing things. Or trying to.

Like I remember a night when two visitors tried to steal a friend's truck.

Ali3.wav

And everyone like got on their four-wheeler and chased after 'em and these 1:07:26 dudes had ditched the car at the footbridge and probably were hiding in the bushes or something

But, not everybody is completely on board with the wild west characterization.

‘Cause sometimes you gotta bring in some back-up.

Enter Stephens Harper. The one and only law enforcement ranger in the valley as I voice this. He works for the park, and he can be deputized in an emergency.

In general, his job is to enforce hunting and fishing regulations, head up search and rescue, respond in emergencies. Normal, park ranger stuff. But sometimes, it’s a whole lot more unique.

Stephens2.wav

Some people describe McCarthy in the summer as like summer camp (laugh) it's summer camp for 20 and 30 year olds that are here for the summer makin' money, having a good time, the sun is up all the time in June, people are just revved up and they're partying and they're having a ball. But like every summer camp there's gotta be a camp counselor. 1:13:11 And I've had more than one person say to me, you're the camp counselor for the McCarthy summer camp (laugh) and that is not something that park rangers typically have to deal with. And uh as long as the counseling part works, I'm fine with all the talking that requires and the personal one-on-one time that being a camp counselor requires. But it's when all of that counseling 1:13:56 doesn't work and you have to take it to the next step of kicking the kid out of camp, that's the part that ain't too much fun. But that's what I signed up to do

Stephens first came to McCarthy in 1999 from Western Alaska. And he wasn’t initially seeking a law enforcement position. Um he was actually seeking community.

Stephens5.wav

10:44 Alaska's a hard place to remain um unless you can put down roots. Unless, unless you a. fall in love with the place and b. figure out how to make it work. Alaska is not an easy place to make a lot of things work. And, and I knew that I needed to 11:04 be amongst other people, and create a scenario for myself where I actually had a community and that was something that I knew I needed to do for my own mental health and and to ground myself in the place that I love, which is Alaska, otherwise I knew that I wasn't gonna be able to hold onto Alaska I was going to end up having to leave um

Four years later when he signed up for the first law enforcement ranger position in the area, he knew it wasn’t going to be easy.

Stephens6.wav

If I was gonna take this job and live here and do what I do, I'm going to have to tell people no sometimes and it's not just the anonymous person that I'm never gonna see again, it might be one of my best friends. Like I'm sorry man, but you're in a national park and you can't do that. No, no, no, I'm sorry, I told you I'm sorry but you can't do that.

And the work-life balance is almost...impossible.

Stephens7.wav

58:59 It's hard. Um because I am I'm on call 24/7 you know my phone could ring right now and it could be any number of un-pleasantries that that I'm getting called about, um, I have to leave McCarthy to really feel like I'm not on...it's a great job in many, many ways I'm very, very thankful to have the opportunity to be a park ranger in this community...it's been a really amazing journey and lots of aspects of it I wouldn't trade for the world. 1:02:13 But some of it has really sucked, some of it has just absolutely sucked and it still will as long as I do it.

Because even though McCarthy is surrounded by a national park, by preservation and regulation, people have owned private land out here since at least the mining days. And that comes with its own set of challenges.

I could do a whole podcast about the Alaska National Interests Lands Conservation Act better known as ANILCA, but what matters here is that in December 1980, Jimmy Carter converted 44 million acres of Alaska into park land, including the land in what is now Wrangell-St. Elias National Park

Suddenly land that people had been using as they saw fit was regulated. The act and an earlier use of the antiquities act sparked protests and petitions. People were worried about a loss of subsistence rights primarily.

And so, certain subsistence rights *were* granted, although still regulated, like hunting and fishing and collecting firewood. And access to private property was guaranteed as well.

In his position, Stephens has had to navigate that space between private and public interests.

Like when a family called the Pilgrims built a road through park land here.

They said it was their right to access their property and the park said it wasn't. And that was a particularly trying time for him.

People have also ignored park regulations not to remove objects that date back to the mining days, like a pool table and all kinds of other things. Also stuff like the excavator leaking into the Clearwater salmon stream. A lot of people really don't really like rules here and they really just want to be able to do whatever they want.

And Stephens has also had to have people forcibly removed from the community. Situations that wouldn't arise if it was just a national park and there was no community here. He's had to navigate the fierce individualism that comes with living in a place like this.

Stephens8.wav

48:18 I love that the community is very tolerant of different ways of living and thinking...in general, the people that live here give one another the respect and the freedom to enjoy this place in the way that they want to enjoy it. As long as it doesn't infringe upon their safety or ability to also enjoy the place.

And and that's the double edged sword, people sometimes, you know, and I'm coming at this from the perspective of the primary law enforcement officer in this community, you know, I'm a, I'm a park ranger 50:00 and in general that doesn't include enforcing laws in your front yard, on private property, but that does occur, the troopers are a very long ways a way and when, when the poop hits the fan and somebody's life is in danger, I'm the one that gets called and so that's the boundary of the freedom

At times, that stress has gotten to him. He's thought about leaving. But when he's looked elsewhere, he's realized, it's kind of like the grass is always greener. This place is still full of freedom. Um ot's still really, really beautiful. And most of the time the community does take care of itself.

Ian1.wav

58:11 The only time there's ever really issues with that I think are in the summer when it's not necessarily members of the community that are behaving badly. Seasonal workers and stuff, and people you know there are people that bring their own problems to a place like this so the town, sometimes the state troopers get called and they do come in and they deal with it. Other times the town will just sort of tell somebody they need to get out, like they're not welcome here anymore and that works. And 58:47 and then other times, it's just like community members step in. We do know how to talk to each other. And um somebody might be a loose cannon but there's no reason to be afraid of 'em. You you talk to 'em or you find somebody that has a personal connection with that person and just try to address whatever the issue might be and it works out

McCarthyLighter.wav

You've been listening to Out Here, a podcast about life at the end of the road in McCarthy. You can find all the episodes, pictures and episode notes at www.outherepodcast.com.

On the next and final episode, we'll take a step back and take a look at the journey. Where did we come from and where are we going and what's next?

And, oh yeah, that weird reality television show about this place, did that change anything?

GregF_teaser.wav

Originally it wasn't gonna be what it became, it was gonna be like a quasi-documentary about living in a bush community but then it became this other thing kind of ridiculous shenanigans.

Thanks for Galen Huckins and Blue Dot Sessions for the music, to Ian Gyori for the artwork, to Scott Swafford and my University of Missouri master's committee for the support and to the Duffy Fund for financial assistance.

For out here, I'm Erin McKinstry.

Episode Seven: Change. To listen to the audio for this episode, visit

<https://www.outherepodcast.com/episodes/change>.



The vehicle bridge, built by private individuals over the Kennicott River. They charge residents an annual fee to use it.

Script: Episode Seven (Change)

Change.wav/mp3
**explicit*

TRT: 36:54

OC: 'Til next time

OutHere mixdown.wav

You're listening to Out Here, and I'm Erin McKinstry.

Rapids.wav

Martin1.wav

37:41 When people come from structured society and then they're hugely liberated by the feeling of being here, of having their own land and building their own house I can't say that I've actually ever felt that. Because my life is like being born on the finish line, you know, my life has no journey has no beginning and end it's just I was born here and I'm here, I have nowhere to go, nothing to strive for except for making this existence more than what it is

But, for most of us, it's been a bit more linear. Including McCarthy.

Martin2.wav

This place started in the stone age 31:44 and then it kind of passed me up because I'm still in the stone age in a lot of ways

Gary1.wav

When I first came out here there was no communication, there was no road, there was no phones..and then living today where we have instant gratification with internet service, phones... I think it's probably partly why McCarthy's grown too is that we have the ability to do that. Some people if we didn't have that, I don't think would live here.

On Episode seven, Change.

Rapids.wav up

It started as a boom town.

Ali1.wav

At one point, it it was way busier than it is now. With all the stores and.

Ian1.wav

The golden age of this place that we're living now was 100 years ago.

Ian2.wav

They built this railroad through a very rugged and inhospitable landscape just to get that copper ore out of here.

And then it busted.

Gary2.wav

It was a ghost town

A few people came to live an older way of life.

Gary3.wav

There was no road to McCarthy then

Gary4.wav

it was moving into old time Alaska

Gary5.wav

I didn't have a snow machine or a chainsaw so I got my wood with an axe or a sweed saw and I had two-man cross cut...everything I did was on foot.

But progress called.

Clockticking.wav

First, came the road.

Gary7.wav

21:52 It had a railroad grade already so the route was established, all they were having to do to build the road was remove all the rails, rebuild bridges across...

Gary8.wav

22:24 And I was very opposed to the road, um, I circulated a petition to every last person that lived in the country on this side of the copper river to the Canadian border on the southern Wrangells, 22:37 uh I did it by on skis in the winter and um and on foot in the summer.

Well, except one person, he said.

Rapids.wav ends

And then the park, which drew its own fair share of controversy. Particularly among hunting guides like Gary.

Gary11.wav

And it didn't take me very long to realize that there was more promotion and development in the land when it became a national park than there ever was when it was just, it wasn't designated. I know in the long run, if you're looking at 100 years down the road and all that, protecting the land maybe does help it to receive less development but for the first 20-30 years, it was a lot more activity, people, construction, because it became a park which destroys the wilderness qualities.

And the park drew people in.

Mark1.wav

The McCarthy Lodge was open one day a week on mail day to get hamburgers 53:09 You know, yeah they'd open if someone came and wanted to rent a room but there wasn't tourism to speak of...

Mark1b.wav

Uh and then slowly 54:12 it's started growing. People recognize that we're in a park now. You know and that that attractiveness of being in the largest national park was going to induce people to come here even without you advertising.

Land came up for sale or large plots were subdivided.

And the national park service bought the historic buildings in Kennicott and started fixing them up.

John1.wav

When I got here, there was a primarily a group of people that lived here in the winter, and in the summer, they did different things. Some of them went out they were pilots, whatever they did fisherman, and they would go out and work in the summer and spend the winter here. And now that the park service has taken over Kennicott, there's work here and the tourism has increased too, so there's work here in the summer...the summer population is big and as soon as it snows, everybody's gone

And that's partly because the park service hires locally.

Mark3.wav

Now there's a, a million dollars a year that flow into the community as wages...and then there's growth aside from that, you know, there's growth of the businesses that do more because more people come

Borough.wav starts

The Department of Transportation improved the road and started winter maintenance, which meant more tourism in the summer and more coming and going in the winter, less hunkering down and less isolation.

GregF1.wav

You know back in the day when the real old timers were here, there was zero maintenance of any kind. Which means it was just continuous potholes...there weren't bad sections, it was the whole thing

Carole1.wav

17:01 Once they started maintaining the road um you get a lot more summer residents in McCarthy

And most people switched from dogs to snow machines.

Carole2.wav

When they first started plowing the road, in certain times of the year before the glaciers start, it made it like a smooth highway with a berm and people would go way too fast. I would be out there with my dogs and when you have a pick-up going 45 miles an hour coming toward ya, there's not a lot of time to make a decision about what side of the road you're gonna be on. And I just couldn't bear the thought of a tragedy.

And then came the bridge wars.

Borough.wav ends

Mark4.wav

The bridge issues were one, a time period when there was a lot of challenge ...when you change access 21:03 it changes the face of the community. The easier it is to get here, the more people come. And the more people come, the more exposure there is, and the more exposure there is the more change that happens.

Valantis.wav

Greg1.wav

Historically there was a train bridge, it was, it was a railroad. In the late '70s the state put in a tram over the Kennicott. So, when I first came out here, you'd drive down the road, you'd take a little tram, a little cable car. 31:23 And pull yourself across the river, it's a raging torrent of a river, it'd kill you dead

Malcolm2.wav

Before there was bridges there was the tram system, two tram systems, and as I live right in downtown, a lot of people give me the, wow is it hard to live with all the, hustle and bustle. But 35 years ago, the last thing I wanted to do was go farther out when I had to cross two trams with a two-year-old and groceries and you're crossing the river with a tram

And you couldn't get a vehicle across the hand tram obviously.

Carole3.wav

You could drive over the ice sometimes of the year

GregF1.wav

54:30 Randy, at the beginning and end of the season, he would create this temporary bridge across the Kennicott River with some flatbed trucks or something and it would cost I believe it was 100 dollars a vehicle. If you didn't have the nerve he would drive it

for you I think for an extra charge, which I would've certainly paid him to drive. 54:54 So it was, very expensive and sketchy you know.

The hand tram needed to be replaced. And so, started a debate.

Malcolm3.wav

21:20 We could've built another tram. But with so many people coming in, that tram was getting backed up like 50, 60 people on the Fourth of July on either end to cross so 19:35 it was at that moment where it's like should we build another one and everybody's like another tram, more tram no access...It's like we could choose how we want our environment to change is what it was. And that was a big thing for a lot of people out here that we have the ability to dictate how this place is gonna grow...a lot of educated people saying this is like a utopia 20:30 because you don't get a place like this in America that is so fresh and the community is not quite a community yet, so you have the ability as a community member to have input on how you want it grow...People fought it, that we're gonna have the uh trams forever. We don't want traffic in here.

Valantis.wav ends under Malcolm3.wav

Turning to you.wav begins

Malcolm4.wav

Anybody like who lives on the west side were like make a bridge yeah of course like come on, 22:28 then you've got all the people who are living in McCarthy saying no we don't want vehicles here. And the happy medium became a footbridge. With that footbridge, the state can't make something that's only three feet wide

GregF2.wav

52:49 Originally in those days, before they finally got serious about putting the restrictors on the bridge. You could drive a vehicle across the bridge, if it was a skinny enough vehicle. Like a little Dotson pick-up. Would just fit. I mean, you gotta be prepared to scrape the sides obviously. You know and, of course, the state had a fit because it wasn't supposed to be. It was supposed to be pedestrians only.

Malcolm5.wav

23:02 What it was is they had two bollards on either end and those became known as the bollard wars. And so, you've got the access-oriented anarchists saying 23:21 they shouldn't be there, let us drive our four wheelers across. And with that they would take them down. The state put them up like four times, and people would go out there with a cutting torch and trucks and pull them down. And then people would drive back and forth. Nobody figured out who was cutting them down. 23:44 We all have a good idea but nobody really knows, the state never found out. Finally, the state said screw this and they put those neck downs in there and essentially it got down to the fight, of neck downs, no cars, only four wheelers could get through and they did and that's what it's been

With it came an expectation of more services from visitors. And people living here who wouldn't otherwise.

John3.wav

When they crossed the river on the tram, they knew they were in the wilderness...they didn't have to have a flushing toilet, they were happy with an outhouse. 54:40 Now there's been a shift, there's nothing really there to get 'em into that mindset

But, for some, there was still one more obstacle.

Greg3.wav

Where we live, you get through McCarthy, there's another, another river called McCarthy Creek, even though it's really a river, and then over that we just built different log bridges over the years 32:03 some of them were two cottonwoods, nailed together at an angle, laid across the channel. One was a nice plywood bridge. Um I've fallen off the bridge a couple times. I pushed my first wood stove across the plywood bridge, inch by inch.

Turningtoyou.wav ends

GregF3.wav

they were these log bridges that kept getting washed out and rebuilt and these bridges were like...just walking across the thing was a little iffy

Greg4.wav

Uh when the creek would get low enough I'd drive through it with my Toyota truck to get water, you know four-wheeling through the creek, it's pretty fun. 32:22 So I had three vehicles. I'd drive the McCarthy road I'd park, I'd walk across the footbridge to another vehicle that'd get me through McCarthy, then I had the log bridge over McCarthy creek to get to that side to get to my cabin, it was like that type of deal.

And then came another set of bridges.

Greg5.wav

32:38 Well the Rowland family, Keith Rowland, he got out here, he's a contractor and a builder type guy, heavy equipment operator, bought land on both sides of the Kennicott and built a bridge over the Kennicott Riiver. He got a state permit. Had it engineered and done, and he took basically railroad cars and welded them together with a couple big pilings and built a bridge over the Kennicott, you can drive a tractor trailer over it. And he charges an annual fee for that bridge. 33:03 Pretty revolutionary for the residents and the businesses out here. 33:02 And then he went and built another one just like that one over McCarthy Creek. So, all the sudden I went from having this like ordeal of taking hours of shuttling equipment and vehicles to like, I have two keys, I pull up to a bridge, I lock it, and I drive through it. I drive through McCarthy, I unlock a bridge, I drive through that one, boom.

Here's David Rowland, Keith's son.

David1.wav

26:41 I would've been about 12, 12 to 14. I believe. We actually built two of 'em. The Kennicott was the first one and then a year or two later we built McCarthy Creek. And I was helping on both of 'em operating equipment with the big steel. the big rail cars, they're heavy...it's helped us be able to do work on both sides of the river much easier and that was our original intent for the bridge was to provide ourselves access to both sides of the river for work, but then other people such as locals also wanted to use it to provide access for themselves. 27:54 So it kind of helps both us and the other locals.

Malcolm6.wav

And essentially that's been a huge demographic change for everybody, myself included. I buy the pass, it helps us with the restaurant and as a, as a resident on the McCarthy side, yeah, I was definitely first year it happened, you betcha after 28 years of taking and parking my car on the other side of the river and walking everything across or having another truck on this side or anything, it was that much easier

Stephens1.wav

Being able to drive to this side of the river, changed things a lot, reducing the need to be able to try and do it on your own to figure certain things out on your own and even to have to rely on your friends and neighbors.

Greg6.wav

In the summer, I can drive my truck right to my door. And that was one of the big reasons I sold my university cabin, was when I bought that land there was no bridges, and that land was remote, people were like oh it's too remote, I can't live over there, it's too far away. And it was, it was a pain in the ass to get to. And the five years I had that place and built my house, the bridges went in and the phone network went in and all the sudden I was like oh I'm in the suburbs now.

GregF4.wav

57:01 I think that bridge was built before I bought the property. I don't know if I would've bought it if the access was a skeezy log bridge

Greg6.wav

The road from mccarthy creek up to the university had grass growing down the middle of it. Now it's been bladed, it's got culverts, it's two lanes wide. I go through there in the summer. Big trucks, I don't even know who these people are, they don't even stop to wave at me. They bought land, in paradise, they're building their vacation home for the weekend. 34:18 I don't know them, they don't know me, they're just brrr driving by in their big truck. I'm like hmmm. It didn't used to be like that. It used to be we'd all shuttle stuff up together.

Pickers.wav

GregF5.wav

You know if I drive into town, I can find a place to park it somewhere but if anybody could drive out here from Anchorage or wherever, and just drive a Vehicle into McCarthy, it would be a horror show. Cause there'd be no place for them to park, it would just be a nightmare. So, I'm kind of, of two minds about the bridges. I'm kind of glad there's not a public bridge. but I'm not real crazy about the idea that access is controlled by private individuals. You know, who could withdraw that access if they wanted to.

Private individuals brought all kinds of services: gas, heavy equipment, road maintenance, propane.

So, people had to rely on their own resources less.

They no longer had to plan as much or do without.

They could have more modern things and also more waste. Eventually trash service would come.

Pickers.wav continues

And, of course, there were changes in communication.

Carole4.wav

We used to have to go to Chitina just to make phone calls. So, used to write a lot more letters. My mother used to, I used to buy cameras, take pictures and send them to her in Texas and she would develop them and then get more than one print and send prints back to me so I could see the pictures I took and she could see 'em...she couldn't get a hold of us in any way, except caribou clatters.

Martin3.wav

32:45 It's a really old messaging system that I think they still have where you just call the radio station and leave a message and they will play that message on the radio.

Ian3.wav

34:37 When I first got out here we didn't even have cell phones. There was a public phone on the street. And uh that was the only way I had of communicating with anybody outside of the valley. And in a way, those, those were great times, it simplified things, makes you more productive with your time

Martin4.wav

When everybody got internet sort of everything changed, the things people talked about, they're all living in another world now that I'm still not a part of

Gary12.wav

16:37 Going from no communications at all to where we had mail service once a week weather permitting and just a few people meeting the mail plane and uh and no Amazon Prime boxes you just, you live differently then, and it was a different quality to life, I'm not gonna say it was better, or it was just different. But it was definitely more removed from the rest of the world

People could look up what you didn't know on YouTube instead of asking their neighbor. They could work remotely instead of leaving or living frugally.

Scott1.wav

There's just so much communication when somebody 1:09:37 finds a place like McCarthy, it's not like writing a letter or calling home, nowadays you can post pictures, you can say hey yo out here in McCarthy, loving what I'm doing you know this and that.

With ease, access and exposure, came more summertime residents.

Stephens2.wav

There's, there's cabins and and properties going up left and right like mushrooms around here right now...

Ian4.wav

There's more driveways, there's more cabins, there's more businesses, there's more people coming out in the summertime to visit.

And more vacation homes.

Pickers.wav ends

Stephens3.wav

Vacation homes that you would find in many National Park Service gateway communities all over the country um that is what I'm concerned about, I mean, you know, we are very far out here we're pretty far removed, we're not gonna end like you know a bunch of touristy knick knock shops right on the edge of a big national park, it's not going to be like that...there's an absolute negative aspect 1:17:32 of some of the development and tourism that has occurred on the door steps of, of national parks which, McCarthy has been sheltered from that from the sheer standpoint of how difficult it is to pull things off here, how far it is, but as access has improved, as infrastructure has improved, such as the vehicle bridge such as being able to hire...a fuel company to drive a big old 1:18:04 propane truck into your yard and fill up your big old propane tank you're not schlepping, you're not carrying 100 pound tanks back and forth yourself I mean

Greg7.wav

People with wealth who come out here with their airplanes and their four-wheelers and their toys, and just like buzz around and blow the place up and do whatever they want all the time and don't give a shit about how much fuel they use and it's just a joke. They build a big giant house out here just to come 36:38 hang out for a couple weekends they're

here a year. And waste all those materials or waste all that heat and all that stuff to build it and maintain it and I do, I find that a little disgusting actually, it does piss me off, we haven't had the trophy home set-up here 36:50 too much, but it's already, it's starting now, we're starting to see it and um yeah it just seems like a terrible waste of resources to build a trophy home in a place like this. I mean I don't begrudge you having a bigger house than we have. But like come on. 37:03 It's McCarthy. The reason you came out here was because you liked it because it wasn't like everywhere else and now you're turning it into Vail

ArizonaMoon.wav

Expectations shifted with the changing economy.

Greg8.wav

You know the people who hire us to build houses for them are expecting more of a professional bonded licensed carpenter, not just like some backwoods guy is helping them build a cabin to get their feet, it's different, I'm not saying it's bad. It's just different.

Ian5.wav

The price of land has gone up which the unfortunate part about that is that you know it sort of restricts the type of people that are able to move out here now.

Greg9.wav

You know it used to be you could buy a piece of land out here and it was pretty cheap and you could do what you want and now it's like, you know, now I need two bridge passes, I need to pay for my Verizon phone, it's, getting, you don't need to but everyone is so that's the competition level and.

Stephens4.wav

It used to be that you could have all the money you wanted but you were still gonna to have to invest your own blood sweat and tears to make something actually come, come about in McCarthy and that's not the case anymore. 1:19:44 Is that a bad thing, well not necessarily. Is it changing this place, and the character of this place. Absolutely... the difficulties of pulling off life here and making life comfortable here is in my mind a very strong thread of the fabric of our community and as things get easier and as you can now just pay for it and it will happen, that is not a common thread amongst everybody in this community any longer.

And then, people don't always wave.

Tamara1.wav

1:14:31 There's a lot more people that I don't know. I used to feel like I knew everybody and that's certainly no longer the case. Just because the more people and more people that come for a shorter amount of time or maybe have a summer home, it's not necessarily good or bad it just is.

Then came a reality television show. And a whole lot of grumbling.

Kristin1.wav

It definitely changed like the economics of the town. Because people made a lot of money doing it. Ourselves included. Well, not me, but Greg, and we're partners so myself included. I know people come out here because of the tv show. One thing that's changed is when I travel and I say that I live in Alaska people start asking me about reality TV shows. I mean that didn't used to happen. People are like oh yeah, I've seen that show, oh you live in that town, so they're kind of like familiar with this thing that they never would've been before.

GregF6.wav

It, it did create a little conflict in the community I think. But, you know, it's gone now and so (laugh)

Gary13.wav

22:56 Well I was involved in the reality TV show and I don't think it's had any impact on the community

Gary14.wav

24:07 Um I probably wouldn't have decided to be part of it if I'd a known that it was reality TV at the beginning. But it was promoted to me as they were gonna do a documentary on McCarthy. They were gonna use me as the pilot, which was business. I was quickly disgusted by the reality TV part of it, by the time I got disgusted, I learned so much about the film industry and what it takes to put shows together that 25:24 the learning and being part of it and the people that were here, filming it, the film crew themselves, all good people that were fun and it kept me doing things that I used to do that I wasn't doing very much anymore.

ArizonaMoon.wav ends under bite

Okay, so the reality TV show didn't have a ton of impact. Just added to the already growing tourism numbers.

Businesses grew to meet the demand. A two-story restaurant popped up in town.

And with more tourism came more impact on the environment. Which could mean less freedom in the future: restrictions on snow machine use, trip limits, park regulations.

Malcolm7.wav

And I hope that uh other people have the same freedoms that I had as a young guy out here. 12:16 Some of those things are becoming a little bit, curtailed. Access into the park and things like that, are becoming more...it's starting to become a talk about

Greg10.wav

There's a couple guide books out now, there's websites, there's GPS coordinates, there's airstrips being built or expanded 29:30 and you're seeing trails now. There didn't even used to be trails and now there's trails. You go to like a semi-popular spot in this park and you're gonna see, guaranteed to see other people. Used to be we'd see nobody. 29:42 You'd feel like you were the first ones there and now there's tent sites, there's fire rings. There's impact, there's feces, um it's a big issue. And unfortunately, I've been working with the park service on their wilderness plan. Like I mean the way that changes things, is all the sudden you have to start to have to have regulation. You have to have group size limits and trip limits...out here it's always just been like you just go. You don't ask permission, you don't pay, you just go. And I think that will change.

And yet some things haven't changed. The road is still 60 miles long and can be in terrible shape. Maintenance isn't consistent.

Stephens5.wav

1:20:41 that is a filter that's still there and it prevents things from changing too quickly

Winters are still quiet. People still smile and wave. And life out here for most still comes with plenty of challenges.

There's people here that continue that older way of life.

Or blend old and new.

And things are still a bit janky. We don't have a real grocery store or fancy resorts or hotels.

Mark5.wav

there's, been a pretty long-standing sentiment that if the people that live here 54:34 meet the needs...you know, you don't have to build out to draw a crowd. You just have to be prepared to deal with the people who show, and it's worked really well. It's kept our community small and non-corporate. You know there aren't outside big megalithic tourism companies that operate here. 55:01 Because the community that lives here are all vested in their community. You know everyone that owns a business here, essentially was here doing something before they started their business. You know and they started their business to meet a demand 55:56 And it's not easy even to this day, I mean the businesses that provide services here go through extraordinary hoops to do what they do.

For some, change has brought good.

Malcolm8.wav

As a young guy, playing in the Wrangell mountains, the one thing that has been lacking out here was available women...And with more women coming out here now, this place is gonna be a greater place to be. And a lot of women are moving out here on their own. You know for a long time it was a male dominated area...it is nice, it's not just a bunch of bachelor's wintering it out like there definitely was back in the, back in the day

El Tajo.wav

Change has brought great food in the summer and an opportunity to share this place and this way of life with others. Also, more money for people to make a living, so they don't have to leave if they don't want to.

And advances like solar mean electricity without burning fossil fuels.

Now, people can continue to live here when they retire because there's more services and it's easier to come and go if they have health problems.

In general, the lifestyle has become more accessible.

The changes have brought a group of seasonal, young people, adventurers coming and going, bringing their thoughts from all over the world. And with that comes more culture.

And really the parking isn't that bad.

The future could be incorporation.

Malcolm9.wav

11:27 It's coming in time where there will be more infrastructure out here and that infrastructure is going to bring more people and with more people goes order and law and all these other things.

It could be more crime.

Greg11.wav

Usually what I've noticed in my life is like you get money, you get development, you get trophy homes, you get nicer things, you create an underclass and all the sudden you have theft and you have problems and things just like of like, it turns into that

It could be less of a fabric binding different facets of the community. Or a loss of that away ness, a loss of freedom.

Greg12.wav

it's too easy, it's too easy to buy land here, it's too easy to hire people to build you a house. It's too easy to get fuel. You know, just turn on your iPad your here. There you go. It's great. We have great people out here, great restaurants, great music, great hiking, I want everyone to hike on the glacier and see it. You know they should. Ride your fat tire bikes around that's great, bring your kids to softball that's fine. Don't get mad when my dog 38:27 bites somebody

Mark6.wav

It's like as a community I wish we did more long term planning because growth is inevitable, change is inevitable. I would like to look forward into the future and say what are the things that need to be preserved, and how can we best do that without impinging or asking for paying taxes

Or it could just be progress as it's been so far. A slow trickle. Busier summers. Quiet winters, a life that's a bit easier but still provides an opportunity to live life your own way.

David2.wav

There's still plenty of wilderness out there.

Greg14.wav

35:08 I mean I'm one of those people who'd love to lock the door behind me, I'm just that type of person, but I also try to be open-minded and I appreciate the new opportunities that abound, but 35:16 I'm happy with McCarthy where it is now, I don't really need it to develop more, other people are very pro-development, and I, we've got it really good right now and you're gonna lose what you have.

Ian6.wav

There will be more people moving out here more people building big cabins that they only come out to once or twice a year as vacation homes and you know the benefit of that is me and my friends will be able to make money building those places...so it's a double-edged sword.

Ian7.wav

I don't see it becoming like a Colorado mountain village, but best be ready for the change...

Ian8.wav

1:04:37 I feel fine about it. I'm a part of it. It means that I'll be able to probably make more of comfortable living. Knowing that I'm a part of the change makes me feel a little better because I, I feel like I have a pretty solid and respectful attitude and vision about my role in that change. 1:04:59 I don't have the money to go bulldoze down whole forests but I won't be a vehicle for that.

El Tajo.wav ends under Ian8.wav

It's about being intentional, about not trying to hold back the tide but shape it how it comes. Preserving that freedom for others as life moves forward.

Malcolm

A lot of people, they try really hard to do the old, oh, it was better then. Or, gosh back in the 90s, you should've been here in the 90s, you should've been here in the 80s, oh boy it was so different in the 70s. Or whatever. And it's, and I look at it with the feeling that, the person who comes and moves here today, is gonna experience their own elation with the

place fresh. And it starts, their journey starts today. Mine I can definitely you know talk about it with the feeling of, what has changed and how it's changed. But it doesn't take away and say you should've been here such and such. Because that was when I was here that was what I did that was how I did it. But I like to give people that move here now that very idea that it's fresh enough for them to continue on. It's no such thing as the good old days in other words. They don't exist. Because [32:01](#) the person who moves here today is starting their good old days today.

Ultima Thule 2.wav

As for me, the snow is starting to drip and sounds are coming back.

Soundofriver.wav

We're already at 14 hours of daylight. Soon the river will break. And I'm feeling resentful, actually. But I'm trying to keep Malcolm's advice in mind. Take it as it comes.

We're heading into a new season, a new journey toward summer.

And who knows where that'll take me.

Ultima Thule 2.wav

You've been listening to Out Here, a podcast about life at the end of the road in McCarthy, Alaska.

The entire seven episodes come from my own experiences and those of 18 residents of the McCarthy area. Trust me, there are so many more stories and perspectives. This is only a sliver of this place. You can listen to them all at www.outherepodcast.com.

Thank you, thank you, thank you for coming on this journey with me.

And a big thank you to all of those who agreed to be interviewed. In no particular order: Malcolm Vance, Mark Vail, Laurie Rowland, Ali Towers, Scott Anthony, Ian Gyori, Greg Runyan, Kristin Link, Greg Fensterman, Gary Green, John Adams, David Rowland, Hannah Rowland, Carole Morrison, Martin Morrison, Karla Freivalds, Tamara Harper and Stephens Harper. Also thank you to Galen Huckins and Blue Dot Sessions for the music. To Youtube for providing a few of the sound effects, but not all of them, I promise. Uh to Ian Gyori for the artwork. To my University of Missouri master's committee chair Scott Swafford and members Sara Shahriari and Dr. Cristina Mislan. And the Duffy Fund for financial assistance.

For Out Here, I'm Erin McKinstry. 'Til next time.

Ultima Thule2.wav ends.

Photos



A snow machine track down to the Kennicott Glacier



A view of Kennicott from the west side of the Kennicott Glacier



The sunrise outside my house



Mark Vail in his cabin



Mark Vail's spinning wheel for carting wool



Mark Vail's wall of handspun yarn



The view out Greg Runyan and Kristin Link's window



Kristin Link in her cabin at the Nizina River



Bush pilot Gary Green in his cabin in McCarthy



Mark Vail's reading nook



Herbs hanging in Mark Vail's cabin



Malcolm Vance's sewing table in his cabin in McCarthy



Greg Fensterman with his dog Izzy in his cabin in the University Subdivision



Gary Green's couch in his cabin in McCarthy



Abandoned buildings in downtown McCarthy



Community members help sort mail at the mail shack outside of McCarthy.



The Chugach Mountains highlighted behind the mail shack.



A historic building in Kennicott, leftover from the copper mining days and now owned by the National Park Service



The bridge over the Kuskulana River



A broken-down bush plane on Gary Green's property



“The pink house,” built by John Adams, had one of the first flushing toilets in the area. It’s now used for employee housing by a local business owner in the summer.



The historic mill building in Kennicott was used for processing copper ore in the 1920s and 30s.



Gary Green's driveway



A broken-down truck in downtown McCarthy



Ali Towers carrying a log from the tree cut down by her partner, Scott Anthony



Scott Anthony takes a break from logging to pause for a photo.



Scott Anthony, Ali Towers and their friend Isaac Hinckley pull logs that they chopped for firewood.



A neighbor's dog, Buddy, jumps for a stick



Scott Anthony's dog "Hobo Joe" guards their firewood while they work.



Mark Vail stands outside his log cabin



A boreal owl outside Mark Vail's cabin



Grosbeak outside Mark Vail's house





Martin Morrison stands on the porch of the cabin he helped build for the reality television show, "Building Alaska"



Martin Morrison shoots his homemade bow and arrow.



Propane tanks outside Greg Fensterman's house



Greg Fensterman's house that he built with the help of friends



Malcolm Vance's log cabin



Gary Green's cabin



Chapter 5: Analysis

For the research component, I analyzed 26 Anchorage Daily News articles (a non-Native owned statewide newspaper) and 25 Cordova Times articles (a Native-owned local newspaper) using textual analysis methods and critical-cultural scholarship as a guide. To find those articles, I queried each website using the search term “Native” and the date range of Jan. 23, 2017, to Jan. 23, 2018. I then read through each article and deleted any Associated Press stories, stories from other news outlets or stories that were unrelated to Alaska Native peoples or communities. Because about four times as many articles were found for the Anchorage Daily News (formerly Alaska Dispatch News) as for The Cordova Times, I then randomly pulled every fourth article from the Anchorage Daily News for the analysis.

For each article, I filled in the following template to help standardize the comparison:

Name of Article:

Paper:

Author:

Date:

Category:

How are Alaska Natives identified?

Short summary of topic:

Are any Alaska Native words or names used?

Terminology:

Stereotypes/tropes?

Sourcing (who's given a voice?):

Historical/cultural context (is it given?):

Other general thoughts:

Tone:

I used this analysis to inform my interview questions and to help answer the following research questions:

1. *-How are Alaska Natives being covered by Alaskan news media?*
2. *-How does an Alaska Native news organization cover Alaska Natives?*
3. *-How does a mainstream Alaskan news organizations cover Alaska Natives?*
4. *-What are the themes and issues regularly covered by Alaskan journalists when writing about Alaska Native communities?*

I did not find a significant difference between coverage of Alaska Native communities by a Native-owned newspaper and a non-Native owned newspaper. Generally, the coverage avoided stereotypes, was accurate and tended toward the positive. There was not an abundance of negative articles, and most articles contained relevant contextual information. The major themes of the articles were climate change and the environment, energy, culture, event coverage, politics, profiles, education, language preservation, business and economics, and health. Most sources were identified by their tribal affiliations (when relevant) rather than being identified as Alaska Native or Native.

I did notice that the sourcing from the Anchorage Daily News relied heavily on the voices of Alaska Native corporations, that a few articles were missing important

historical and cultural context and that one article quoted the Secretary of Interior of the United States as calling Alaska Natives “Native Alaskans,” and the author did not paraphrase to avoid the incorrect usage. I also noted that many of the more complex articles about rural Alaska were written before the Anchorage Daily News (then Alaska Dispatch News) laid off many of its employees and pulled a rural reporter back to Anchorage. Also, many of the articles about Alaska Native peoples and communities focused on rural Alaska, although a significant number of Alaska Native peoples live in cities, and they focused on Western Alaska. There were few articles about southeast or about southcentral Alaska (where I live).

I used those observations to inform my questions when interviewing journalists about coverage. I then read articles and blog posts by nine writers, academics and former or current reporters who are Alaska Native or who cover Alaska Native communities. I conducted interviews with the following journalists, academics and writers:

1. Sharon McConnell, the executive director of Denakkanaaga, Inc, a non-profit that works with Alaska Native elders. She was the first Alaska Native news anchor when television was introduced to villages in the mid-1970s, hosted a national radio talk show from Anchorage in the mid-1990s (Native America Calling, The Wellness Edition) and co-owned a production company (Blueberry Productions) that produced a weekly Native news television program and PBS documentaries. McConnell is Inupiaq and grew up above the Arctic Circle in Evansville.
2. Joaqlin Estus, a special projects consultant and retired reporter for KNBA, a Native-owned radio station in Anchorage. Her beat was Alaska Native peoples

and communities at the radio station. Joaqlin is Tlingit and grew up in Wrangell in Southeast Alaska. She now lives in Anchorage.

3. Laureli Ivanoff, a freelance writer, communications professional and columnist. She's Inupiaq. She's the former news director for KNOM in Nome, Alaska, lives in Unakleet in Western Alaska where she grew up, and writes a blog called Living Village about life in Unakleet.
4. Diana Campbell, a freelance writer and adjunct faculty member for the Department of Communication and Journalism and the University of Alaska Fairbanks. She's Gwich'in Athabascan and Alutiiq and used to work as a reporter for the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner. She lives in Fairbanks, Alaska.
5. Edgar Blatchford, professor of journalism and Alaska Native Studies at the University of Alaska Anchorage. He is Inupiaq, used to work for the Chugach Native Corporation, ran for governor and was the mayor of the town of Seward, and used to own several local newspapers throughout the state.
6. Anna Rose MacArthur, news director at KYUK Bethel. She's from out of state and is non-Native, but the station she works at covers an area that is predominantly Yup'ik: the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta. Her entire career as a journalist has focused on covering Alaska Native communities and rural Alaska. She worked at KNOM Nome under Laureli Ivanoff.
7. Shady Grove Oliver, freelance reporter for the Arctic Sounder. She's also from out of state and is non-Native, but she's the only reporter who covers the Arctic, a predominantly Inupiat region of the state. Her entire journalism career has focused on covering rural Alaska and Alaska Native communities. She moved to Alaska

in her early 20s and started working at a radio station. She's worked as a reporter in Wrangell, Homer and the Arctic.

8. Christine Trudeau, an education and government reporter at KYUK Bethel. She's also worked on special projects. She's a member of the Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation and moved to Alaska to work at KYUK in Bethel, mostly because she was interested in working in a predominantly indigenous community.
9. Angela Gonzalez, indigenous communications director at First Alaskans Institute and freelance writer. She runs a blog called Athabascan Woman where she highlights stories of rural Alaska, Athabascan culture and prominent Athabascan and Alaska Native people. She is Koyukon Athabascan and grew up in Huslia, Alaska, northwest of Fairbanks.

With each reporter, writer or researcher, I discussed the following broad research questions:

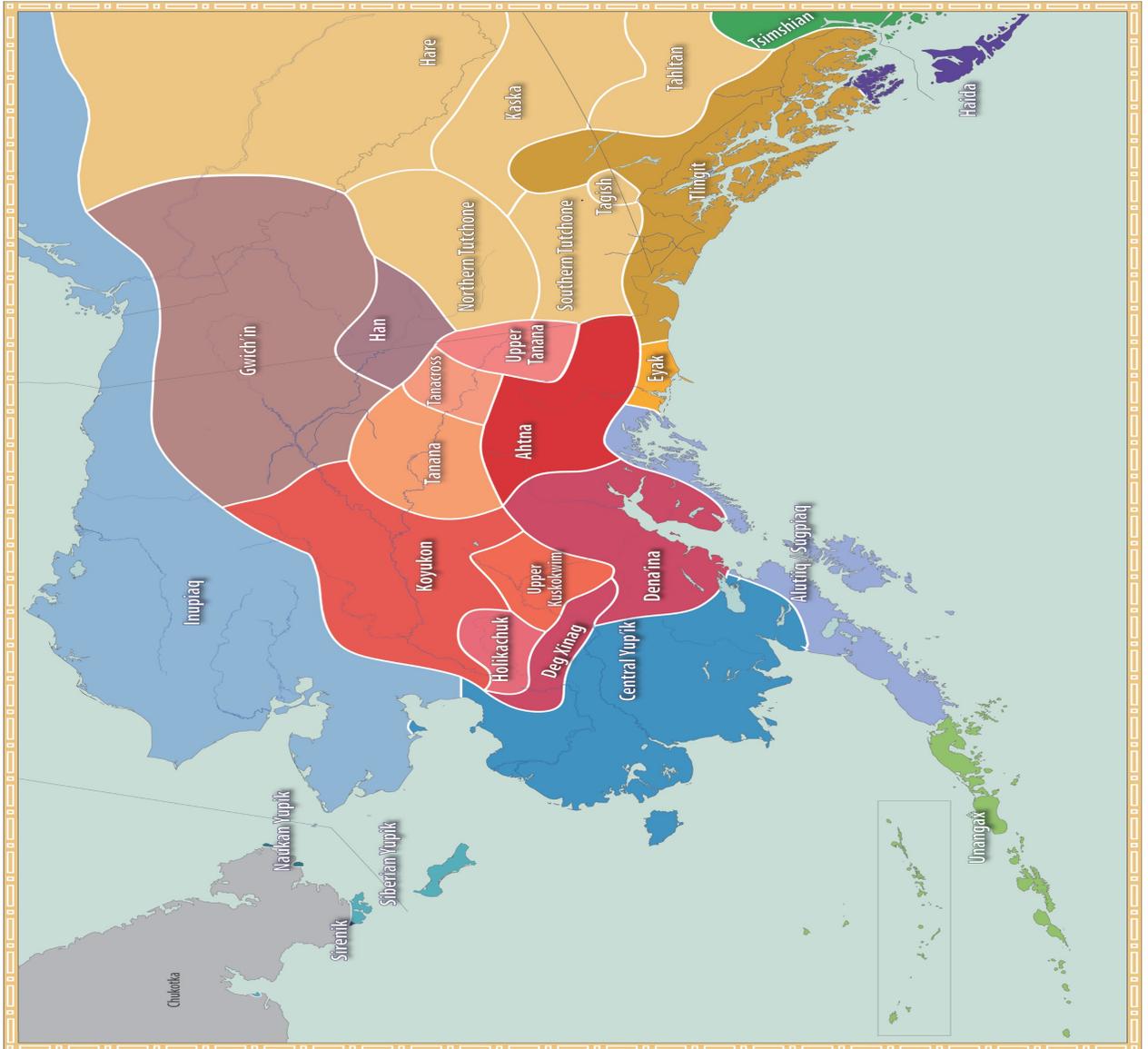
- *How are Alaska Natives being covered by Alaskan news media?*
- *What are some of the challenges that journalists face when covering Alaska Native communities and writing about Alaska Natives?*
- *What do they think they could do better?*
- *What advice do journalists who regularly cover Alaska Native communities and write about Alaska Natives have for other journalists interested in covering Alaska Natives and other tribal nations?*
- *How can journalists more accurately cover Native Americans and Alaska Natives in the news media, rather than relying on stereotypes or ignoring them altogether?*

- *What are some of the issues that are important to Alaska Native peoples and communities but that aren't receiving enough attention in the press?*

After transcribing all the interviews, I wrote an 11-page magazine-style article discussing current representations of Alaska Native peoples and communities in the news and then offering advice, from the perspective of those I interviewed, for reporters when working on stories about Alaska Native peoples and communities and about rural Alaska in general.

Fighting stereotypes: Advice for reporting on Alaska Native communities.

Figure 1.



Source: (Krauss, 2011)

Historically, media representations of indigenous communities have been fraught with stereotypes.

Portrayals have often only displayed the negative, like problems with alcoholism or domestic violence, without providing proper historical context about how and why those problems persist. They've labeled indigenous communities as poor and destitute

without also highlighting the resilience and richness of their cultures, which in turn shapes how the public views and interacts with indigenous peoples.

Laureli Ivanoff works as a freelance writer and columnist and is Inupiaq. “Much of it is directly related to historical trauma and the treatment of Alaska Natives by the U.S. government, by churches, by essentially white people who came into our communities and forced assimilation,” she said.

“I think that's a big conversation in our community that's not really addressed in the media at this point.”

Nationwide, Native Americans and Alaska Natives make up only [1.3 percent of the population](#). Although the group is small, it's incredibly diverse: there are [562 federally recognized nations, approximately 229 of which live in Alaska](#). Each has its own culture and customs and often its own language. Some people live without running water and electricity, living off the land like their ancestors, while others live in urban centers.

That diversity, that geographic distribution and that deep, complex history of colonization means covering indigenous communities is complicated.

Diana Campbell is a freelance writer and adjunct faculty member at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. “Racism — you can discuss on a very surface level, but then if you start taking it apart and unpacking it, people just can't sit still for it. When you talk about health disparities or economic issues, it's hard for reporters to understand, but it's also hard for the readership to understand,” Campbell, who's Gwich'in Athabascan and Alutiiq, said.

“And I've just found that to be true in all walks of life, not just in the media, but everywhere I've been there's few people I can have a deep conversation with about racism, enculturation, ethnocide, micro abrasions, things like that. What it's like to be a Native person.”

Many non-Native journalists grew up without exposure to indigenous peoples, and reporting on remote, rural sections of the country can be difficult with time and money constraints. Freedom of Information laws may be different or non-existent. And although Native-run news organizations have a long history in the United States, they are still few and far between.

Journalists aren't likely to have someone who is Native American or Alaska Native in their newsroom either to answer questions or bring their stories to the forefront. Fewer than 1 percent of journalists are Native American or Alaska Native, [according to the Nieman Foundation](#).

Christine Trudeau is a reporter for KYUK. “If somebody is non-Native and they leave the office after doing a story, they might not have Native friends. They might not go to art events where there are Native people,” Trudeau, who is a member of the Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation, said. She reports on the majority Yup'ik communities in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta area of Alaska. “It might not enter into their consciousness.”

That means that sometimes Native stories are just completely ignored, or Native voices are only sought for stories specifically related to a Native cultural event or an issue that predominantly affects indigenous peoples, rather than being included in stories about day-to-day life.

That's what inspired Angela Gonzalez to start her blog, [Athabascan Woman](#). She's of Koyukon Athabascan heritage and grew up in Huslia in rural Alaska. She said she wanted to share stories of her upbringing and of Athabascan culture.

"There's all the negative statistics and crime like if the state trooper is involved. You know they have their daily update to the media, so the media is fed this information on a daily basis sometimes about Alaska Native people," Gonzalez said. "And are they fed with the other side of the story, too, about talking about our ways of life? Not as much."

She said there *are* some publications that write about those sorts of things, like KYUK, where Trudeau works.

Anna Rose MacArthur is the news director at KYUK. "It's not like, how do we report on the Native community? We just ask, how do we report on the YK Delta? And most of the YK Delta is Alaska Native," MacArthur, who is non-Native, said. "So, we're just reporting on the life and the issues and the joys and the tragedies and the developments that are all happening within our region."

In general, Native voices and cultures are more visible in the state of Alaska than in other parts of the country. Alaska Native and Native American peoples make up a greater portion of the population than in any other state: [15.2 percent](#). [Koahnic Broadcast Corporation](#), which runs all kinds of nationwide programming focused on Native issues and peoples like [National Native News](#), [Native America Calling](#) and Stories of Our People, was started in the state. And [Alaska News Nightly](#), a statewide radio broadcast, and the [Anchorage Daily News](#), the biggest paper in the state, regularly feature stories about Alaska Native peoples and their communities.

That has to do with history, at least in part. Campbell said the history of colonization is a bit shorter here.

“I think that impact happened a lot sooner in the lower 48. They’ve been living with the mechanisms of that for a lot longer than Alaska Natives have,” Campbell said. “And we’re lucky that we still can practice a subsistence lifestyle in a way and practice who we are in some way with potlatches and gatherings and things like that.”

In many parts of rural Alaska, non-Native people are the minority, and subsistence activities rooted in Alaska Native cultures are practiced and valued across the community.

In areas such as the YK Delta, indigenous languages like Yup’ik are still widely spoken. Almost half of all Yup’ik people speak it. KYUK has a Yup’ik newscast, and it uses Yup’ik sound bites in its English newscast.

“Having that commitment as a part of our value system and having programs on our air waves that are entirely in Yup’ik... We are able to do the work that we do because we’re committed to it but also because our community is the YK Delta,” MacArthur said. “It’s not like we’re reporting on a region that has a reservation within it, and we’re reporting from the outside. We’re reporting from the inside.”

Alaska has no reservations. Things played out a bit differently there. Not to say that it was perfect or that Native peoples didn’t experience exploitation or marginalization or that white people didn’t take land from them, but the [Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act](#) (ANSCA), signed by President Richard Nixon in 1971, did establish 12 regional Alaska Native corporations (and later added a 13th) and 220 village

corporations, and it put 44 million acres of land and \$962.5 million under their control. Alaska Native peoples alive at the time became shareholders in those corporations.

Native corporations have become major economic players in the state. Sometimes their interests come in direct conflict with the preservation of the land and subsistence activities valued by Alaska Native peoples, and not everyone sees ANSCA as a positive thing. But in general, the economic power of the corporations *has* made native voices and concerns more visible across the state.

“With the passage of the Claims Act, I think the voice has gotten stronger,” said Sharon McConnell, who was the first Alaska Native news anchor.

And that’s reflected in the media. The corporations are quoted all the time.

But that doesn’t mean that coverage of Alaska Native communities and peoples is perfect.

“News coverage of Alaska Native issues is kind of broad but doesn't go very deep,” Campbell said. “It's not all about the leadership in the corporations. People tend to depend on them as a source of people who know what's happening in Alaska Native politics. It's also very confusing, I think, for outsiders, which makes it more difficult to cover.”

Native reporters in Alaska are still very few and far between.

“For a while, I was the only rural Alaska, Alaska Native reporter,” Ivanoff, who worked as the news director at KNOM, said. “That's not OK. I mean, to me, that's not right.”

Stereotypes persist, McConnell said, whether through media portrayals such as reality television shows or in the minds of people across the country.

“There's still the belief, not just in the state but across America, that Alaska Native people are just getting free health care, they're just handed that,” she said.

“They've got to realize the history of our Native people and what has taken place.”

Small papers like the now-closed [Tundra Times](#) used to represent the voices of Alaska Native communities from the perspective of Alaska Natives. And there are still papers and media outlets under Native ownership. [KYUK](#) is one example. [The Delta Discovery](#) is another. But as the newspaper industry has lost steam, many have closed. Bigger papers in Anchorage and Fairbanks have less of a budget to send reporters to report on rural areas.

Alaska is a big state. It's over twice the size of Texas, and the divide between rural and urban is huge. Many places are only accessible by bush plane, and in some areas like the Arctic, there's now only one reporter for the entire region.

“There's an incredible lack of coverage in rural parts of the state. Being completely frank, there's no possible way that I can do it justice,” Shady Grove Oliver, who reports for [The Arctic Sounder](#), said. Grove Oliver is non-Native.

“I'm the only reporter for more than a dozen communities stretched out over a massive swath of the state. There's major industries (here too).”

Reporters end up relying on official voices from afar. Context is left out. And stories go untold.

In some cases, national outlets have come in to tell some of those stories, particularly stories about climate change's impact on rural Alaska Native communities.

“I think that coverage is needed, and we need more coverage,” MacArthur said. “When the coverage is done well, it's done from the standpoint of agency and resiliency

and innovation. When it's done poorly, it's done from the standpoint of victims of greater forces.”

In general, over the past few decades, coverage of Alaska Native peoples and rural communities has grown.

Ivanoff said that when she was growing up, it was rare to hear a story about rural Alaska on the news. “I remember any time a rural Alaska community was mentioned or highlighted or a story took place in rural Alaska,” she said. “We would get so excited because things happening in rural Alaska were rarely showcased or highlighted or mentioned.”

Now, she sees more stories.

“I think it's gotten more accurate because again we have social media, we have the internet,” McConnell said.

And Gonzalez said simply because there are more stories about rural Alaska, the quality has also improved.

But, there's still plenty of work to do.

“I can guarantee you that not everything is as bleak as some people like to make it look, and unfortunately I see that in a lot of reporting on Native communities,” Trudeau said. “We've come a long way, but we also can see — this is across the lower 48, too — there's strides moving forward, but there's also the occasional articles where it's just like: ‘What was this person thinking? Why didn't this person talk to this person?’”

So, what can journalists do to keep heading in the right direction? And what can be gleaned from the experiences of reporters working in communities where Alaska Native voices *are* being heard? Here's what these writers and current or former reporters

who are Alaska Native or have extensive experience covering Alaska Native communities had to say:

ANGELA GONZALEZ

Gonzalez works as a freelance writer and as Indigenous Communications Manager at [First Alaskans Institute](#). She also runs the blog [Athabascan Woman](#) where she highlights Athabascan culture and notable Athabascan and Alaska Native peoples. She's of Koyukon Athabascan heritage and grew up in Huslia, Alaska, northwest of Fairbanks along the Koyukuk River. Her Denaakk'e (Koyukon Athabascan) name is Lot'oydaatlno. She lives in Anchorage.

Understand Alaska Native 101. Learn about the history of ANSCA and the corporations. Understand the geography of different tribes and linguistic groups. Understand what tribal sovereignty is and the role of different entities in the community, like the tribal council, the village council, the Native corporation and the non-profit corporation.

The term is Alaska Native, not Native Alaskan or Alaskan Native.

Don't assume that all Alaska Native — or all native peoples — are the same. Each region has many different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Try to be as specific as possible when identifying someone (i.e., Siberian Yupik rather than Alaska Native or just Native). There's no such thing as "the Native perspective" on something.

Build relationships beyond the corporations. "A lot of Native corporations have budgets for communications people, and they have an office and staff who can respond to media inquiries. But for the smaller tribes, they may not have as much staff. The reporter may not know who to contact in a tribe, and then the person at the tribe may

not know how to respond to media, and they might be suspicious,” Gonzalez said. She said building relationships over time can help.

Don’t assume that people in rural Alaska have the same phone and internet speed as you do and recognize that not all rural Alaskans are Alaska Native.

Don’t judge by appearance. People drive four-wheelers in rural Alaska, so most people don’t wear suits. “You might look at somebody and, based on their appearance, you might not think that they’re someone important, but they might be the mayor or the chief,” Gonzalez said.

Don’t believe all the bad statistics, and don’t use those statistics without context.

Being humble is valued. Many Alaska Native people don’t like to talk about themselves. So, the person you’re talking to might be the right person for an interview, but they wouldn’t ever say so themselves. They might send you to another person. It’s going to take time, trust and patience.

Make sure to call ahead. Just like in a city, you need to make an appointment to talk to the mayor of a rural village.

When looking for stories, **focus on the positive and the day-to-day,** not just the negative.

CHRISTINE TRUDEAU

Trudeau came to Alaska last year to work for KYUK in Bethel as a radio reporter, where she covers government and education. She’s a member of the Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation in Mayetta, Kansas. “To me, it really just came down to, this is a majority Native community. I’m going to be delivering news to a Native audience,” she

said. *“That is incredibly unique, and I feel really privileged and honored to be able to participate in that. Because it's just something that I couldn't do where I'm from.”*

Stay connected to the smaller communities. When people come together for bigger events or visit Bethel for the weekend from a village, she asks them about what’s going on in their communities, or she calls the local post office, the tribal council office, the school, or the village corporation office and asks if they have any upcoming events. There’s also Facebook, and when she can, she visits in person.

Explain the media process (and this goes for reporting on anything). “You know, this is what the deal is with this story. This is how I go about it. This is what we're saying is on the record. And if you wanted to say something or not communicate something, then we have a very set guideline to go about that and what feels comfortable,” Trudeau said.

Ask questions...and don’t be afraid to look stupid. “That's your job is to ask every single question, so you understand something,” Trudeau said. “People are so afraid of just asking a dumb question. What if that is racist to ask? Well, think about what you're going to say first, and don't just blurt out the first thing. A lot of times it's just like, well, let me just try to understand this.”

If it doesn’t mean that much to you, then you need to figure out why it means a lot to other people. “Let's say you're doing a story on a low fish count run, and you’ve never covered fish before,” Trudeau said. Ask kids and elders what fishing means to them. And make sure to get a sampling of perspectives.

Let go of your assumptions. “You should be doing that as a reporter anyway. You shouldn't have an idea of what the story is before you go and cover it,” she said.

“Check your own value system, too. Don't get too caught up in framing something from your perspective, an outsider's perspective, because you're inside now and you need to be aware.”

Make sure you're pronouncing someone's name correctly. Trudeau doesn't speak Yup'ik. She's learning as she goes. “You wouldn't want to mispronounce the governor's name, so you kind of have to treat it with that same mindfulness,” she said.

Develop mentorship programs and be a good mentor to help bring more Native reporters into the newsroom. “Look at what support systems you have in place for them. You have to look at what they can do and what you ask of them. And be aware that some things that you assume are easy to do aren't always easy for everybody in the same way,” Trudeau said. If you're non-Native and mentoring someone who is Native, be aware that there are limitations on your perspective. Adapt your teaching style when necessary and be open to them teaching you something too.

DIANA CAMPBELL

Campbell is a former reporter for the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner, an adjunct faculty member at the Communication and Journalism Department at the University of Alaska Fairbanks and a freelance writer. She's Gwich'in Athabascan and Alutiiq.

Understand tribal sovereignty and what the fourth estate means when reporting on Alaska Native communities. The process for FOIA or access may be completely different. You may not be allowed into a corporation meeting or a tribal council meeting. Read up on the specific laws and practices of the tribe you're covering. And develop relationships over time to help gain access. Sometimes you might have to take the back door.

Each community has its own micro culture, and each is constantly in flux.

“You have to understand what happens and what happened and how it changed and then how it is continuing to change,” Campbell said.

Accept that you’ll never learn everything, but keep trying. “You get over your first hurdle, and you finally get comfortable. You feel like you're in a place of understanding and acceptance, and people kind of stop there. It's really a life-long journey,” Campbell said. “I mean, I've been a student of Alaska Native cultures all my life, and I still don't know what I don't know.”

Be patient and don’t be afraid of silence. People who are bilingual sometimes need to find the right words in the right language. “Their silence may not mean what you think it means. In some communities — in Yup’ik communities — there's a lot of nonverbal communication that happens,” Campbell said.

Not all Alaska Natives live in rural areas. “There's a difference between an urban Native and a rural Native. I don't think that enough has been said about urban Natives,” she said.

JOAQLIN ESTUS

Estus is a retired reporter and a special projects consultant for KNBA, a Native-owned radio station in Anchorage. She’s Tlingit and grew up in southern California until she was 13, when she moved to Wrangell in southeast Alaska. She now lives in Anchorage.

We need more Native reporters, and then we’ll have more Native stories. “I think if we had more Native reporters, they would have more background. I know Native history, and I lived through a lot of what happened,” Estus said. “So I remember exactly

what I thought and felt with some of these momentous occasions.” She said that would add complexity, nuance and richness to reporting.

If you’re not familiar with the community, consider a guide. When she wrote [a series of stories about the lack of water and sewer infrastructure](#) in rural Alaska Native communities, she had a guide who spoke Yup’ik travel with her. “Having somebody who speaks Yup’ik and that local people know, it just opens the door. People are justifiably afraid of reporters, I think. They're going to put your voice on a megaphone and send it out to the world. It's scary,” Estus said.

Spend a few minutes before the interview getting to know the person and building trust. “I tell them where I'm from, something about myself, what I'm trying to do with this story. I do this with non-Natives, too,” she said. “And when it comes to building trust, it doesn't have to be I'm an Alaska Native. It can be: I come from a place like this. I hunt and fish too. I've had the same kind of job you've had. It's just like getting to know anybody else. It's just building bonds and helping the other person see what you have in common.”

Think about it before identifying someone as Alaska Native, particularly in crime articles. Would you identify someone as white in the same scenario? Is their ethnicity relevant to the article? If it has bearing on the story, include it. Otherwise, don’t, because it can reinforce negative stereotypes.

SHADY GROVE OLIVER

Grove Oliver is a freelance reporter for [The Arctic Sounder](#) and is the only full-time reporter covering the Arctic in Alaska. She’s also worked in Sitka, Homer and Wrangell. She’s non-Native.

The lines of personal and professional might not be as distinct as you're used to. “Especially when covering small and tight-knit communities, before you can ask other people to trust you with their stories, opening yourself up as a human being and not just as a reporter is important,” Grove Oliver said.

Be aware of your background. “The Arctic is predominantly indigenous. I am a white reporter covering majority Native communities,” she said. She said you have to keep the extremely troubled history of colonization and imbalanced power structures in mind. “If you're a non-Native reporter working in a Native community, you're part of that,” she said. “I can't hide that I'm white. I can't hide where I'm from. I wouldn't want to. So, being transparent about that and not shying away from that difference. You're not pretending that you're working in a place that you're from.”

Keep intellectual property rights in mind. You need to get permission to record songs and dances, and never record the whole thing. “It's like you're physically taking someone's shirt and passing it to someone else. Being aware that you're taking a physical thing,” she said.

Don't expect people to share their stories. “Realizing that you don't have a right to their stories. You only have stories that people trust you enough to give you,” Grove Oliver said.

Use the local language when you can. “I write stories that have words that aren't translated,” she said. She said a lot of people use Inupiaq words in daily conversation. So, she makes sure that she's familiar with those words and she uses them in her stories without translating them into English. Always keep your audience in mind.

Sometimes you have to let a story go by for the sake of building trust. “I’ve tried really hard to not just jump headfirst. I’ve let stories go past for the sake of giving space and time,” she said.

Be flexible. “You don’t want to give up your journalistic integrity, but letting go of some of that control, just opening yourself up to like why are you doing that,” she said. Journalistic conventions were formed around western thought and values. Keep that in mind when working in indigenous communities.

ANNA ROSE MACARTHUR

MacArthur is the news director at KYUK in Bethel, Alaska. She’s non-Native.

Be humble. It’s something she tells reporters when they first land in rural Alaska. “Recognizing that I’m landing in a radically different place with a different culture and a different history and a different language and even a different geography and climate, and I’m just a humble student,” she said.

Value where you are. She said some reporters land, and they leave immediately. “They land in this place where it’s a bunch of Natives walking around, speaking a different language. They look different. They have different cultures. They have fish hanging outside in their yard,” she said. “And it’s different and therefore it’s this other and it’s just not valued.” She said the reporters who succeed are curious and recognize that those differences are something they can learn from.

The history is a lot deeper than you know. “I would emphasize more than anything just humility as a non-Native person,” she said. “I think will take a very long time to learn and build an appreciation for systemic forces that have over a long period of

time shaped the experiences in the present moment. Learning that history is massive. So, just entering with respect.”

Know the best practices for the communities you’re covering. She said she knows that she needs to call the tribe before landing in a community and ask permission to come. Early on in her career, she said she cut an introduction for the sake of timing, and she later realized she shouldn’t have. The man she was interviewing had said his name, his mother’s name and his occupation. “I cut out him saying his mom's name, and I later learned oh you shouldn't have done that because that's how you introduce yourself here,” MacArthur said. “You say who you are, and you say who you're related to as a method of introduction and building relationships.”

When looking at problems, look at those who have solved them. “Look at communities that are doing well and what are they doing and why is that working for them and how did they get there. What can we learn from that,” she said.

LAURELI IVANOFF

Laureli Ivanoff is a freelance writer, columnist and communications professional, and she’s the former news director at KNOM in Nome. She’s Iñupiaq and lives in Unakleet, where she grew up.

Watch your negative adjectives. “I worked in a newsroom, and I saw the press releases that reporters get every day from the Department of Health and Social Services and from the State Trooper Dispatch,” Ivanoff said. “In most cases it was negative news, negative information, negative statistics on rural Alaska.”

Check your value system. “We have such a rich community when it comes to natural resources, and economically I feel like that makes us very wealthy people,” she said. “What makes a person wealthy or rich is very different here.”

Watch your words and the connotations they carry. “In news stories, I never used the word ‘village.’ I would train reporters not to use that word because it further separates our communities from communities on the road system.” She said to watch for words that highlight differences instead of similarities.

If you don’t know how to identify someone, ask them. Ask if they want you to include a Native name. Ask if they want to be identified by a specific tribal affiliation. “What I would tell reporters is how does that person identify? What do they say they are?” Ivanoff said. “You can go with that.”

Chapter Six: Conclusion

Before I started journalism school, I knew that I wanted to base my career in Alaska. Therefore, it only made sense that I complete my research and professional components in the state. On the surface, the geographic connection is the only thing that links the two, but as I moved through my project, I realized that the research and the professional skills component informed each other.

Both focused on reporting in rural Alaska. Both touched on telling stories of people who are living life in ways that are very different from the average American lifestyle. Both explored how to tell complex and accurate stories about lifestyles that are often sensationalized, and both explored reporting on lifestyles informed by the subsistence traditions rooted in Alaska Native cultures. Even though there is no Alaska Native population in McCarthy, many of the people who live there are in search of a way of life that very much resembles life in remote Alaska Native villages. Often when I interviewed Alaska Native reporters and journalists reporting on rural communities, we connected over the fact that we both lived without running water or indoor plumbing and that our communities were, in some cases, living off the land through hunting, fishing and other subsistence activities.

And yet, at one point, an interviewee pointed out the public health implications of living without modern conveniences. She'd done a series on how a lack of access to clean water and to sewer was impacting rural Alaska Native communities and how the state wasn't doing anything to bring in that infrastructure. My first impulse was to ask whether people in those villages wanted those modern conveniences because, in McCarthy,

people live without those things by choice. The reporter said that the people she interviewed *did* want that infrastructure, and after breaking down the conversation after the interview, I realized the difference comes down to privilege.

The people in McCarthy have the privilege to choose whether they want to live without or not. The majority of people living there are white and they come from other places in pursuit of a simple, off-grid lifestyle. In Alaska Native communities, on the other hand, people do not have that privilege to choose. Many of their communities have had their water supplies contaminated, and above the Arctic Circle, digging outhouses is complicated. Living without running water isn't just some sort of challenge or test. It's a hurdle for elderly people. It can spread disease and leave people in rural communities feeling like they've been forgotten by a government that's supposed to serve their needs as well as the needs of people living in urban Alaska. In McCarthy, the population is small and dispersed, and the national park designation protects many of the natural resources so people don't have to contend with the same issues. They have the privilege of living without and living a lifestyle rooted in Alaska Native traditions without having to contend with modern contamination.

They're attempting to live a lifestyle that Alaska Native communities across the state pursue successfully, but a lack of institutional and cultural knowledge means that many people fail. They are living on land that at one point was utilized by Ahtna people. They use dip nets to fish and benefit from subsistence permits that were, for the most part, created to help Alaska Native peoples preserve their ways of life. And yet, people in McCarthy have little to no contact with the Ahtna community in Chitina, which is only two hours away. They have little understanding of the historical and cultural connection

their lives have to the Ahtna people. In completing both projects, I realized that deficit and also realized how important it is for people in the McCarthy community to respect and understand the peoples that have, in many ways, made their lifestyles possible. I hope to share the knowledge I gained about Alaska Native communities in my research project with members of the McCarthy community that I interviewed for my professional project. I'd like to find ways to try to connect the two communities in the future because they do have a lot in common. Privilege stands as the difference. And, in future projects, highlighting those similarities and the realities of day-to-day life for both could bring connection, highlight an important history, give respect and credit to a group of people that's been marginalized and point out continuing disparities and privileges.

Combining the knowledge from my professional skills component and research component, I feel better prepared to report on rural Alaska with complexity, context and with the long view of history. While completing the research component, I was able to ask deeper questions from the lens of someone who had an understanding of life in rural Alaska. While completing the professional skills component, I utilized the advice from reporters I'd gained from my research to navigate the story of a mostly white community that has the privilege to live a life rooted in Alaska Native traditions on land that was historically utilized by Ahtna people. Because of my research, I realized the importance of pointing out that privilege, including important historical context and framing the community in a way that acknowledges the past and keeps cultural sensitivities in mind.

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Appendix

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PROJECT PROPOSAL

Professional Project Proposal

Heading North: Telling Tales of Rural Alaska

Erin McKinstry

CHANGES

The committee approved the following changes to the project proposal:

1. The Native-owned paper to be analyzed was switched from Alaska Native News to The Cordova Times because of a lack of relevant articles available from Alaska Native News for analysis.
2. The number of articles to be analyzed was increased to 51 and the time frame was shortened from two years to one.
3. The episodes were released at the end of the project rather than throughout the project to make sure there was enough time for editing and interviewing.
4. Episode notes were written for each episode rather than blog posts.

Introduction

When I started the University of Missouri's graduate program in the fall of 2016, I'd never conducted an interview, much less written a news story for an actual paper. My portfolio of published work was limited to my personal travel blog, a tiny literary zine that had published my poems, and a guest article for my mom's food column. I'd studied Modern Languages and dance at Knox College for my bachelor's degree, so I spent my time writing esoteric papers about art and conjugating Spanish verbs instead of contributing to the school paper. Something in my gut told me that coming to journalism school was the right choice, but I could've been wrong. I'd been obsessed with stories from the time I was a kid: books, magazines, movies, and later podcasts and radio. But just because you love consuming something doesn't mean you'll be good at making it.

Thanks to the required headfirst dive into news making (first boot camp and then a semester at *The Missourian*), I walked away four months later with five front-page features, tons of smaller stories, a freelance offer for a research and data analysis gig, and a solid understanding that, yes, I did in fact enjoy writing stories as well as consuming them. I also realized that my newness to journalism wasn't necessarily a bad thing. My time spent dancing, making music, and writing poetry meant that my creative muscles (and my sense of rhythm, which matters in audio production) were quite developed. And my cultural studies classes and travels around the world helped me when I needed to relate to people who were different from me. Most of all, I had an opportunity to do the very thing that had driven me to journalism school in the first place: tell the stories of those who often go unheard. I had the opportunity to write an in-depth portrait about a

family of Syrian refugees living in Columbia, and I don't think their story would've been told to the community otherwise.

Then came the spring, and thanks to Paige Williams and her Advanced Narrative Topics class, I had the amazing opportunity to write a feature about gun violence for *The Trace*, a national online magazine. The long-term project required a lot of self-discipline and self-imposed deadlines. I also started my journey into radio with an independent study at KBIA, producing a combination of features and day-turns. And I produced my first few podcasts for the IRE Radio Podcast, learning to write long scripts and incorporate music into my audio production. I decided after that semester that of all the different media, audio came most naturally. I could paint scenes with sound and include the emotion and intimacy of someone's voice. I loved every step of production, from reporting to crafting a script to editing the audio. This semester, I'm taking on another independent project for investigative reporting and honing my audio skills at KBIA, where I'm producing a show, editing, and delivering live, weekly newscasts.

So here I am. I've tested out my love for journalism and radio. I've proven to myself that I can work on big, independent projects with self-imposed deadlines. And I've been inspired to continue exercising my creativity and telling stories that often go untold. Without the trials of the past three semesters, I don't think I'd have the courage to pursue the ambitious independent project that I'm about to propose. But I feel confident that the strong faculty support, intensive hands-on experience, and my solidified passion for journalism will guide me well. Also, my past experiences living off-the-grid in Alaska won't hurt.

Before I started graduate school, I found an amazing community at the end of a 60-mile dirt road in the Alaskan bush. The town has no real municipal or county government to speak of, no property taxes, and no building codes. Most people build their own homes, living without running water, heat (besides a wood stove) ,or a grocery store. The people span the political spectrum and come from across the country and the world. The wintertime population dips to around 40 at its lowest, peaking in the summer at over 1,000. It's mostly a tourist town, but it's also a place with a rich history that dates back to the days of the Gold Rush. The people there are like no place I've ever been. Their stories of how they got there and why they stayed could fill a book.

And I'm not the only person who has taken notice. Discovery Channel is running the third season of "Edge of Alaska," a reality television show about McCarthy. I know all of the characters in the show and have watched the crew filming. The show casts the town and the characters in a false light. Producers make up story lines and feed lines to the people featured in the show. It's also created a divide in the town between people who support the extra income and exposure and people who don't. For my professional project, I want to produce a podcast about the town and paint a more accurate portrait of the rural lifestyle that people live there, rather than the caricature that's often portrayed on reality television shows, in which the characters are cast as "good" or "evil" and often come across as stupid or incapable. Instead, the people living in McCarthy are some of the most capable I know and, also, some of the most complex. I want to reflect that complexity in my podcast.

After graduating, I want to make it as a freelance journalist and audio producer. And I want to be able to live in McCarthy at least part of the time. Unlike some other

graduate students who just graduated a year or two ago, I already have a life established in Alaska. My boyfriend owns a restaurant there, and we're building a house. I'm going to try to balance my life there with my ambitions to pursue journalism. No matter what, I want to produce journalism in Alaska, an unsaturated market, and work on big, independent projects. Eventually, I hope to become a go-to journalist and audio producer for national outlets that are doing stories about Alaska. This project will help me make connections throughout the state, add to my portfolio, give me the time to set up an in-home studio, and test the waters before launching into a full-on career as a freelancer. I've always been drawn to features and profiles, and I've been wanting to tell the story of this town since I met it. Think S-Town without the murder mystery. Even if it doesn't get millions of listeners, I'll be able to carry the learning experience with me forever.

The Professional Skills Component

For the professional skills component, I'll primarily be working for myself. I will be spending most of my time in McCarthy, Alaska, although I'll start recording on my ferry trip up from Bellingham, Washington. I'll spend 30 hours each week for 14 to 15 weeks working on my professional project. I'll work 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Thursday, unless interviews can only be scheduled outside those times. My time will be spent interviewing people in McCarthy for the podcast, transcribing interviews, writing the script, editing and mixing the audio, and promoting the podcast episodes. Each episode will be accompanied by photographs and a blog post on a website that I will build specifically for the podcast. I'll promote it on social media (Facebook and Twitter) and release it independently on iTunes, but I'll also send pilots to various national podcasts and outlets such as This American Life, Home of the Brave, and Love and

Radio. I will also pitch the entire podcast to Alaska Public Media, where I am applying for a summer internship.

I see the podcast as a series of short vignettes about life in McCarthy. I'll publish seven to eight 20-minute episodes. I will include parts of my own experience living in Alaska and will serve as narrator, but the episodes will primarily focus on the community and its residents. Throughout the episodes, I want to break down why people decide to move to a tiny town in the middle of nowhere, why they decide to live without many modern conveniences, and what some of their day-to-day challenges and joys are. The tentative title is "Heading North." The first episode will start with my own journey north (I'll be driving my truck up and taking the ferry in January). I'll interview people on the ferry, including staff, asking about why their lives are taking them north in the middle of winter. I'll use that content as well as my own story, and background about the McCarthy community to launch the podcast.

Here are some ideas/themes that I want to explore in the podcast:

- Raising children off the grid
- The various political/religious views and how they all get along
- A scene from mail day (the mail comes twice weekly by plane) and a discussion of how the internet and cell service has changed people's lives in the bush (They've only had both for about 10 years, and things like Amazon Prime and being able to work remotely have made life easier)
- Discussing how people live without year-round regular employment and public infrastructure, like electricity and water

- The changing climate (The glacier has shrunk significantly over the past 100 years and the rivers aren't freezing as much as they used to)
- Subsistence living (catching fish, hunting, canning, etc., to get through the winter)
- Living in a town with no local or county government (I'll go to one of the town meetings that happen once a month.)
- The effects of reality television — specifically “Edge of Alaska,” on a small Alaskan town
- The conflict between public and private lands (McCarthy is located in the middle of the country's largest national park.)

Here are some of the people I'd like to interview:

- Mark Vail: A former Navy veteran who's lived in the town since the 1970s; also, the president of the McCarthy Area Council, the closest thing McCarthy has to a government
- Jeannie Miller and Stacy Miller: A mom and daughter; Stacy was born in McCarthy and has lived there her whole life.
- Brittany and Kaleb Rowland: A young couple raising two children in McCarthy
- Lori and Keith Rowland: A very religious family that has built two bridges in town, maintains roads, and in general, has greatly advanced the town's infrastructure through their own investments
- Eli Potter: A world-class mountaineer who guides on Denali and makes his home in McCarthy

- Stephanie Sievert and Leigh: Two single women in their 30s who have built their own homes and lives in McCarthy
- Neil Darish: A prominent business owner in town and star of the reality television show on The Discovery Channel about McCarthy
- Karolina and Orion Brewster: A young married couple spending their first full winter in McCarthy together. Orion was born and raised there. Karolina is from the Czech Republic, came to McCarthy as a seasonal worker, and met Orion and decided to stay.
- Stephens Harper: The closest thing to local law enforcement, he's the head park ranger for the park service.
- Fred Denner: Since the '80s, Fred has lived with his wife at Dan Creek, a fly-in- only gold mining settlement near McCarthy. They've been isolated from the rest of the world for almost four decades.

The material included in the final project will be the seven to eight podcast episodes, the audio and web versions of the audio features, and the website and blog posts that accompanied the podcast episodes.

Educational and Professional Qualifications

This semester, I've already started purchasing professional audio equipment to help me complete the project. I'll use a Marantz recorder, a dynamic cardioid microphone and shotgun microphone for field interviews, and then complete my voicing in the small studio that I'll build in my cabin in McCarthy. Here's a link to the article I will use to help me build an in-home studio at an affordable price: <https://transom.org/2013/voice-recording-in-the-home-studio/>. I'll also have a subscription to Adobe Audition for editing

audio. I know how to use the equipment well thanks to my work producing and hosting the IRE Radio podcast and reporting and producing at KBIA. I also have experience with doing long audio field interviews thanks to a class I took last spring called Field Reporting on Food and Race. We went to Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi over spring break and interviewed African-American farmers about their experiences. We were sometimes out in the field for 10 hours. When I came back, I had hours and hours of tape, and I had to pick a theme and condense it all into a four-minute feature.

Although my experience with the IRE Radio Podcast is just a stepping stone to producing my own podcast, it has given me an idea of the amount of work that goes into producing a 20-to-30-minute audio piece. That, combined with work at KBIA and during my field reporting class, has prepared me to take on this project. I can edit and collect quality audio. Thanks to my Advanced Narrative Techniques class, I know how to shape a story with a narrative structure and how to set deadlines for myself and keep myself motivated. And my three years of living in Alaska and 2½ living (on and off) in McCarthy have prepared me sufficiently to have connections in the community for interviews and to understand the themes at hand.

Schedule

Week 1 (1/12/17 to 1/19/17): Collecting audio on the ferry trip up and during the drive to Anchorage

OFF WORK: (1/20/17 to 1/27/17): Get supplies, return to McCarthy, and prepare the cabin for the winter

Week 2 (1/28/17 to 2/3/17): Start interviews (both professional and research) and transcribing

Week 3 (2/4/17 to 2/10/17): Continue interviews and transcribing

Week 4 (2/11/17 to 2/17/17): Script writing/editing

Week 5 (2/19/17 to 2/23/17): Release first podcast episode

Week 6 (2/26/17 to 3/3/17): Interviews and script writing/editing

Week 7 (3/4/17 to 3/10/17): Release second podcast episode

Week 8 (3/11/17 to 3/17/17): Interviews/script writing/editing

Week 9 (3/18/17 to 3/24/17): Head to Homer for in-person interview Alaska Native News and local Alaska Natives. Get supplies in Anchorage and complete a research interview with an Anchorage journalist

Week 10 (3/25/17 to 3/31/17): Release third podcast episode

Week 11 (4/1/17 to 4/7/17): Interviews/script writing/editing/promoting podcast online

Week 12 (4/8/17 to 4/14/17): Release fourth podcast episode

Week 13 (4/15/17 to 4/21/17): Interviews/script writing/editing/promoting podcast online

Week 14 (4/22/17 to 4/28/17): Release fifth podcast episode

Week 15 (4/29/17 to 5/5/17): Stay in Missouri and make necessary edits; voice in-studio at KBIA; release sixth podcast episode (the final one will release mid-May)

Supervision

For the podcast, I will send my scripts to Sara Shahriari, who is on my committee and works at KBIA. Sarah Hutchins, my current editor at the IRE Radio Podcast, also she'd be willing to look at my scripts and listen to my audio. We already have a good editor/reporter relationship, and her input would be valuable. Finally, if any of the episodes or stories get picked up by national outlets or podcasts, I will work with the

editors on staff to edit my work. I won't have any on-site supervisors, but I will send in-depth weekly memos to my committee for review.

The Analysis Component

For my professional analysis component, I'll be evaluating coverage of Alaska Native communities and conducting semi-structured interviews with journalists who regularly cover Alaska Natives. I'll review and compare coverage of one Alaskan mainstream news outlet and one native-run Alaskan news outlet. Then, I'll ask experienced journalists and Alaska Natives about challenges to covering Alaska Natives, how to overcome those challenges, how journalists could do a better job covering Alaska Native communities, and what tips they have for other journalists interested in covering Alaska Native communities and, more broadly, other tribal nations, including Native Americans. I'll then compile my findings and the advice from the interviews and create a tip sheet for the IRE Journal or a similar publication about best practices for covering Alaska Natives and other tribal nations.

Obviously, the research component connects to my project and professional goals geographically, but it also connects in other ways that are less obvious. As a working journalist in Alaska, it's important that I understand how best to cover Alaska Native communities and the unique issues they face. They make up around 15% of the population. Although McCarthy isn't a Native community, many of the people there live subsistence lifestyles that echo Native customs. They also live in a very rural area like much of the Native population in Alaska. Therefore, interviewing journalists who regularly cover Alaska Native communities may provide some insight into how to better cover rural communities in general. It'll help me identify stereotypes to avoid and

identify issues or aspects of the community worth covering that may not seem as obvious as an outsider.

Introduction

Native Americans and Alaska Natives make up only 1.7% of the U.S. population, according to the 2015 five-year American Community Survey (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Although the group is small, it is incredibly diverse. The National Congress of American Indians reports that there are 562 federally recognized Indian nations, 229 of which live in Alaska (“An introduction to Indian nations,” n.d., p. 4). Each has its own culture and customs and often its own language. They live in a range of geographies, from the integrated communities of the Cherokee in Oklahoma to the remote villages of the Yupik in Western Alaska. Some live without running water and electricity, living off the land like their ancestors, while others live in urban centers. Overall, around 22% live on reservations and tribal lands, often in remote and isolated sections of the Western United States and Alaska (“Living Conditions,” 2010; Norris, Vines & Hoeffel, 2012).

The fact that Native Americans and Alaska Natives are so diverse, so geographically scattered, and so few in number presents a particular set of challenges for media professionals when covering their communities. Many non-Native journalists grew up without exposure to indigenous peoples, and reporting on remote, rural sections of the country can be difficult with time and money constraints, especially when four out of five people now live in cities (“Measuring America,” 2016). Also, these journalists aren’t likely to have someone who is Native American or Alaska Native in their newsroom to answer questions or bring their stories to the forefront. The Nieman Foundation reports that less than 1% of journalists are Native American (Marcus, 2016). And although

Native-run news organizations have a long history in the United States, they are still few and far between.

Although Alaska Native portrayals in the media lack significant scholarly study, critical-cultural scholars have studied the long history of troubling and stereotypical portrayals of Native Americans in the media (Lacroix, 2011; Bird, 1999; Lui & Zhang, 2011; Perkins & Starosta, 2001; Freng, 2007; Miller & Ross, 2004). They've argued that their identity in popular media has been constructed by and for whites in line with cultural hegemony and that Native Americans have often been constricted to binary constructions and stereotypical narratives, such as either "Savage" or "Noble" (Lacroix, 2011, p. 1-3). For example, Freng (2007) identified news media representations of Native Americans as "thieving, drunk, violent, cruel, and bloodthirsty," which would fall under the "Savage" narrative (p. 2). This reinforces their identity as "criminal," a stereotype that is often assigned to other minorities as well, such as African Americans (Freng, 2007). This misrepresentation has real and damaging effects on the lives of Native Americans, especially since the vast majority of the population never comes into contact with the small and sometimes remote population other than through media (Ramasubramanian, 2007). Stereotypical narratives of marginalized groups ignore the complexity and diversity of human identity, and they are often built on a history of oppression and discrimination (Hall, 1997). They perpetuate in-group and out-group mentalities and can breed hatred, violence, and misunderstanding (Ramasubramanian, 2007). These narratives also leave people who do not identify with hegemonic identities feeling underrepresented, unheard, and silenced. The narratives can influence everything from policy to hate crimes to lack of compassion for the plethora of problems facing Native

Americans and other tribal nations, such as deep poverty and environmental changes associated with climate change.

Most recently, Native Americans were brought to the forefront of American media through the Standing Rock protests in 2016. From September to December, thousands of people from across the world flocked to North Dakota to join the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe in their protest against the completion of the Dakota Access Pipeline, a 1,772-mile-long pipeline that would transport 470,000 barrels of oil a day from Stanley, North Dakota, to Patoka, Illinois (Ravitz, 2016). Native-American protesters worried that an oil spill from the pipeline could permanently contaminate their water supply and said the construction would destroy sacred burial sites (Vongkiatkajorn, 2016). The protests caught the eye of mainstream media, social media users, and even President Barack Obama, who announced in December the company would not be granted the necessary easement rights to run the pipeline under the Missouri River (Hersher, 2016; Weiss, 2016). However, newly elected President Donald Trump overturned Obama's decision, and pipeline construction moved forward. The protests raised broad questions about the treatment and power (or lack thereof) of tribal nations and the U.S.'s long history of ignoring their interests and their voices. However, since President Obama left office and President Trump allowed the pipeline to move forward, these voices and issues have all but disappeared from the conversation in the media (Railton, 2016).

Several Native-American journalists, including the Native American Journalists Association, have criticized non-Native media coverage of Standing Rock, saying journalists missed relevant context and did not portray Native Americans with complexity, instead falling on age-old stereotypes (Ahtone, 2016). For example, as one

Al Jazeera article subtitle put it, “Native American issues are only sexy when natives with painted faces and horses are around” (Ahtone, 2016, December 14). Although more than 500 tribal nations exist in the United States, they were often lumped together in the coverage, and important historical and cultural context was missing (Ahtone, 2016). From the coverage of Standing Rock and from the work of critical-cultural scholars, it is clear that journalists and media professionals still are not doing a good job of covering tribal nations. They are not given the voice, context and complexity that is afforded to hegemonic groups (Hall 1997). And although their numbers are small, tribal nations are sovereign entities, with jurisdictional and economic power. Nevertheless, scholarship studying Native-American and Alaska Native portrayals in the news media is surprisingly limited to just a few studies and books (i.e., Miller & Ross, 2004; Perkins & Starosta, 2001; Freng, 2007). A search of Investigative Reporters & Editors’ tip sheets for the word “Native American” only turns up four results, two of which date back almost 25 years (“Tipsheets,” n.d.). Journalists need guidance on how to better cover tribal nations today, which leads to the first, overarching research question of this study.

RQ 1: How can journalists more accurately cover Native Americans and Alaska Natives in the news media, rather than relying on stereotypes or ignoring them altogether?

And who better to ask than Native journalists?

Research Questions

Four and a half years ago, I spent my first summer in Alaska. I had finished college and a Fulbright Fellowship and wasn’t sure what to do next. I knew I wanted to travel, so I started searching the internet, and I found a seasonal job in Denali National Park. Within a month, I was stepping off a shuttle bus into fresh snow just outside the

park. It was May, but I didn't care. The place was so beautiful and the people so unique that I knew I had found home. Since then, I have spent most summers and a winter there and plan to return after graduate school. Given my personal connection to the state, I am hoping to do my project and analysis component there, and I have a network and community to draw from. But that is not the only reason I want to use the media representations of Alaska Natives as a case study for understanding how to more accurately cover tribal nations overall: I believe that for the purpose of this project, looking at the way the news media covers Alaska Natives has something to teach the rest of the country about covering Native-American communities.

I want to be clear that the two groups are not one in the same. Alaska Natives have their own designation by the U.S. Census Bureau, although the statistics they collect for overall population estimates lump both together. However, just as Native Americans are not one homogenous group and are made up of several different tribal nations, so are Alaska Natives. And all share a similar history of oppression and face many of the same challenges based on their history, lifestyles and locations in rural areas.

Zainal (2007) argues that case studies are “a robust research method particularly when a holistic, in-depth investigation is required” (p. 1). According to Zainal, when using case studies, “a researcher is able to go beyond the quantitative statistical results and understand the behavioral conditions through the actor's perspective” (p. 1). Answering questions about race and ethnicity is complex and nuanced. The questions often require personalized and in-depth responses that consider cultural sensitivity and the diversity of each situation. In journalism, we often find and feature individual stories that are demonstrative of a larger problem or that can teach us something about the

problem, similar to the qualitative methods' practice of using case studies to answer research questions. We then supplement the individual stories with data and context. For example, Nikole Hannah-Jones (2015) in the *This American Life* episode "The Problem We All Live With" reports on the effects of a successful school integration program in one school district in St. Louis. She features one family affected by the integration program and looks at two schools: one predominantly white and one predominantly African-American. But, Hannah-Jones is not just telling the story of one family or one school district; she's using those stories as exemplary case studies to talk about school integration in the United States more broadly and to offer solutions. I would like to use the story of Alaska Native representations in the news media, to do the same thing, much like what Devers and Frankel (2000) call a "deviant or extreme case" (p. 265).

When I first arrived in Denali, I noticed something odd. The park concierge, who I worked for, was run by two different corporations: Aramark and Doyon. The latter, I would later learn, is the Native corporation for that region of Alaska. Rather than pushing Native Americans — or Alaska Natives here — off their land in large numbers and relocating them to reservations, Alaska did things differently. European settlers did not come to Alaska until much later than other states, and when Alaska became a state in 1959, Congress included a provision that protected Native land rights ("Statehood," 2017). Some tribes were also paid for land that was taken earlier in the century, but disputes over land continued. By 1971, the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) attempted to solve the problem by establishing clear boundaries and putting \$962.5 million in compensation for any disputed land still retained by the state into 13 different Native Corporations (Gun, 2004). That's where Doyon comes from.

Because things were done differently here, Alaska Native communities tend to be more visible than in the continental United States, and they retain significant financial assets in the corporations created under ANCSA. Their numbers have also grown significantly in the last 100 years from just over 20,000 to around 120,000 in 2010 (Hunsinger & Sandberg, 2013). Not to say that this solution was perfect; in fact, many Alaska Natives were frustrated that lines had been arbitrarily drawn and communities that before had been nomadic, following traditional hunting and fishing patterns, could no longer cross boundaries as they saw fit. And they also lamented that the money was too little and too late. However, they have fared better, retaining more economic and political power. At the company I worked for, several of the positions were reserved for Alaska Native youth, and they made a lot more money than we did because Doyon pitched in the extra dollars. And since 1970, when Alaska's economy grew significantly through investments in oil and added military jobs, the unemployment rate and percentage of Alaska Natives living in poverty have declined significantly (Martin & Hill, 2009).

At 14.8%, Alaska Natives make up a larger portion of Alaska's population than Native Americans do in any other state (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Non-Native news outlets such as Alaska Public Media and Alaska Dispatch News regularly cover Alaska Native issues. The radio station that I tuned into daily in McCarthy had a daily slot devoted to National Native News, the only nationally distributed daily Native-American radio program in the country. Where they are often invisible in other parts of the country, they are not here. Alaska Natives come up in conversations and policy decisions. Questions about how to fund services in rural communities often reference them, and the subsistence lifestyle that is based in their historical practices is still alive and well among

Alaska Natives and non-Alaska Natives alike. One of the few academic studies about Alaska Native coverage in the news found that both Native and non-Native news outlets covered Alaska Natives in a positive light (Murphy & Avery, 1982). Daley and James (2004) tracked “the ways in which the indigenous peoples in Alaska have used various forms of mass media and community media for purposes of cultural expression and self-determination” (p. 1). They have a strong history of making their voices heard.

Still, Alaska Natives face some of the same challenges as Native Americans in other states. The poverty rate among Alaska Natives remains nearly twice as high as the national average, and their median income is two-thirds of the average Alaskan household (Martin & Hill, 2009). Alaska Natives are also some of the hardest hit by human-induced climate change. Rivers that used to freeze in the winter no longer do, making it difficult for them to reach hunting and fishing grounds. Coastal villages face rising waters. Also, media organizations struggle to cover their remote, rural communities, similar to reservations in the continental United States. The state of Alaska is the biggest in the country but has one of the smallest populations, almost half of which lives in Anchorage, the largest city (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Outlets based in Anchorage and Fairbanks are far-removed and connected only by plane to the remote villages of western Alaska. And with many media organizations struggling to make ends meet, the traditional way of covering those communities with on-the-ground correspondents may become more and more rare (Roohi, n.d.). Given the visibility of Alaska Natives in Alaska and the wide coverage they receive in the media compared to other places, and given the fact that they face many of the same challenges as Native

Americans across the country, it is a uniquely situated place to answer my guiding research question using the following more detailed questions:

RQ1a: How are Alaska Natives being covered by Alaskan news media?

RQ1b: How does an Alaska Native news organization cover Alaska Natives?

RQ 1c: How does a mainstream Alaskan news organizations cover Alaska Natives?

RQ2a: What are the themes and issues regularly covered by Alaskan journalists when writing about Alaska Native communities?

RQ2b: What are some of the challenges that journalists face when covering Alaska Native communities and writing about Alaska Natives?

RQ2c: What do they think they could do better?

RQ2d: What advice do journalists who regularly cover Alaska Native communities and write about Alaska Natives have for other journalists interested in covering Alaska Natives and other tribal nations?

Theoretical Framework

For this study, I'll rely on a theoretical framework created by critical-cultural scholars such as Stuart Hall. Their work not only examines marginalized groups and their representations in the media as typically inaccurate and damaging, but it also provides a reasoning behind those stereotypes (cultural hegemony) and offers ways to overcome those stereotypes and create more accurate representations of minorities in the media.

Muted group theory establishes that dominant groups mute the voices of marginalized groups, such as women and people of color (Orbe, 1998). The people in power construct the narratives of the marginalized and silenced (Orbe, 1998). Co-cultural theory establishes that different cultures communicate in different ways, and mass media

favors the communication style of the dominant culture, thus making it difficult for groups outside the dominant culture to achieve accurate representation in the media (Orbe, 1998; Ramírez-Sánchez, 2008). Hegemonic identities — white, male, cisgender, and straight — receive more complex and visible coverage in the media, while the media presents minorities through the eyes of those dominant identities and uses narratives that are stereotypical, unidimensional, and lack the voice of the people being represented (Hall, 1997).

the media and co-cultural groups.

According to 2015 Census data, women make up 50.8% of the U.S. population, and people of color make up 37.9% of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). A 2015 Gallup poll found 3.8% of people self-identify as part of the U.S.'s LGBTQ community (Newport, 2015). 8.6% of people under 65 have a disability, and 13.5% of people live in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Even when considering intersectional identities, these numbers still represent an overwhelming majority of the U.S. population. Yet, members of these groups are marginalized within a society that favors the communication style and representation of cisgender, straight, white males (Orbe, 1998). They are co-cultures within the dominant culture (Orbe, 1998).

co-cultural theory and muted group theory.

Co-cultural theory studies the intersection of “culture, power, and communication” (Orbe & Roberts, 2015, p. 293). Its roots lie in muted group theory, which anthropologists Shirley and Edwin Ardener devised in the 1970s to explain communication within societal hierarchy (Orbe, 1998, p. 4). Social hierarchies, in which some groups have privilege and power over others, exist within every society (Ardener,

1978). Groups with privilege determine the dominant societal communication system (Ardener, 1978). Members of all groups are encouraged to adopt this system as their own (Ardener, 1978). In turn, co-cultural groups are muted because the dominant structure overshadows their lived experiences and communication styles (Ardener, 1978). Kramarae in 1981 and Orbe in 1994 applied this anthropological theory to the study of women and African-American men in communications research (Orbe 1998).

Orbe (1998) defined co-cultural groups as women, people of color, members of the LGBTQ community, people with disabilities, people from minority religions, and people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Rather than use weighted or inaccurate words like “subculture” or “minority,” Orbe used the term co-culture to describe society’s non-dominant groups, and this study will also use the term co-culture moving forward. Co-cultural theory establishes that members of co-cultural groups, although diverse, share the common experience of being “marginalized and underrepresented within dominant structures” (Orbe, 1998, p. 7). It also establishes that, to succeed or to confront dominant structures, these groups adopt particular communication styles (Orbe, 1998, p. 7). It seeks to unite co-cultural groups while recognizing their diversity and understanding their communication styles within hierarchical structures.

Muted group theory and co-cultural theory unite incredibly diverse groups of people, bridging the gaps, for example, between queer theory, feminist theory, and studies of people of color. The theories create the broad framework necessary to study co-cultural groups and their media representations across fault lines. They also establish important structures and power dynamics necessary to study co-cultural groups in the mass media. As a form of mass societal communication, mass media functions within the

outlined framework. Mainstream media practices and content favor the communication styles of dominant groups and silence the voices of co-cultural groups (Hall, 1997). Six companies own 90% of today's media, all of which have straight, white male CEOs (Lutz, 2012). Although people of color make up almost 38% of today's population, they only occupied 12.76% of jobs at U.S. daily newspapers in 2015 (American Society of News Editors, 2015). This tipped balance of power favors the communication structures and styles of straight, cisgender, white males and constructs the identities and representations of all co-cultural groups through the dominant structure (Hall, 1997).

stereotypes, hegemony, and binaries: the work of Hall.

These hierarchies and imbalanced communication structures result in what Hall (1997) calls “the spectacle of the ‘other’” (p. 225). Through pop culture and mass media, dominant groups define co-cultural groups as different, as other, and as outsiders (Hall, 1997, p. 225). Co-cultures often fall victim to “the representational practice known as ‘stereotyping’” (Hall, 1997, p. 225). According to Hall, “stereotypes reduce people to a few, simple essential characteristics, which are represented as fixed by nature” (p. 257). Ruling groups use stereotypes to establish and maintain hegemony, establishing associated characteristics as “natural and inevitable” norms and all other characteristics as “other” (Hall, 1997, p. 259).

These stereotypes promote the myth of binary constructions, often representing co-cultures through “sharply opposed, polarized binary extremes — good/bad, civilized/primitive, ugly/excessively attractive” (Hall, 1997, p. 229). As Hall writes, “they are required to be both at the same time,” and they are not allowed the multi-faceted representation of dominant groups (p. 229). Their images and representations are

constructed for and by hegemony, in response to an inherent need to make meaning through binary opposition (Hall, 1997, p. 236). Media representations of co-cultural groups are tools used by dominant groups to maintain power (Hall, 1997, p. 261). They keep the powerless, powerless and perpetuate misunderstanding (Hall, 1997).

the harm in stereotypes.

When people are not exposed to co-cultural groups, they rely on the media to tell their narratives, which can be problematic if the media present denigrating narratives that reinforce hegemony (Perkins & Starosta, 2001). Racial stereotypes in the media have real effects on audience attitudes that reinforce, justify, and perpetuate hostile and benevolent racism (Ramasubramanian, 2007). Historically, racism has led to hate speech, lynchings, and violent crimes against co-cultural groups (National Equity Project, n.d.). Systemic oppression and discrimination can manifest in a multitude of ways from income and health inequalities to fewer educational opportunities to addiction and mental illness (National Equity Project, n.d.). They relegate co-cultural groups to second-class citizenship. Bringing diversity to newsrooms and media companies is not enough (Benson, 2005). Journalists and media makers must actively challenge social and political norms (Benson, 2005). They must challenge stereotypical narratives to promote true multiculturalism and accurate and inclusive representations of all groups, not just those of the powerful (Benson, 2005).

Literature Review

The study of Alaska Native media representations is practically non-existent. In 1982, Murphy and Avery did conduct one study where they examined Alaska Native representations in Alaskan newspapers and found that overall their representations were

positive, particularly in Native-run newspapers. However, since whites began to settle in Alaska, Alaska Natives have struggled to gain control of their own media representations and outlets, often being silenced and misrepresented (Daley & James, 2004). And, in recent years, some papers like *The Tundra Times* that have traditionally represented Native communities have shut down. To combat cultural hegemony and accurately represent the population, it's important that Alaskan journalists and journalists across the country know the best ways to represent their communities in the media. This research aims to help.

Zooming out to the study of media representations of tribal nations overall, we find more scholarship, although still very little. Most of the scholarship focuses on representations in film and literature. Overall, scholars identify those representations as negative, saying that the “media constructs and perpetuates racist notions of tribal peoples through images and discursive practices that portray them in stereotypical ways” (Lacroix, 2011, p. 1). Scholars have established a set of traditional narratives the media use to portray Native Americans (Bird, 1999; Liu & Zhang, 2011). They have also studied challenges to traditional news media narratives of other minorities, such as Latinos, African Americans, women, and the LGBTQ community, using historical, narrative, and framing methods and theories (Adebanwi, 2004; Anderson, 2015; Báez & Castañeda, 2014; Barnett, 2013; Cloud, 1992; Roessner & Whiteside, 2016). For example, Roessner and Whiteside evaluated the narrative of anniversary Title IX coverage and found that it challenged the traditional narrative of “Battle of the Sexes.”

The study of Native Americans in the *news* media is limited, although Miller and Ross (2004) did study the coverage of Native Americans by *The Boston Globe* using

framing theory and found that “today’s newspaper continues to dehumanize and silence American Indians as it gives voice to the dominant culture” and that depictions of Native Americans have changed over time (p. 1). Lang (2015), Perkins and Starosta (2001) and Freng (2007) have also analyzed Native American news coverage. But compared to other minorities, such as African Americans, women, and the LGBTQ community, the study of Native Americans in media is limited (Miller & Ross, 2004).

Native Americans in the media.

Native American representations in the media exemplify the power dynamics of co-cultural and muted group theories and the stereotypes and binary constructions outlined by Hall (1997). As the history of slavery informs commodified racism and media representations of savagery and exoticism of African-Americans today, so does the history of colonization, war, and tragic decimation of and against Native Americans inform the media binaries, stereotypes, and narratives of Native Americans today (Hall, 1997). Native Americans are conquered and invisible, exotic, ancient-relics constrained to the binary constructions of “the Ignoble Savage” and “the Noble Savage” (Lacroix, 2011, p. 3).

Traditional narratives, such as the narrative of captivity, “in which white women and children are degraded by lustful savages,” or the narrative of Native Americans as the “wise, spiritual keeper of the land,” still dominate media representations (Bird, 1999, p. 62). They are “created for and by white people” (Bird, 1999, p. 62). Native Americans themselves have “had little voice” (Bird, 1999, p. 62). Their role has been to be the “object of the White gaze and the focus of White myth” (Bird, 1999, p. 62). The narratives of Native Americans have been “discordant and disjointed” and often

sensationalized by the media (Carstarphen & Sanchez, 2010, p. 320). Stereotypical portrayals of Native Americans “deny their humanity and present them as existing only in the past as single, monolithic Indians” (Merskin, 2014, p. 184).

Although media representations of Native Americans have evolved over time, their present-day manifestations still echo images and stereotypes of the past. In the pictorial press of the mid-1850s to the early 1900s, Native American women were portrayed as fantastical ideas and images for white men (Coward, 2014). They constructed Native American women as “symbolically useful outsiders, alternatively alluring or repulsive, but always contained within the ruling ideology of Euro-American culture” (Coward, 2014, p. 71). Women were portrayed as either “the Civilized Princess” or “the Squaw¹,” portrayals that can still be found in film and literature today (Bird, 1999; Coward, 2014; Stuckey & Morris, 1999).

In popular culture, gendered media portrayals of Native Americans, although less problematic than in the past, still present a Native American that is sexualized for “the White Gaze,” a vantage point rooted in “colonial domination” (Bird, 1999, p. 61). “The Squaw¹” and “the Crazy Savage” have evolved into “the Lovely Princess” and “the Native American Stud,” stereotypes that are still unrealistic and dehumanizing (Bird, 1999, p. 61). Within the persisting captivity narrative, Native American men have “become anything the current White culture wants him to be, and so does his sexuality” (Bird, 1999, p. 68). Representations of “the Indian Princess,” such as Disney’s 1995 film, *Pocahontas*, represent “the virgin land that will be possessed by the white man” (Bird,

¹ “The squaw is the other side of the American Indian woman. She is a drudge who is at the beck and call of her savage husband, produces baby after baby, and has sex endlessly and indiscriminately with both Whites and Indians” (Bird, 1999, p. 73).

1999, p. 72). The face of Pocahontas is anglicized, much like the images of assimilated Native American women of the past (Stuckey & Morris, 1999, p. 45). Men and women both are either “the Wise Elder” or “the Sexual Beast,” animal-like and exotic, and locked in the past through Western films, television shows, and novels (Bird, 1999, p. 75).

In contemporary television representations, Native Americans are either “relegated to the distant past” or presented as enforcers of white norms (Fitzgerald, 2010, p. 367). These persistent stereotypes are rooted in the values of colonialization; they encourage assimilation and portray Native Americans as enforcers (often as police officers or FBI agents) of the hegemonic power that colonized them (Fitzgerald, 2010, p. 369). Much like African Americans, the stereotypes often portray Native Americans as having more physical power than intellectual power, equating them with savage beasts that need to be colonized and civilized (Fitzgerald, 2010, p. 374).

Television representations also follow the traditional tropes of “the Ignoble Savage” and “the Noble Savage” (Lacroix, 2011, p. 1). “The Casino Indian” is a modern manifestation of the trope of “the Ignoble Savage,” or the presentation of the Native American as a violent threat to hegemonic and colonial power (Lacroix, 2011, p. 1). The political and economic power that many tribes have gained from owning and benefiting from casinos poses a threat to the dominant culture that elicits “fear and anger” and fuels contemporary television representations (Lacroix, 2011, p. 3). The Native American has been consistently “depicted as being doomed, a part of a vanishing race, standing in the path of inexorable progress” (Lacroix, 2011, p. 5) and as “stupid and slow” (p. 8). Both fuel “the Casino Indian” stereotype with presentations as “rich, but unintelligent and

classless...clearly built on ridiculing these ‘nouveau riche’ Casino Indians” (Lacroix, 2011, p. 8). “The Casino Indian” also echoes “the Noble Savage” trope, as television depictions suggest that “money and prosperity are antithetical to nobility, and the casino is the intervening force, corrupting what might otherwise be noble souls” (Lacroix, 2011, p. 13). Contemporary television representations of Native Americans continue to trap them in binaries and age-old stereotypes.

Perhaps the most obvious commodification and stereotyping of the Native American in the media occurs in advertising and team mascot representations. In 1992, the American Indian Mental Health Association of Minnesota wrote: “We are in agreement that using images of American Indians as mascots, symbols, caricatures, and namesakes for non-Indian sports teams, businesses, and other organizations is damaging to the self-identity, self-concept, and self-esteem of our people” (Merskin, 2014, p. 185). Yet, team mascot representations and caricatures in advertising remain. They play into a “sociopolitical power structure that renders Indianness tolerable to Whites as long as it is represented on terms acceptable to them” (Staurowsky, 2007, p. 62). White people created the images of Native Americans in headdresses or as “Bloodthirsty Warriors” without the permission of Native American communities, but when Native American communities attempt to reclaim their own images, White culture sees this vie for self-representation as a threat to their power (Staurowsky, 2007).

Advertising and brands featuring Native Americans, such as American Spirit cigarettes or Land O’Lakes products, perpetuate the notion of oneness across Native American populations. This diverse population of 566 distinct tribes and communities is reduced to “Bloodthirsty Savages,” “Children of Nature,” “Indian Princesses,” and

“Defilers of White Virgins (National Congress of American Indians, 2015, p. 9; Merskin, 2014, p. 187). For the 99% of the U.S. population that is not Native American, these everyday images and the notions that Native Americans are products to be sold and sexualized, paint a one-dimensional picture of a three-dimensional population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). When members of the Native American community challenge these images, White Americans claim them as theirs, turning the attention away from the victims of racism and toward the perpetrators (Staurowsky, 2007). To, “when these views are not contradicted by other information, or alternative views are not provided, the stereotypes persist, bearing full of hegemonic potential” (Merkins, 2014, p. 193).

Many young people perceive Native Americans as alcoholic, lazy, and uneducated (Tan, Fujioka, & Lucht, 1997). They are recipients of special benefits because of their ethnicity and only live on reservations because they have no other choice (Tan, Fujioka, & Lucht, 1997). Yet, despite the persistence of these negative misperceptions, their narratives *are* evolving toward a more inclusive and multi-dimensional representation, primarily because of the increasing presence of Native Americans as media makers (Carstarphen & Sanchez, 2007). Native American artists like Sherman Alexie have replaced the “reticent, subservient, disappearing ‘Noble Savage’ with the expressive, free, and surviving new Indian” (Lui & Zhang, 2011, p. 105). These deconstructions of stereotypical narratives provide healthier role models to Native Americans and provide a more realistic and relatable image of Native American life for the public, many of whom have no regular contact with Native American populations (Lui & Zhang, 2011). Looking to artists like Alexie, media makers across genres are responsible for breaking down the traditional tropes described throughout this section and

replacing them with multidimensional and realistic representations of contemporary Native American life.

news narratives of Native Americans.

Just 1.7 percent of Americans identified as American Indian and Alaska Native in 2010, “either alone or in combination with one or more other races” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015); yet, only four-tenths of 1 percent of journalists are Native American (Prince, 2016). Because of small sample sizes, Native Americans are often made invisible and “assigned to the ‘other’ category of research findings” (Merskin, 2014, p. 186). They face higher rates of poverty, violence, incarceration, suicide, alcoholism, binge drinking, and tobacco use than any other ethnic group (Merskin, 2014, p. 186). Native American women make “58 cents to every White woman’s dollar” (Merskin, 2014, p. 186). Stereotypes in the news media have real effects on Native American communities, and the study of these media images, much like representations of the community, is limited.

The limited pool of research has found that, although stereotypes of Native Americans in the news media have evolved over time, their portrayal is still dehumanizing, stereotypical, and silencing. Journalists construct their identity from the eyes of dominant groups and define Native Americans as outsiders (Miller & Ross, 2014, p. 250-251). They are identified through six frames: “the Generic Outsider,” “the Historic Relic,” “the Good Indian,” “the Bad Indian,” “the Degraded Indian,” and, occasionally, “the Voiced Participant” (Miller & Ross, 2014, p. 249).

Journalists often focus on the perspective of non-Native sources for issues primarily affecting Native Americans (Perkins & Starosta, 2001). The perspective often

presents the “official” and non-Native sources as correct and Native sources as “nameless, insignificant, and wrong” (Perkins & Starosta, 2001, p. 74). Their coverage draws on repeated journalistic norms of form and cultivated narratives about Native Americans by primarily white reporters that reinforce hegemony (Perkins & Starosta, 2001). Mainstream news coverage of Native Americans takes an institutional stance that reinforces neocolonialism and silences their voices (Lang, 2015).

In contrast, Native-owned news sources promote de-colonialization around Native American issues through an interpretive approach, or a contextualized analysis of the story’s history, stakeholders, consequences, and concerns (Lang, 2015, p. 98). Although Native journalism is rarely referred to or studied, the first instances appeared over 180 years ago (Murphy, 2010, p. 328). They have “championed Native rights, corrected mistakes and misinterpretations by mainstream media, and preserved important traditions in Indian Country” (Murphy, 2010, p. 328). They offer an alternative to the stereotypical narratives and can provide lessons for the mainstream media on how to report more accurately and completely on Native communities.

narrative deconstruction.

If most media representations of tribal nations are inaccurate and very few Native journalists work in newsrooms, how can journalists enact change? Conventional journalistic narratives draw on white and masculine forms of storytelling and “privilege objectivity, detachment, distance, conflict, and hierarchies” (Barnett, 2013, p. 506). Societal norms “determine which stories are told, who tells them, who hears them, and how listeners respond,” and by deconstructing these norms, narratives can reject these white, masculine storytelling forms (Barnett, 2013, p. 506). For example, Roessner and

Whiteside (2015) found that, in sports journalism's commemorative Title IX coverage, journalists deconstructed the myth of Title IX as "the Villain" and transformed it into "the Good Mother" and "the Superhero" (Roessner & Whiteside, 2015, p. 584). This deconstruction resulted in a "celebratory, women-centric" model (Roessner & Whiteside, 2015, p. 584). Barnett (2013) found that if, in coverage of maternal infanticide, journalists had deconstructed the myth of the ease and naturalness of motherhood and replaced "the Villainous Mother" with "the Victim," they would have created a narrative that offered solutions to maternal infanticide rather than telling the "contemporary fable about what happens to 'bad women'" (Barnett, 2013, p. 511). Also, deconstructing what and what is not a story and who has the right to tell which stories can make room for narratives of co-cultural communities (Adebanwi, 2004, p. 768).

voice.

Including the voices and faces of co-cultural groups combats stereotypical narratives. Roessner and Whiteside (2015) found that women-centric Title IX coverage featured the voices of female athletes and women sport journalists more than in the past. Barnett (2013) found that solution-oriented narratives of maternal infanticide captured women's voices, rejected language and styles that subordinated women, and turned women from objects to subjects. In narratives that supported the ethnic co-culture of the Nigerian Ogoni, Adebanwi (2004) found that journalists raised the voices of the Ogoni and lowered the voices of the government and ethnic majority. In negative news narratives of Islam in Australia, Anderson (2015) found that Muslims were "spoken for" rather than quoted. Báez and Castañeda (2014) found that, in the counter-narratives of

Spanish-language news coverage of Latinos, journalists presented the voices and experiences of Latinos, rather than simply presenting statistics and data.

context.

Contextualizing the experience of co-cultural groups can also counter stereotypical narratives. Barnett (2013) found that solution-oriented narratives presented motherhood as lived experience and work, not biological destiny, and presented maternal infanticide as a problem resulting from the systemic issues of women's powerlessness and dependence on men, not as cases of individual behavior. Anderson (2015) found that positive narratives presented terrorism within context, attempting to make violence explicable, rather than simply presenting instances of "terrorist violence." In these positive narratives, journalists "reflected critically on anti-terrorism legislation and its impact on Muslim communities" (Anderson, 2015, p. 265). In Spanish-language coverage, Báez and Casteñada (2013) found that, by explaining political, economic, and psychological consequences and providing information about how brokers promoted Latino home ownership despite low-incomes, news coverage countered narratives of Latinos as uneducated, lazy, and limiting to economic progress.

complexity.

Finally, adding complexity to binaries and stereotypes counters unidimensional narratives. Barnett (2013) stressed the importance of including the complexities of women's lives and the stresses of caretaking and gender inequities in maternal infanticide coverage. Also, she found counter narratives broke the virgin/whore dichotomy and allowed for ambiguity and complexity in language. Adebani (2004) found journalists used the binary of language to juxtapose a complex portrait of the Ogoni as "the

Deprived” and “the Oppressed” with the portrait of the Nigerian government as “the Criminally Indifferent” and “the Oppressive.” In positive narratives of Islam, Anderson (2015) found coverage broke the stereotypical narrative of Islam as “a monolithic, static block,” and presented the “faces of Islam,” profiling individuals and the history of the Muslim community in Australia (p. 260). In positive narratives of Latinos, Báez and Castañeda (2013) found that Spanish-language coverage broke “the Latinos as a Threat” narrative and presented Latinos as “the Victim.” The coverage showed the resilience of real-life Latinos and combatted anti-immigrant rhetoric and narratives (Báez and Castañeda, 2013).

News coverage can challenge dominant narratives that are inherent to journalistic conventions and form by replacing myths and archetypes with empowering and complex stories. Using the voice of co-cultural groups — and including historical, social, and political context — combats unidimensional stereotypes with complex portrayals of diverse and relatable communities.

Study Design and Methodology

I have drawn on two different fields — journalism and qualitative research — to design the multi-method study for the analysis component of my project. Although the two types of research sometimes diverge in their methods — for example, journalism tends to use anonymous sources sparingly while qualitative researchers often grant their sources anonymity — they can also inform one another (Feldstein, 2004). When journalists conduct research for a story, that research is usually inductive. They usually set out to find the story rather than thinking they know the answer before they begin their reporting. This prevents them from finding only what they are looking for. Many critical-

cultural studies are also inductive, and my own study will be as well. Often the basic tenets of critical-cultural scholarship inform the work of journalists covering socially disadvantaged groups.

For example, Ta-Nehisi Coates, who writes about issues facing African-Americans for *The Atlantic* and other publications, uses concepts developed by critical race scholars, like cultural hegemony and race as a construct, in many of his articles. In “The Case for Reparations,” he uses both to chronicle housing discrimination in Chicago and argue that slavery still influences the lives of African-Americans today (Coates, 2014). Amy Goodman, host of *Democracy Now!*, covers socially disadvantaged groups using many of the concepts first outlined by critical-cultural scholar Stuart Hall. For example, she gives voice to the socially disadvantaged rather than speaking for them, portrays groups with complexity rather than stereotypes, and provides necessary context about past discrimination as well as cultural differences. She was one of the first journalists to cover the Standing Rock protests and walked with the protesters live on camera while they were being attacked by dogs and pepper spray, arguably bringing the previously-ignored issue to national attention. Goodman focused her report on the Native Americans affected, allowing them to speak for themselves and explain the complexity of the issue at Standing Rock in their own words. Her work informs my decision to interview Native-American journalists for advice about covering Native Americans, rather than simply analyzing the text of news articles or asking non-Native members of the press for their opinions.

Both Goodman and Coates use the advocacy and participatory worldview of critical-cultural scholars to conduct their work. As Creswell and Plano Clark (2006)

outline, the worldview works to bring about social change in the world and is inherently political. Both also use journalistic methods such as interviewing primary and expert sources, researching historical context and background information on a topic, and providing data and numbers to back up their claims. My study will model that method, using the professional norms and practices of journalism to inform the study design, a practice that Thorne, Stephens and Truant (2015) recommended in their 2015 article about how the professional practices of nursing can inform study design and the study of nursing.

The analysis component will be conducted in four phases:

1. *Reading and analyzing news articles about Alaska Native communities by a mainstream news outlet*
2. *Comparing that coverage to a Native news outlet*
3. *Interviewing five Alaska Native journalists (or journalists who've extensively covered Alaska Native communities) from around the state to learn how journalists can better cover tribal nations*
4. *Interviewing members of the Alaska Native community who are not members of the news media about their thoughts on news coverage of issues facing Alaska Natives*

To carry out the four phases, I will first focus on two news organizations: Alaska Native News and Alaska Dispatch News. Alaska Native News is the only state-wide Native-Alaskan-owned news organization in Alaska (“Connect with Alaska Native communities statewide,” n.d.). It is a digital-only publication based in Homer, which is a few hours south of Anchorage, that covers statewide, national and local issues,

specifically issues facing Native Alaskans. *Alaska Dispatch News*, formerly *The Anchorage Daily News*, is the most widely circulated Alaskan newspaper. It covers national, state, and local issues and distributes to and covers the entire state of Alaska. In recent years, according to one former reporter, they have cut back the number of on-the-ground correspondents in remote villages due to budget cuts and advancing technology (Roohi, n.d.). For example, they can now make phone calls and use the internet to contact remote areas that were previously disconnected from modern communication (Roohi, n.d.). Also, the journalists are based in the largest city in Alaska, where almost half the population lives and can provide insight into some of the challenges of covering remote, Alaska Native villages from afar (U.S. Census, 2015). I will be using both as examples because Alaska Native News is the largest news media organization owned by Alaska Natives, and *Alaska Dispatch News* is the most widely-circulated private news media organization owned by non-Native Alaskans.

I will start by taking “a long preliminary soak” in the literature, something Thomas and Finneman (2013) propose when beginning to conduct a textual analysis (p. 176). I will read all news articles from the past two years that contain the word “Native” from both *Alaska Dispatch News* and *Alaska Native News*, using previous literature on media representations of Native Americans as a guide. That’s approximately 17 articles from *Alaska Dispatch News* and 17 from *Alaska Native News*. Much of the previous literature uses narrative analysis and discourse analysis to understand how tribal nations are portrayed in the media. Using the past analyses of critical-cultural scholars as a guide, I will identify whether each article follows those identified stereotypical narratives and binary constructions of tribal nations. I can also compare the coverage of the same issue

by both organizations. To do so, I will read each article and make detailed notes about sourcing, content, and structure.

This background research and understanding of the literature will inform my understanding of how certain Alaskan media organizations portray Alaska Natives and enable me to ask more in-depth and direct questions when interviewing journalists and other Alaska Natives later on. It will also provide useful details to include in the article about covering Alaska Natives in the media and help answer RQ1a. I will also read several articles about Alaska Native issues by each of the five journalists that I will be interviewing for the analysis component.

I will then conduct journalistic, semi-structured interviews with five journalists from around the state who regularly cover Alaska Native issues and a majority of whom are Alaska Native. In accordance with journalistic principles, I will avoid leading questions, instead using semi-structured interview techniques and asking open-ended questions. These interviews will be conducted in-person, when possible, because non-verbal language is also important in understanding the nuances of what someone is trying to say. Also, understanding the environment and gathering details from each place will add rich details to the narrative in the journalistic write-up at the end of the project. For example, I could include possible details like where we interviewed, what the office looked like and what they were wearing. Still, the remote location of many communities where Alaska Natives live and the large size of Alaska, may require that I conduct a few of the interviews over the phone.

Before I can conduct the interviews, I have to answer two questions: 1. How will I choose the journalists to interview? 2. How many will I interview? To choose the journalists, I'll keep the following in mind:

1. A diversity of geography, ethnicity, age and media
2. Experience level: More is better, although I don't want to exclude entirely the opinion of a younger journalists who may have fresh ideas to add to the field.
3. A representative sample
4. The size of the media outlet (diversity here is key, too.)
5. The prominence of the media outlet (A paper that has a very low circulation has very little influence, and the work that the reporter does may not be as relevant to the broader conversation about Alaska Native portrayals in the media.)

With those qualifications in mind, I've compiled a list of reporters who I could interview for the project. They are scattered throughout the state and work for different types of media outlets, from radio to small newspapers to large digital outlets. All of them have written extensively about Alaska Natives.

1. Nellie Moore, a veteran Alaskan broadcaster and an Inupiaq Eskimo. For years, Nellie ran Independent Native News, a show that had a national audience and focused on issues facing Alaska Natives and other tribal nations. She lives in Anchorage.
2. Brian Patrick O'Donoghue: Brian is a journalism professor at the University of Alaska-Fairbanks. He spent years investigating "The Fairbanks Four" case for the Alaska Innocence Project with his students. The case involved three

Alaska Natives and a Native American that were wrongfully convicted of murder. They eventually went free. (bpodonoghue@alaska.edu)

3. Lisa Demer reports for Alaska Dispatch News. The paper has the highest circulation in the state and is based in Anchorage. Lisa lives in Bethel, a remote community in Western Alaska and covers rural Alaska stories. She's been a reporter for more than three decades. A glance at her past few months of reporting reveals a number of different articles about Alaska Native and Alaska Native communities. (ldemer@alaskadispatch.com)
4. GW Rastopsoff, Lydia Lohse, James Cobb: The owners of Alaska Native News, based in Homer, Alaska, a small town on the Kenai Peninsula. They also have volunteer reporters that write for them that are scattered throughout the state.
5. Edgar Blatchford, the owner of two small newspapers and a professor of journalism and Alaska Native Studies at the University of Alaska Anchorage. He used to own six rural Alaskan newspapers that primarily served rural, Alaska Native communities (ebatchford@alaska.edu). He grew up in Nome, Alaska, a remote town in Western Alaska.
6. Jennifer Canfield, Alaska Native reporter for KTOO in Juneau and former reporter for *The Juneau Empire*
7. Joaqlin Estus, a special projects consultant for KNBA, a public radio station that serves South central Alaska. The radio station is Native-owned and operated. Estus is also on the board of Native Public Media.

8. Shady Grove Oliver, *The Arctic Sounder*. Shady Grove is the sole reporter for *The Arctic Sounder*, a newspaper serving the Northwest Arctic. Her stories almost exclusively cover rural, Native communities.
9. Teresa Cotsirilos, KYUK. Teresa is a reporter for KYUK, a public radio station serving the Yukon Kuskokwin Delta. She reports on crime, criminal justice and public health and many of her stories focus on Alaska Native communities. (Teresa@kyuk.org).

Although if I have time, I will certainly interview more, the choice of five reporters is a matter of practicality. I think it is important that I spend some time reading news coverage about Alaska Natives as well as interviewing people about how to better cover Alaska Native communities. Just like a journalist wouldn't rely solely on background research or interviews, I think it is important that I can cross-check some of the problems that journalists identify with my own examination of the literature and of news coverage. The examination of news coverage will also help me come up with better, more in-depth questions to ask the journalists during the semi-structured interviews. These details will also help me write a better-informed tip sheet that not only offers insight into on how Alaska Natives are being covered in the Alaskan news media but also offers advice for how anyone can cover tribal nations on a level that is sensitive and complex and that challenges stereotypes.

In addition to interviewing journalists, I will also ask each if they have sources or acquaintances who are Alaska Native but do not work as journalists. I will then conduct semi-structured interviews with a few Alaska Natives about how they view news media

representations of Alaska Natives and what advice they have when covering Alaska Native communities. I will also conduct these interviews in-person when possible.

I will use my phone to record each interview. After the interviews, I will transcribe each and highlight parts of the transcript that offer the most concrete advice on how to better cover Alaska Natives. I'll also highlight quotes that I may want to include in the tip sheet. Then, after examining my own notes on news coverage of Alaska Natives by two different media outlets, I'll make a list of the most common themes and pieces of advice. I'll use all this information as well as the historical context and the statistics included in this proposal to produce a 2,000-word article and tip sheet on how news media professionals can better cover Alaska Natives and other tribal nations. The article could be published in the IRE Journal, Poynter or Journalist's Toolbox.

To access people at these organizations, I will begin by contacting Brian O'Donoghue, the UAF professor who covered "The Fairbanks Four" case. Mark Horvit sent me his contact information and suggested that he would be a good source for my project. I'll talk to him about my list of potential sources and see if he has any additional advice on whom to interview. Most of the journalists have contact information readily available online, and I'll work with them to schedule an interview on their time. Still, it is possible that I will face problems with access. As an outsider, I may be questioned by some Alaska Native journalists about whether I am knowledgeable enough to cover the issue. Doing background research before the interviews and being gentle, persistent and open will help combat this issue. Also, driving around Alaska in the winter may be difficult if the road conditions are poor, but I did just buy a four-wheel-drive truck and have experience driving in winter weather.

My final project will detail how to provide more accurate and complex coverage of Native peoples and provide information specifically for Alaskan journalists interested in better understanding how to cover Alaska Native communities. I will also consult with one of my sources that is Alaska Native before I publish my final work to make sure that I have the editing perspective of a Native journalist. Like many works of journalism, it will open with a story or anecdote from one of my interviews and then go into the purpose of the sheets, some data and statistics, and the bullet-point list of advice for reporters. The study will provide additional in-depth research on Native representations in the media, a topic area that has received relatively little attention. It will also add research to a topic, Alaska Native representations in Alaskan news media, that has barely been covered by scholarly research. Considering the economic and political power of tribal nations, the historical importance of Native Americans in the United States, and the recent failures in media coverage at the Standing Rock protests, the research area is deserving of more attention.

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