

Five honored at HAIL awards

For the Juneau Empire

Honoring Alaska's Indigenous Literature (HAIL) awards, which honors indigenous educators from across Alaska, were presented by Andy Hope on Tuesday night at the Juneau Arts & Culture Center.

The 2007-08 recipients were renowned storyteller Annie Blue, of Togiak; Ernestine Hayes, author of "Blonde Indian, an Alaska Native Memoir"; Walter Johnson, author of "Sukdu Nel Nuhghelnek: I'll Tell You A Story"; Michael Krauss, author of "In Honor of Eyak"; and Clarissa Hudson, author of "Jennie Weaves an Apprentice: A Chilkat Weaver's Handbook."

ANNIE BLUE

As a young girl more than 50 years ago, Evelyn (Coopchiak) Yanez listened to Blue tell her stories. During the course of this long-term project, Blue has told many more stories. More recently, Ben and Eliza Orr, Yanez and Dora Andrew Ihrke collaborated in collecting, transcribing, translating and refining these stories.

Because of the long-term relationship between Blue and Yanez, and the trust developed between Blue and the Math in a Cultural Context project, Blue was willing and eager to share her stories so the next generation would learn.

Blue was born on Feb. 21, 1916, in Qissayaaq, along the Togiak River. She was one of nine children. About 1945, Blue moved to Togiak, where she still lives. She married Cingakaq (Billy Blue) and had seven children; four survived birth and one, Nellie, is still living today. She has 15 grandchildren, 25 great-grandchildren and one great-great-grandchild.

When asked how she became a storyteller around 1945, Blue credits Saveskar, the storyteller in her village. Today, Blue is a respected storyteller, carrying on the oral tradition of Yup'ik storytelling.

ERNESTINE HAYES

In her book, Hayes traces one life from childhood in the Juneau Indian Village through adulthood in California and an eventual return home. Since its publication by the University of Arizona Press in 2006, Hayes's memoir has earned recognition as an honest and welcome addition to Native American literature.

Called a "rewarding, evocative, ultimately uplifting view of Native life" by Booklist and "one of the most important books to come out of Alaska" by the Anchorage Press, "Blonde Indian" received a 2007 American Book Award, was chosen as a 2006 Book of the Month by Native America Calling and was named a Kiriayama Prize nonfiction finalist and a creative nonfiction finalist in the PEN Center USA Literary Awards.

A member of the Wolf House of the Kaagwaantaan, Hayes' work has been published in anthologies, journals and other media. She has been an assistant professor of English at the University of Alaska Southeast Juneau campus since receiving a Master of Fine Arts in creative writing and literary arts from the University of Alaska Anchorage in 2003. She is the grandmother of four.

WALTER JOHNSON

Johnson's book is the first Dena'ina book that coordinates written text and sound. The stories are a colorful portrait of Dena'ina life and language, and the book and audio CD function as language learning tools.

"Walter and I had a lot of fun with the stories as we tape-recorded them at the Johnson's home in Homer in 2002 and 2003," Jim Kari Walter said. "Walter told some of the stories spontaneously. For some we paused the recorder to think about phrases. During proofreading sessions, Walter made inserts and changes in some stories."

The 14 stories in this book and the photos, most of which were captioned by Johnson, give a vivid sense of mid-20th century life on Iliamna Lake. Students of Dena'ina and Athabascan folklore will enjoy the text for the details, such as the handiwork of Walter's mother, the low-flying comets seen by Walter and others, the legendary Mountain People, or the precipitous demolition of a Dena'ina cultural shrine at the summit of Iliamna Portage.

Johnson was born on June 14, 1922, along the Kvichak River to Alf Johnson, of Estonia, and Annie Rickteroff. The youngest of 12 children, Johnson lived much of his early life as an only child. He and his mother lived alone in Lonesome Bay in the northeast corner of Iliamna Lake. His fluency in his native language, making him a rarity among the Dena'ina people of Old Iliamna Village, is due to this mother only speaking Dena'ina at home.

Through the years, Johnson used this knowledge by acting as an interpreter of his Dena'ina language. His mother also passed on to him much of the oral history and literature of the Dena'ina people of the area. At the age of 24, Johnson married Annie Mysee, of Old Iliamna Village, and they had three children. They now live in Homer.

MICHAEL KRAUSS

Krauss' book includes stories told by Annie Nelson Harry in Eyak that were translated by her husband. She told us that she had learned them from "Old Chief Joe."

"We are fortunate to have several of these tales told not in only one version, but in two by Anna herself - an earlier version in 1933 when she was a young woman of 27, living where she was born and raised, and married to another Eyak, and a later version from Anna now 13 to 40 years older, after living a long time in Yakutat, married to Sampson Harry," Krauss said.

"For the earlier version, we have only her first husband's English translations, and for the later, we have Anna's Eyak originals. It is very interesting to compare the two versions, not for their language, of course, but for the difference in content of the story, which is often very great and reflects very deeply the story of Anna's life and Eyak history. The versions she told in her later life are now much fuller with personal meaning, wit and wisdom that could only be Anna's and Eyak. "

Krauss, a professor emeritus, joined the University of Alaska faculty in 1960 and has been a professor of linguistics since 1968. He has been director of the Alaska Native Language Center since the center was established by state legislation in 1972 until his retirement in June 2000.

CLARISSA HUDSON

"Hudson's book portrays the time-honored apprentice relationship," Vivian Martindale said. "It is also a handbook for weavers that depicts weaving techniques, offers tips and includes stories surrounding Clarissa's work. Her essays are varied, from her trip to museums "visiting the relatives," to her worldview on subjects such as northwest coast art, to living an honorable life.

"The book is rich with creative spirit, and it is an honor that this talented artist, writer, weaver has chosen to share her knowledge with others. "Jennie Weaves an Apprentice" should be on the shelf in every Tlingit home.

Although I would like to see this book published by a national publishing house, currently it is a limited edition. It deserves a wider audience."

Hudson is Tlingit, Raven T'akdeinaaan (Sea Tern), Snail House in Hoonah, born and raised in Juneau. She is a world-renowned weaver and artist whose award-winning creations are in various private, corporate, public art collections nationwide and internationally.

Since 1980, Hudson has focused on artwork inspired by her Alaska Native heritage. Between 1983 and 2005, she designed and created 50 traditional Alaska ceremonial robes, including Chilkat, Ravenstail and button blanket robes as well as numerous traditionally inspired carvings, paintings, small weavings and collages.

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The first HAIL was organized in 2001 by a group called the Alaska Indigenous Literary Review Board per the above-mentioned guidelines. In the spring of that year, the group changed its name to Honoring Alaska's Indigenous Literature, or HAIL.



Honorees past and present: Honoring Alaska's Indigenous Literature (HAIL) awards, which honors indigenous educators from across Alaska, were presented by Andy Hope on Tuesday night at the Juneau Arts & Culture Center. From left, Miranda Belarde-Lewis, 2006 HAIL award winner; Nora Marks Dauenhauer, 2001 HAIL winner; and Ernestine Hayes, 2008 HAIL winner, pose at the ceremony. This year's honorees not pictured with this story are Michael Krauss and Clarissa Hudson.

Photo Courtesy Of Peter Metcalfe

Elders honored: From left, Walter Johnson, author of "Sukdu Nel Nuhghelnek: I'll Tell You A Story," and renowned storyteller Annie Blue, of Togiak, pose after the presentation of the Honoring Alaska's Indigenous Literature (HAIL) awards Tuesday night at the Juneau Arts & Culture Center.

Photo Courtesy Of Peter Metcalfe

