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Skagway

Robin Johnstone
rkjohnst@uno.edu

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Robin Johnstone

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Abstract

This work of creative nonfiction is both the story of the author's experiences in Skagway, Alaska and a comprehensive study of the town itself with an historic, ethnographic and biographical focus. The draft uses a memoir-style retelling of events as a framework to incorporate research, particularly personal interviews. In this way, the format merges travel narrative with elements of the profile essay. The writer incorporates experiential learning as a strong component of research; she lived in Skagway for a total of 15 months and conducted nearly 40 hours' worth of recorded interviews. The idea was fueled by the juxtaposition of the historical Gold Rush boom with the contemporary tourism boom.

Skagway; Alaska; Jewelry; Tourism; Cruise Ships; Seasonal Work; Travelling Sales; Klondike Gold Rush; Inside Passage; Historical Towns; Boomtown; Chilkoot Trail; Dyea Settlement

SKAGWAY

Were you ever out in the Great Alone, when the moon was awful clear,
And the icy mountains hemmed you in with a silence you most could hear;
With only the howl of a timber wolf, and you camped there in the cold,
A half-dead thing in a stark, dead world, clean mad for the muck called gold;
While high overhead, green, yellow and red, the North Lights swept in bars? —
Then you've a hunch what the music meant . . . hunger and night and the stars.
And hunger not of the belly kind, that's banished with bacon and beans,
But the gnawing hunger of lonely men for a home and all that it means…
-from "The Shooting of Dan McGrew" by Robert W. Service

Skagway, Alaska. Isolated, foreign, magical, and deceptive. I would begin by telling you the population, but that number evades exactitude. The U.S. census online lists an estimate of current, post-2010 official population as 995. There are 1,005 registered to vote. The sign in front of the Jewell Gardens restaurant at the end of town lists 832, but it has not been updated in several years. The seasonal residents during the summer months usually have no idea what the population is other than that it is small, and many of the year-round residents qualify any official number with an explanation that many of those listed as year-round are not truly so. Some of the residents own businesses, many quite lucrative, but stay gone most of the year, including the summer. Some leave for such a long stint in the winter that their neighbors accept them as locals but not truly year-round residents. Skagway. Transient, always changing, yet resistant to change.

If the seasonal workers counted, the population would swell by a thousand, maybe two or three. It is near impossible to keep track of that number as new shops and tour companies pop up each year, and workers come and go, being fired and replaced or not replaced or transferred to other port cities like Juneau, Haines, or Ketchikan. Housing and rental property records offer no assistance; dormitory style rooms sometimes house just one occupant while one-bedroom units

offer residence to whole families. Besides, the two RV parks and multiple campsites shelter not only tourists but seasonals, as well.

Some locals can more accurately confirm the number of graves in the historic Gold Rush cemetery than they can confirm the actual living population. Even so, conjecture about the identity of some of the graves' occupants leaves room for debate regarding the veracity of that number as well. Quantitative details lack surety in this town.

Geography would seem like a more concrete topic of discussion, but a longitudinal and latitudinal description of the state of Alaska obscures its enormity, irregularity, and non-contiguity. Skagway (N59.47º W135.31º) rests on the eastern side of the Southeastern Alaska panhandle, on the western side of the Canadian border, south of mainland Alaska and north of every other state in the union. Unlike almost every other city[1] in the panhandle, Skagway is accessible by car, but only through British Columbia. The road from Canada extends to the nearby borough of Haines, but because the path follows a twisty mountain puzzle, the drive takes an estimated six to eight hours as compared to a 40 minute ferry ride or 15 minute flight.

Cruise ships travel north from the capital city, Juneau, along the Lynn Canal until they reach the Taiya Inlet, the site of Skagway, that rests in the valley beneath the mountain pass over which prospectors journeyed during the Klondike Gold Rush in the late 1890s. The look of the old frontier town is preserved. Broadway Street features original saloons, curio shops, and

[1] The term city is used loosely here. Technically, the city of Skagway is referred to as the Municipality of Skagway Borough. Alaska is one of two states that do not use counties to geographically divide regions, instead using the term borough. Many describe the community and land of Skagway as a village, a term leftover from the days when the area was inhabited by only natives and no white men. The municipality is actually more like the county seat of a much larger geographic area. *Skagway.org* describes it thusly: "On June 28, 1900, Skagway became the first incorporated first-class city in Alaska, and on June 25, 2007, the city was dissolved and the first-class Municipality of Skagway Borough was formed, also the first of its kind in Alaska."

homesteads dating back to the boom years of 1896 to 1898 before Seward made his infamous folly[2] in purchasing the 49th state. Although Russia is not visible, matryoshka dolls are available for purchase in multiple locations.

Because the campsite grew to become a town so quickly during the Klondike Gold Rush, business owners erected false front walls with a doorway into an erect tent in order to appear legitimate. Broadway Street in Skagway is lined with a combination of original false fronts (now fully constructed buildings) and more modern edifices designed to coordinate with them. Despite a gaggle of anachronisms, structures must match and are subject to approval by the Skagway Historic District Commission guidelines. Even business signage is subject to inspection[3].

When I first set foot in town, the architecture seemed so authentic that I found it difficult to believe. The first day I arrived was a busy one—more than one ship in dock, and it was early enough in the day to view the parade of tourists. Each summer an estimated one million people visit the city. Children licked ice cream cones, and parents left trails of popcorn along raised sidewalks made of wood. A horse drawn carriage trotted along the street before store fronts filled with designer jewelry and watches. The attic of my future workplace had a painted sign reading "established in 1898" hanging out front. This historic building also housed a smoothie shop and a restaurant boasting combined Mexican and Italian fare.

So much of what I witnessed my first day reeked of contradiction. The town was small in every sense of the word, but the mountains and the sky and the ocean were vast. I had begun my day in one of the busiest, most chaotic cities in the country, Los Angeles, but I went to bed in a

[2] U.S. Secretary of State William Seward purchased the state of Alaska from Russia for two pennies an acre in what became known as "Seward's Folly".
[3] Skagway Historic District Design Guidelines are accessible by link found in the "Boards/Commissions" subsection of *Skagway.org*.

place where doors are left unlocked at night. The number of inhabitants in Skagway dropped by around 10,000 after the ships left that night, and the place metamorphosed from Disneyland to Mayberry within minutes.

I had searched some Internet discussion groups for insights about the town, and unsurprisingly, there were plenty of past visitors who had not been impressed with Skagway, preferring the less "commercial" townships included less frequently or not at all on cruise ship itineraries. But there were also those who expressed their admiration, wonder even, for a remote little town, frozen in time, so drenched in dualism that it seemed both out-of-the-way but also so oddly familiar. This was a place physically removed from the predominant landmass of the lower 48, but its language still reflected the same apple pie and television and American flag motifs found in the rest of the country.

I spent three months in Skagway that first summer. Then I came back for a full season, May through September, and I did it again the following year, this time bringing my boyfriend and my newly-adopted kitten. The fourth year that I returned to Skagway, my summer was bookended by a wedding in early June and the start of grad school in late August, so I stayed for only the six weeks in the middle. Finally, my fifth summer, I returned for two weeks to collect research and hike the Chilkoot Trail, the historic 33-mile trek that follows the route of the Gold Rush stampeders from a few miles just outside of Skagway all the way to Bennett, Yukon Territory, Canada.

I returned so frequently because I felt like I had not quite seen every hidden alcove of the city and the mountains surrounding it. In a reversal of my expectations, three short months were not enough. Most people might expect to cover all that may be covered in a town that size in a very short amount of time. But that was not the case for me. Each of the visits offered something

unique; I felt like each excursion offered one more piece in the puzzle that made up this town. Many of the tour companies in town offered discounted or complimentary trips for those living there. My work schedule was always intense, with few days off, but I said yes to every activity I could fit into my stay: kayaking, deep sea fishing, dog camps, historical walking tours, trolley rides, road trips into Canada…The more I discovered, the more I realized that there was more to do--see every corner, hike every trail, hear every anecdote, and meet every local. I was falling in love with Skagway, and I wanted to know everything about her. My goal: become an expert in Skagway-ology.

The Chilkoot hike that I completed during my fifth trip marked my completion of the Dewey Trail system, a series of twelve hikes of varying degrees of difficulty regulated by the National Park Service (NPS). My hiking buddies would also frequently go off the maintained trail to explore overgrown paths and create new shortcuts[4]. I still have a few routes I have not gotten to. Plus, the NPS continues to undertake maintenance projects, like building outposts and restoring overgrown paths.

Each trip, each adventure, and each season contributed to my piecemeal understanding of the history of the town. Thousands and thousands of people from all the corners of the planet converged on Skagway during the Gold Rush, hoping to strike gold and return home. Most of

[4] Bushwhacking itself is not illegal, although local authorities and the NPS discourage the casual hiker from going far off trail because of the inherent dangers involved with getting lost in the backcountry. The landmass surrounding the two original Klondike Gold Rush trails, though, is littered with what appear to be forgotten trails created by settlers and prospectors. Much of the current restoration near Skagway involves clearing the White Pass trail, which was largely forgotten after the Chilkoot became the more frequented trail. Maintenance projects focus on taming the constant overgrowth and soil shifting caused by glacial runoff along the Chilkoot and the Dewey Trail system. The NPS even employed a volunteer program during the summer of 2012, asking volunteers to meet for hikes along each of the established trails. During these group excursions, the rangers distributed gloves, axes, saws, and other tools for some mild bushwhacking/maintenance of these trails.

them never struck it rich. And most of those who did make their fortune did so through traditional business entrepreneurship rather than prospecting.

They sold supplies and sled dogs, baked pies, offered carnal satisfaction, charged tolls, built hotels, scammed the naïve, gambled, entertained, and accumulated wealth in all the ways that people do in less harsh terrains. A town was born almost overnight. When the boom was over, the population of Skagway dwindled dramatically. Outside influences would instigate an ongoing cycle of boom and bust over the next century, from the military to the NPS to the WP&YR railroad to the building of the docks for ore transport and the additions to the docks for cruise ships.

Over four summers, I accumulated knowledge about the Klondike Gold Rush, bit by bit, fleshing out an understanding of not only historical Skagway, but present day Skagway as well. I came to realize that the Skagway of the 2010s was not so different from the Skagway of the 1890s. The town that I grew to love is still very much a boom town, reliant on transient populations yet skeptical of outsiders, a flawed utopia, one of the last frontiers outfitted in anachronistic modernity, and populated by money-seekers, both short- and long-termers; the only difference between then and now is that where gold nuggets were once sought, payoff now comes in the form of a paper bill--a sale or a tip from an affluent cruise ship passenger rather than a mineral deposited in the ground.

Modern Skagway, as I see it, is still the Wild West. Risk-takers take up residence there because the potential for reward is stronger than it is in their former cities. For example, the ad I answered boasted an earning potential that was three times what I was already making in Los Angeles. I knew men who left wives in other states and other countries, and women who left children and other jobs. They came from every country, some legally and some not so legally.

They were willing to live in tents or packed like sardines ten to a room. They faced rejection or physical harm, selling luxury items with impossible success rates or climbing mountains as Sherpas for ill-prepared clients.

This is the story of the people who stay, the ones who come back year after year, and the ones who just don't quite make it. A few of them make money, some make trouble. People get married and divorced and make babies and die. Life goes on like anywhere else in the world, except that for five months each year, twelve hours a day, the city is a living history museum. Tourists enter a live interactive museum display featuring trinkets from a bygone era. They press their noses to the fishbowl, almost completely unsuspecting that history repeats itself in this place.

But something else entirely occurs when the last ship departs each night.

TRAVELLING

Friends and strangers seemed like they wanted to warn me of something when I first considered taking a summer job in Alaska. I was living in Los Angeles and waiting tables at a sports-themed corporate restaurant. Someone told me that I had to speak to one of the hostesses about Alaska. She was a tall, Nordic, supermodel-looking girl to whom I had never spoken a word to in my year of working there. The hostesses were a sub-unit of our staff with whom I had little reason to socialize. They were very young, some of them teenagers, and many of them went to school together at a design and fashion institute. One of them was a Laker girl.

The hostess's already large round eyes grew larger as she described what I could expect. She towered at least a foot over the next tallest hostess, and though she was pretty, she had an earthy vibe that I would later recognize as typical among Alaskans.

"All those cities are little villages," she told me. "They aren't real cities." Her description was apt, though I did not yet viscerally understand the isolation she described. At the time, I was still in the process of finalizing my assignment with the company. I barely understood what the job entailed, and I knew even less about the working environs. Her tidbits only frustrated me.

I told her I had no idea what city I would be in, so she proceeded to guess and offer little insights into each place. I don't remember all the cities she mentioned that day, but none of them was Skagway. An acquaintance asked with little awareness of his condescension: "Did you even Google the company?"

Of course I did. And, more importantly, I Googled the city. But if a person had never been to New York, and only read the encyclopedia entry about Times Square and the shape of a tiny island built upward rather than outward, would they really understand what people say when they describe a New York minute? Or a New York state of mind? Is it possible to understand why Paris is romantic from a AAA pamphlet? Does Joan Didion's San Francisco sound anything like the city description pages on california.gov?

What I did know about Skagway at this point was that it was a cruise ship port, although even that detail meant relatively little to me. I had never been on a cruise or really even vacationed, as a tourist, in a port city.

A friend mentioned the possibility of hostility between locals and summer residents. I suppose that his expertise came from having the type of upper middle class family that makes sport of vacations. They cruise, they drive, they fly, no destination too short or too far. He may have even witnessed it locally, growing up in suburban Wisconsin. Perhaps he struck up a conversation with a ride operator in the Dells or a local grocer in one of those fishing towns on

the lake. Or maybe he read about the idea in *The New Yorker*. Whatever the case, I always trusted the depth of his knowledge.

My attempts to search "local Alaskans' thoughts on tourism" came up fruitless, but I did stumble across a Yelp review for the jewelry company that I would end up working for. Decidedly disparaging, the review emphasized that the sales techniques were pushy and annoying and that the company was generally untrustworthy. I did not save the review, and it has been long since removed, but I remember a distinct feeling of dread—and embarrassment. What if the whole thing was a scam? What if I got stranded up there or sent home after just a few days? My friends would think I was so naïve.

There were plenty of others whose reactions were more innocuous, based mostly in curiosity. Their questions, and my responses, went something like this:

Friend: What makes you want to go to Alaska?

Me: My brother put the idea in my head. We've been talking about Alaska for several years.

Friend: How did you hear about the job?

Me: The company advertised on LA Casting as a potential summer job for actors during the "off" season.

Friend: What company?

Me: It's based in California. I interviewed in Carlsbad. They have a design studio there and show pieces mostly by appointment. In the summer, the jewelry is sent to three cities in Alaska, distributed among eight stores. In the winter, the jewelry moves to St. Thomas, US Virgin Islands.

Friend: So, wait, what is this job exactly?

Me: It's selling jewelry to tourists who cruise to Alaska.

Friend: Like, on the dock? Do you work at a kiosk or something?

Me: No, there are actual free-standing stores, same as at a shopping center or mall. It's apparently very expensive jewelry, so a kiosk wouldn't work for security reasons. However, some of the stores share space with other businesses, like a small coffee shop.

Friend: Have you done this sort of thing before? Sell jewelry?

Me: No, not at all. But I have sales experience, and I am assertive. Apparently, they liked those things. So, while I was not hired to join them for the opening of their season, my status is "on-call replacement." A lot of times people get homesick or just struggle to hit their sales quota, so they get sent home.

Friend: Seems a little uncertain.

Me: I am actively seeking adventure…

And a paycheck. I would be remiss if I omitted the fact that the ad I answered promised monthly paychecks of up to $7000. The pay scale, I learned in my interview, was a complicated blend of base salary and bonuses dependent on performance. We did have a guarantee of $2700 and free housing, but that came with a strict warning against riding on the bare minimum. Performance would be subject to regular review, and salespeople could be sent home at any time.

I have purposefully left out the name of the jewelry company for four reasons: 1.) technically, there is a parent company under one name, but the stores operate under two different names. This is fairly common practice for medium-sized businesses that have multiple financial

operators involved in different aspects of the business, either investment, management, or both. Referring to "the company" is a matter of convenience. 2.) I have no desire to provide coincidental advertisement for this company. 3.) While my experience was less than positive with this company, I also have no desire to disparage it or any of my friends and co-workers. 4.) I am fairly certain that if this document reaches publication, the owners of the company will be litigious, despite any good things I may say about them in my portrayal.

I will discuss the husband-wife team who manage and operate the company as I relay my personal experiences. However, for reasons related to those stated in my previous explanation, I will not be using their names. Only the names of those whom I have interviewed specifically for this project and who have given express consent will be used. I will begin with my immediate supervisor to whom I first reported in Skagway—Kevin Hanegan.

KEVIN HANEGAN AND THE JEWELRY BUSINESS

The flight the company booked from Los Angeles the morning of July 5, 2010 was numbingly early but necessary. Because it would take two connecting flights to reach Skagway in one day, it was crucial that the whole trip begin first thing in the morning, and there was no margin of error for missed flights or connection problems. The boarding pass I received said something about priority status, but in my groggy state I failed to realize that meant first class until I actually found my seat on the plane.

I remember glancing around, feeling completely out of place, and halfway expecting to be called out. *Yes, the ticket says Row 5 but yours is NOT FIRST CLASS Row 5.* Once I finally realized that I was in the right seat, I relaxed and said yes to the all the comforts offered to me—warm towel, hot breakfast, and complimentary cocktails. Eleven hours and three flights later, I

arrived in my new city with several firsts under my belt: first First Class, first time through Seattle, first prop plane, first stuffed bear observation.

While waiting in the Juneau airport to transfer from a major airline to the regional carrier, I decided I should sober up, so I wandered around looking at the stuffed wildlife on display—a mountain goat, polar bear, black bear and Grizzly. The airport was chilly because the automatic doors kept allowing the brisk air in, but a few hours later the terror of traveling on the low-flying eight-seat plane into Skagway left me sweating. On the ground at my final destination, teeth unbrushed, sticky underneath my layered clothes, and scented with airplane vodka, I expected someone named Kevin to pick me up from the tiny little airport.

Carol came instead. Blond, Texan, sweet, slow-moving Carol. Not that day, but later, when I knew her better, she would get excited while she was talking, and her whole body would bounce as she described evening plans or her home in Houston or a big sale. Frankly, a lot of people have underestimated that girl, but as I came to know her, I delighted in the sudden flashes of wisdom that she would blurt out between long periods of silent stares. I have never met a single person quite like her.

She was late that day, so I called the number I had for the store. I can't remember if Kevin answered, but when he did take the line he told me to look for a white sedan. His voice was patient; he spoke slowly but not in the way a Texan speaks slowly. The tone sounded folksy like a drawl, but not Southern. Later he would tell me that he grew up in rural Oregon—Tualatin, to be exact. His demeanor still reminds me of a cartoon character, animated and friendly and unassuming. Flights, he explained, were unpredictable so he waited until he knew the plane had landed to send the car.

All I really wanted to do was get settled into housing and showered, but Carol White was not the type of girl to disobey directions. She had been instructed to take me directly to the "small store," as it was called. I felt disconcerted not only because of my disheveled appearance, but also because Carol had a terrible habit of not looking me in the eye as we were talking. She courteously attempted to load my bags into the trunk but lacked the upper body strength to perform the task. Concerned that she might not be able to withstand the assault of a battered old suitcase, I stepped in, saying, "I got this."

The ride to the store lasted only a few blocks, but I was full of questions. Carol met these inquiries with either confusion or "I don't know", so I quickly realized that she had been sent to me merely as a gofer. The reassurance I felt in being awarded a first class flight was eroded by the vacuous demeanor of my welcoming committee.

We parked the white sedan in front of the small store. Inside, I was introduced to half the crew: Jane, Anthony, Ravi and Walt. Everyone was dressed smartly but not formally. Kevin, however, wore a suit, tie, shined dress shoes, and his hair was perfectly gelled. Even with his professional façade, he still didn't look slick. Professional, yes. But the suit fit a little too loosely, especially in the shoulders, and the styled hair was modern but not trendy. He smiled a little widely and his teeth were a little too big for his mouth to convey the aloofness that comes with "cool." He was a nerd, all grown up.

For a half hour he left me to hang out with this new ensemble in the main showroom while he adjourned to a back room with a telephone. The store had no customers, something I would soon learn was typical of mid to late afternoons, so the salespeople focused on me with a barrage of questions about where I was from and what I did.

Lights in all jewelry stores, I now know, are extra bright and white to make the diamonds sparkle. The lights there shone down onto the heads of the crew who stood behind the showcases, leaning their elbows on the glass. I stood opposite them, like a customer, and politely answered their questions.

"I'm from L.A. Yes, I answered the ad on Actor's Access. No, I don't know anyone else up here." They had already spent two intense months getting to know each other and knowing the girl that I was replacing. I was an outsider, and I instinctively felt my presence would shift some type of unspoken balance of power.

Kevin finally emerged and offered to walk me over to the other store. Apparently, it was only two blocks away. He seemed to enjoy playing the tour guide, pointing out the grocery store and the liquor store, and he launched into a conversation about practicalities as if he had delivered the speech many times before:

"We arrive at the small store at 7:15 then break up to open both the stores. You might want to hit the grocery store now because it closes before we finish our day, which is around 7 at night…"

The larger store, also referred to as the "Starbucks store" contrasted with the smaller store in size, busy-ness, overall ambience, warmth of lighting, and the smell of freshly brewed java. At about quadruple the space of the first store, the front section of the building contained both jewelry counters occupying three-quarters of the space and a coffee counter and seating section occupying the other quarter.

The coffee shop/pastry counter served Starbucks brand coffee. It was not, however, a branded Starbucks franchise. No Starbucks sign hung from any wall or entranceway, though the

familiar green and white placard on the wall above the Espresso machine claimed *We proudly serve Starbucks brand coffee*.

Kevin quickly introduced me to the rest of the team, then sent Carol and me back to employee housing so I could settle in. After a restless evening of quick-napping, cleaning a dormitory style room, and searching for fast food in a town with few options (and, literally, no fast food or actual chains of any kind), I finally tucked myself into a single bed at the back of our shared ladies-only blue house. In the morning, the girls all rode together in a beaten-down white Jeep for our impressive six-block commute to work. We arrived late. Kevin greeted us at the small store, dressed perfectly again, perturbed at our lateness but mild in his scolding. "Well, good MORNING…," he said.

Over the next few days, Kevin taught me how the stores operated. Sales technique, both the art and deceit, I would learn from other co-workers. The moral integrity of salespeople, or lack of it, was a pervasive theme. But I always respected Kevin, then and now, for his integrity. In my fourth summer in Skagway, Kevin and I would sit down in the café area of the big store. But by that time, I was no longer working seasons in Skagway. I had finally returned as a visitor.

I sat my tape recorder down next to our coffee cups on the wooden table between us. Our conversation began with a discussion of "Indian" selling. "I try to get the new people to sell ethically, basically," Kevin told me over the rattle of an espresso steamer and employees pitching Alaskan gold.

Before Alaska became a major cruise ship destination, the Caribbean islands boomed with an influx of wealth brought by tourism. The increase of visitors allowed these port areas to shift their economic foundation from sugarcane production to a service economy. European

aristocrats and invaders had first brought African slaves to the islands but later shifted to indentured workers from India and surrounding territories. Because the food and religious celebrations of India had become so integrated into island culture, it makes sense that Indian nationals would continue to move there.

Cruising came into vogue among the upper and upper-middle classes between the 1960s and 1980s. Duty-free luxury goods sales offered an additional draw to these populations. Having already assimilated the culture of the East Indies to the West Indies, the region was a likely place for entrepreneurs from India to relocate with their diamond supplies. While a majority of the world's diamonds come from the African continent, a large percentage also come from India; and more importantly, craftsmen in India cut and polish most of the new diamonds mined across the globe.

The term "Indian selling" takes on a pejorative term for both Indians and non-Indians. It began as a way of describing the style of haggling that is common in India and most parts of the world except the U.S. The female of the husband-wife team who owned the company that Kevin and I worked for at one time described it as "disrespectful" not to haggle a price offered by a street vendor. I could see her point, in relation to pricing the relatively disposable goods that a person might buy in a market, but not in relation to buying precious gems that ranged from hundreds to thousands and tens of thousands of dollars.

The negative connotations of Indian selling included the idea of selling "dirty," or deliberate lying or embellishing to make a sale. The term "Indian selling" itself, coupled with the prevalent visibility of jewelry salespeople of Indian descent, make for a convoluted and unpleasant conversation about racism. In truth, there are two issues at play: race and sales ethics. Due to the unfortunate confusion of correlation with causality, the two issues have been blurred.

After that first summer, I would eventually work for five separate jewelry companies in Alaska, the Caribbean, and the U.S. mainland. I can say now that the overwhelming majority of salespeople provide ethical and transparent approaches to selling, regardless of ethnicity, but most of the "dirty" sales and salespeople I encountered were associated with my first company. And those whom I would accuse of being "dirty" were of various racial identities.

Were prices overinflated? Yes. Was the quality of goods sometimes overstated? I feel confident in saying yes. Were employees thoroughly and properly trained in gemology, gemstone grading, and manufacturing techniques necessary to authorize repairs and alterations to jewelry? No. But that's capitalism. Sales is sales—buyer beware. And for his part, Kevin always tried his best to train bright-eyed, underprepared recruits. He explained as much about the business as he could to newbies who were hired to work for short periods of time by the husband of the husband-wife owners who placed an emphasis on profit over education.

Four years after that first day working in Skagway, I continued to sip my tea as Kevin glanced back and forth between me and the salesroom floor, watching for the four o'clock rush of people returning from the all-day train excursion into the Yukon Territory. The station connected to the Klondike Gold Rush visitor center building on Fourth Street, and the nearby walkway and street area is the most bustling half block in the town. Stools line the front window of the not-Starbucks store in order for customers to relax with their coffee and pastries. With the amplified, echoing sound of the combined store and the bustle on the sidewalk parallel to the station, it was easy to forget just how far away the big city really was, how quiet the streets would be just hours later.

During our chat, I was reminded of his sense of loyalty. Kevin vehemently defended his bosses. Despite his tendency to focus on the techniques of the Indian salesmen, he did not group

the husband-wife team, both born in India, into the same category. “If they were shady, like some of the others, I wouldn’t work for them.”

He not only defended his parent company; he also saw them as better than other jewelry companies. We traded anecdotes and rumors about other companies that refused to pay employees and vendors and suffered from negative reputations among the local jewelry-selling community. Skagway is a small town with an incestuous populace, but the seasonal jewelry world possesses its own small social world. The only difference is that the jewelry people are connected by mutual friends and overlapping résumés rather than geography—this clique extends to all three of the main Alaskan ports, the ever-changing staff onboard the ships, and those few who stay behind in the Caribbean during winter season.

Perhaps the presence of the tape recorder provoked it, but Kevin and I danced around the discussion of one particular company’s shadiness. I was fairly certain which one he means, but neither of us said it outright.

“So, this other company,” I said. “Do they bring girls from other countries?”

He sputtered. “Umm, you mean taking advantage of girls from other countries?”

A tourist interrupted us, asking the bathroom location. Kevin, even though seated in a corner, obviously looked like he worked there. Always in sales mode, Kevin courteously gave directions, waiting until the tourist turned to reveal his exasperation. Tourists wore down even the most patient person. Kevin had been at this a long time.

He had changed in one major way since that first summer I met him. He was now married a Bulgarian girl whom he met in Skagway the first summer I lived there. Though she was recruited legitimately through another industry, I knew that she was friends with some of the

Eastern European girls working in jewelry. I assumed that was why he was playing coy with the subject of this other company's shadiness.

"I don't know that I've ever necessarily heard that knock on him…" He was referring to another Indian boss in town, a man sometimes compared to Kevin's boss in business tactics but known to be even shadier.

Many of the females in Kevin's company shared dubious tawdry stories about inferred or direct sexual advances made by Kevin's boss. Hookups between co-workers were common, and some long-term relationships and marriages have resulted from them. But Kevin's boss, like many of the actual owners of these companies, was already married.

I was careful to steer the conversation toward a discussion of companies other than Kevin's. As we exchanged stories about the shadiest goings-on that we knew of, it soon became apparent that we were both referring to the same company in regard to having the worst reputation:

"…It's spelled like a French word, but it's something else," I said, leading.

"It's a classy name…," Kevin added.

I would not reveal this name in this text, out of fear of litigation, but I feel confident in saying that the identification is no secret in the jewelry world.

Kevin described an ambiguous "assistant" position at the other company that seemed to be filled each year by a different young girl. What I had heard about the company was related to its financial treatment of employees; I was told by a ship staff member that the company failed to pay for promotion. Anyone who's ever been on a cruise has probably noticed, among the barrage

of expensive add-on options like premium dining and shore excursions, the promotion for "free" lectures touted thematically as either city guides or shopping guides. Passengers were lured in with the promise of free gifts, and the seduction began.

Come to our onboard lecture. Free gifts! Buy the coupon book for $20; it's full of coupons for redemption. Free gifts!! Walk inside our store. Free gifts!!

While the shopping presentation sends a vast majority of browsers into jewelry and retail stores, another "lecture" deals only with art. *Come for the art appreciation, stay for the deep, deep discounts!* Sometime during the next forty-five minutes you will discover that *long-forgotten Picasso prints are now available exclusively to you, passenger, at discounted savings!* (Discounted from what—doesn't matter). My father never bought art in his life until an Alaska Inside Passage cruise. That was three years ago. I'm pretty sure he still hasn't bought any frames.

Port lecturers (PLs), most of whom I liked, give presentations describing unique gemstones and diamond buying techniques. Port lecturers become successful because of their showmanship and charisma. Are they trained in diamond grading? Mostly no. Are they trained at all? Yes, in selling. Most of them, in my observation, know less about gems than the undereducated salesmen. One store manager, a GIA[5] graduate gemologist, took it upon himself to personally tutor each of the shopping guides during the downtime when they were in port. This store manager felt it was equally important to win their favor, for business' sake, by getting them thoroughly inebriated in the backyard of the store complex.

Onboard, the port lecturers hand out program guides, listing ship recommendations for in-port shopping, with a numbered map. The number one store always has the lengthiest

[5] Gemological Institute of America, a 501 (c)(3) organization.

description in both the printed guide and the presentation. The amount of store promotion decreases as their numerical placement descends until, at the very bottom, only names are listed with no description and no mention by the lecturers. The level of promotion depends completely on the money paid to the marketing companies, but the store manager I mentioned did his absolute best to manipulate the PL's loyalty.

Not all of the recommendations were for jewelry stores, although gemstones dominated. Souvenir shops, curio stores and furriers made the list as well. One promoted store in Skagway still sells an authentic men's rabbit fur jockstrap, with or without tail.

Within the subculture of jewelry shops in the port city culture, there were recommended and non-recommended stores. Socially, there was no distinction between employees within their respective fields. Jewelry sellers often hung out with other jewelry sellers from other companies, regardless of whether they worked for a promoted store or not, just as tour guides usually hung out with other tour guides, whether they led hikes or canoe trips or cycle tours. Sometimes salesmen from one store would cozy up to a salesmen from another store just to brag about beating the other in a big sale. In Skagway, unlike in a mall somewhere else, you could watch your customer leave your store, sale not closed, and walk into a competing store, only to emerge an hour later with that competitor's shopping bag in hand.

In a town whose shopping district only stretches six blocks, the presence of over twenty jewelry stores made for steep competition. Ship recommendation was expensive, and smaller shops usually couldn't afford it. Being on the program helped direct traffic into a given store, but it never guaranteed a sale.

There were multiple tiers of participation in the recommendation program that determined a business' amount of advertisement. An owner could pay more to be both listed in the program guide and mentioned in the PL's presentation (during which they would both wear and mention specifically popular items sold in those stores), or pay less to only be listed in the program and on the map of the town that configures numbers next to the buildings that correspond with the promoted stores.

A large portion of attendees at these port lectures only wanted to collect free gifts and had little interest in learning fun facts about exotic gems or the lost prints of a commercial visual artist. Some of these budget shoppers feigned innocence while looking for advertised free gifts, acting surprised when they were cajoled, teased, pushed or simply urged to make a purchase, as if the idea of promotion was ever rooted in anything other than a slick marketing gimmick. Then there were the passengers who seemed sincerely impressed at the receipt of these mediocre trinkets and genuinely thankful for what they respond to as an act of hospitality. "Thank you so much for doing this for us! What a lovely gift. You're so nice!"

The truly sincere ones always left me speechless. NO. No, no, no. None of it was done to be nice. None of those stores were handing out cheap little giveaways to be nice. It's advertisement, the same as back home. The same as free coffee and popcorn at a car dealership or free makeup samples at a department store. Somehow, for some reason, when people leave home they believe the rules have changed. I imagined that these were the people who keep the time-share industry viable.

The Kevin-company long ago participated in ship promotion. Finding it to be less than cost effective, the husband-wife team came up with their own ingenious idea for a free gift. They wanted to become the biggest jewelry company in the Inside Passage (what the cruise ship route

between Ketchikan and Skagway along the Taiya Inlet is often called), and the name of the game was saturation. By stationing more than one store in each port, they could accomplish multiple goals:

- Catch customers in multiple locations
- Carry different styles of merchandise in each location that could be transferred back and forth as needed to satisfy customer desire
- Encourage subliminal influence by forcing the customers to see similar merchandise over and over
- Keep customers out of competitors' stores, and
- Upsell prime customers by referring them to other locations within the chain, thereby maximizing total purchase amount.

Another aspect of marketing for the company involved renting space inside other spaces, as in the Starbucks store, in order to drive traffic to notice the shiny, well-lit jewelry in the cases. The location was prime, people were willing to wait in line for coffee, and the cases drew attention as the mochas were made.

The husband-wife team built an empire. Nine total stores. They also created their own free gift, placed their advertisement in the papers and booklets given out in port, and hooked the tourists into visiting each and every one of the nine. The gift, a choice of collectible coins or charms, required each of nine pieces in order to be significant. In the last store visited, the collector would receive either a case into which they could insert the coins or a bracelet upon which to attach the charms that, together, spelled out ALASKA + (picture) + 10 or 11 or 12 or 13 or 14 or 15, whichever year it was.

I remember the frustration of being harassed for these free gifts non-stop, day after day. I admire Kevin's patience in dealing with this scenario for over a decade. My instinct, when asked if the coins were real gold, was to point out the silliness of the question, but whenever I acted on that instinct I was often met with blank stares.

"It's also not gold-wrapped chocolate," Kevin said with a grin. I asked him what other common questions were asked in regard to the trinket:

"'How much is this worth?' 'Is this the [official] Alaska gold coin?' 'Where do I get the box?' People are passionate about their freebies."

We all made fun of the free-gift seekers. As we sat there, Kevin called them "lazy" and theorized that the most typical ones were "overweight and under-educated."

For all the "dirty" salespeople and shady goings-on within the jewelry company, tourists could be just as dirty. It was amazing the lengths that some of us go to for a virtually worthless token. They would frequently ask for multiples, so they could have souvenirs for all of their family members at home. They would lie, often, about losing a charm or coin to get another. They would stand outside the store, holding their free gift, and send a small child or grandparent in to ask for another. They would argue, curse, and even throw things at the salespeople.

Frequently, Skagway marked the final port for travelers. Most companies instructed their employees to show at least one piece of jewelry for every coupon redeemed. After all, customers cannot buy an item that they don't know exists. By the time the passengers had been asked to look at charm bracelet pieces in seven stores, in addition to their stops at other stores, they knew full well the game they had to play. Their revenge? Walk in, point to the biggest item they could see (or a series of them, if they were particularly salty), and ask to try it on. They would hold

their hand out, ogling over the beauty, maybe even ask a price, and generally just waste a salesperson's time…until it came time to buy. "I've got to think about it. Can I just have my free gift?"

One particularly mischievous saleswoman, a Puerto-Rican who would change her nationality to fit the country of origin of a potential Spanish-speaking buyer, would hold her patience for long periods until, occasionally, she would snap. After one jerk threw a tourist booklet at her, the saleswoman threw a coin at the tourist's back, hitting him on the way out. During one slow stretch of an afternoon, she glued a coin to the wooden sidewalk just outside the entrance to the Starbucks store. The entire crew laughed each time someone paused, bent, and reached for it. The unsuspecting victim would try in earnest to pry it off the ground, at first confused, but eventually embarrassed or disappointed as they realized the reality of the prank.

That particular coin remained glued to the sidewalk the rest of that season. The city maintains the look of "authenticity" of the Gold Rush era by replacing the sidewalk boards periodically throughout the summer and more extensively just before the start of a new one, so the coin was gone the following year. In our discussion, Kevin told me that the coins are actually bullet proof. He said, "I've tested that theory myself."

Our discussion of guns and bullet-proof vests made from souvenir coins turned to Soapy Smith, the legendary huckster of Gold Rush Skagway. Jefferson Randolph "Soapy" Smith ran scams like peddling bars of soap supposedly packaged with cash (but were not), and other grifter tricks.

"Soapy would have sold a lot of jewelry," said Kevin blankly, as if the idea had been proposed before. "He would have sold a lot of rainbow topaz."

Common in all ports, the multi-colored, treated stone (which could be made of anything from quartz to topaz) goes by different names depending on the location. In Alaska, it is frequently called "Northern Lights topaz." The salespeople, however, lovingly refer to it as "glass."

Soapy, the Puerto Rican saleswoman, and I all have something in common. We were all actors. Kevin explains the theory behind recruiting actors for a sales job, and it boils down to their ability to speak well and confidently. I am already aware of this, having responded to an ad on an actor site, and also because after that first summer, my agreement with the owner of the company was to act as recruiter back in California for the coming summer.

One of a multitude of events that made me distrustful of the company involved the use of the LA Casting website. The owner asked me to write ads for online placement, which I did. I also came up with an alternative recruiting strategy targeting people already working in sales, shifting the hiring plan away from actors. The owner approved my written ads but disregarded my recruitment plan. He asked me to contact the new manager of the website, because the site would no longer allow posting of ads that were not audition advertisements in the space dedicated to this type of notice. The company ads for work in Alaska had been sneaked in for many years. Now, however, the new LA Casting manager took a harder stance on what was allowed for placement.

The LA Casting manager informed the previous company recruiter that she could use another section of the website that was designated specifically for industry jobs. These positions included anything that was not specifically an acting job, and often were referred to as "survival jobs" because they paid the rent between gigs. The owner thought that the Alaska job would make a perfect survival job because he had been told that the summer months were slower for

actors, but he refused to accept placement in the industry jobs section because the ad would get fewer hits. Because of my connection to the film and acting community and some previous experience as a hiring manager, he asked me convince the casting site manager of the ad's worth. Despite serious reluctance, I simply had to try—or lose my job.

I contacted the LA Casting manager, pled my case, and he still refused to let us place the ad in the audition notices section. After going in circles about the issue, me explaining that it was a dead end and the owner answering that I had not tried hard enough, he finally came up with a new plan. I had done some casting work for small films. He wanted me to post an audition notice on the site (since we could not list a job post) for a commercial for the company. We would interview as many actors as possible without the intention of ever casting or shooting an actual commercial. A week or so later, we would contact the most charismatic aspirants, inform them that the role was already cast, and offer them jobs as salespersons instead.

I refused. It was unethical. Besides, I still thought he should focus on more professional salespeople. The actors I worked with did sell well. They were driven and competitive and charming. But, as I asked Kevin during our interview:

"Do they tend to have stable personalities?"

"No. Not at all. What do actors do? ACT OUT."

Kevin explained that the actor-hires tended to complain more about the hours, and even worse, they liked "to stir shit. They mentally dramaticize (sic) our living arrangements crossed with work, and cause mental anguish amongst their peers and superior for their own amusement."

At this point, I was giggling. It was certainly less funny at the time, but my first summer in town marked a season that was particularly dramatic. I would see more conflict between seasonals, townies, jewelry workers and other groups later but the drama among the jewelry workers themselves was apparent immediately.

I had arrived on July 5, 2010 as a replacement for another girl, an actress, from L.A. She had taken up with another seasonal who was working in a different field, and one night they were drinking. The company provided two functional cars for the crew, so this girl and her boyfriend went joy riding on Dyea Road—a twisting, narrow patch of road accessible at the outskirt of Skagway, just past Jewell Gardens. I am not clear on who was driving, but they lost control on the way down and ran off the mountainside. Yes, mountainside. Fortunately, neither died, but I understand that the boyfriend was badly injured.

The car was towed back to town and left in the yard behind the female employees' house, with its smashed windows, clothing fragments, and blood smears. With an absence of scrapyards available by land, that car would sit in that yard for the next few seasons. The owner couple probably thought it served as a warning to stay in line.

The team would meet each morning in that space, and Kevin would assign teams for each store. By the time I arrived, he was usually making these assignments according to the two cliques that had formed. Two girls, an actress and a model, had become vicious, bitter rivals. The team at the small store that first day I arrived, led by the model girl, had warned me to look out for the actress girl. I knew the model for all of ten minutes before she was pouring out vitriol toward the other girl. The actress, busy while we visited the larger Starbucks store, did the same thing later that evening at the Blue House. I would soon be floating between the two cliques.

In a commissioned sales environment, competition was fierce, regardless of the personal goings-on after hours. Employees were faced with quotas that, if not met, would mean termination. When successful, commission plus base peaked at $9000/month. Both the earning potential and the fear of being asked to leave fostered cutthroat attitudes.

The company also had an elaborate referral system through which sales might be split between two employees at different stores, either in the same town or in different ports. If a customer showed up with a VIP card, we were expected to pay off two salespeople: the person from whom the card came would receive one third of the sale, and the person to whom the customer was sent would receive two thirds of the sale. We were not supposed to take credit for a sale made by a VIP customer if someone else's name was listed as the "referred to."

The common practice in all ports was to mark prices up in order to mark down, i.e., haggle with the customer. In this company, the maximum discount that an employee was allowed offer a customer was 70%. Technically, the real final price was 75% or sometimes lower. Regular employees were required to call in a manager to offer the final dollars of the discount. The technique of opening and closing, or team selling, was fairly common for big ticket items, but the added pricing element made the customers feel special, like they really were getting a good deal. It could also backfire.

Sometimes the buyers would get so caught up in the game of negotiation that they would lose sight of their actual desire to buy. Sometimes they would fight for an item they never could afford in the first place. Sometimes the power of asking for lower prices would create unrealistic expectations, and when the bottom line did not match their budget, they were bitter and defeated. These customers liked to insult us by calling us used car salesmen. They would sometimes run straight into a competitor's store just to emphasize their dissatisfaction and let us know that they

would just *take their business elsewhere!* A lot of times those people never bought anything. Salesmen gossip at the end of the day—not about the ones who buy, but the ones who don't, the pains in the ass. Sometimes the nastiest customers would make fun of the Indians we worked with, shaking their heads from side to side and mocking the accent. Those people had no intention of buying anything.

Kevin had always floated between two stores, but the system requires more than one closer. So the owner designated additional "managers" during each season based on performance and seniority. But these managers have their own quotas to make, and they were guaranteed a piece of every sale they closed. For the more unscrupulous managers, that meant an automatic 50%, even if they only walked in for five minutes of an hour-long negotiation. Kevin, to his credit, was always very fair; he sometimes took nothing if only approving a price or one quarter for a small effort.

I will never be a hundred percent clear on what sparked that rivalry during the 2010 season. Some guess that it was partially a love entanglement (both girls were bi-sexual and apparently started the season as close friends). But it seems logical to blame it at least partly on sales competition. Both girls were talented saleswomen, both in their rookie season but placing near the top of the sales rankings for the entire company, all nine stores combined.

The actress pulled ahead in sales and was made manager. The model still performed well, but not as manager. By the way—the actress is the same woman I mentioned earlier—the Puerto Rican woman who changed the details of her life story to fit whatever customer she was attending. Here's an example:

Puerto Rican actress (PRA) overhears customers speaking in Spanish.

PRA (en Español): Ay, ¿de donde son? [Hey, where you from?]

Customer (in English): Mexico.

PRA (in either Spanish or English, improvising): Oh, my husband is from Mexico!

PRA was not married. But she was flexibly pragmatic when it came to the truth. I thought of her as Kevin gave this example of how actor types create drama around themselves:

"Someone who was with us for a little while maybe said to a new person, 'Oh, you're not going to make it. You should just quit now.' Some people like to cause the drama, some like to be a part of the drama, some don't like any of it. Some come here and think they're here to model jewelry."

Kevin had weathered staff turnover, drama, the recession. In the five years I had known him, he had mentioned moving on, returning to a normal, stay-in-one place existence rather than the move-twice-a-year life. But he seemed fairly content overall. After that first summer season, I met with the owner to discuss a continued position with the company. Kevin came up in the conversation, and the owner mentioned that Kevin had left the company briefly years earlier but returned. The owner explained it like this: "He realized he needed this job."

In studying the economic ebb and flow of the city, from boom to bust and back again, over and over, spanning more than a hundred years, I can't help but wonder if the current sales business can continue at the rate it has sustained since the cruising boom of the early 80s. Maybe it's a superstition thing, or just force of habit, but ask a salesman, *how's business*? and the complaint is always the same, *not as good as last year*. Kevin did not worry about the industry dying out.

"The cruise ship companies won't let that happen. Think of them like sharks, and we are fish that stick up underneath the sharks for a free ride. So, the sharks, maybe they'll eat each other in order to grow. The cruise ship industry, over the last fifteen years, has gotten much, much bigger."

With more ships, there are more rooms to fill. Kevin acknowledged that the recession is still affecting the market, driving down cruise prices, which, in turn, changes the socioeconomic breakdown of passengers.

"We have things for $7. We also have items for $70,000."

I asked him what makes the most successful salesperson. His answer resembled the philosophy he had expressed in my training years ago—do what you can, chase every customer, whether they are the kind who buys high or low, and be "consistent and persistent."

"You can take a small sale and turn it into a big sale." He was right. Most "big fish" customers don't enter the store planning to spend tens of thousands of dollars. But the right combination of merchandise, salesmanship, and the romance of being in a remote Alaskan village can open pocket books. I had not entered that store in an Alaska village planning to return year after year. I also had not entered that store planning to tell the story of the people I would meet. But I have never experienced buyer's remorse.

THE SEASON

The cruise ships visit Alaska between May and September. By mid to late August, the college kids working the season start leaving. The ship schedule is always solid through early September. Most employers require a commitment until at least the middle of that month, so it is more common to see recent graduates than continuing students. (I noticed that a lot of tourists

ask seasonals if they are in college, and I think they do this in order to understand why someone would take a temporary job. I was asked this question multiple times despite having finished undergrad twelve years before I started working seasonally.) Jewelry stores stick it out to the bitter end of the season and these employees are usually among the last to leave. Helicopter tours are forced to end a few weeks before the end of season because of weather conditions. The Bonanza Bar & Grill closes first, but all the other bars and restaurants, except for the Sweet Tooth Café, close for at least part of the winter. The train stops making runs to the summit and into the Yukon Territory, except for a local Christmas ride in December. Even most of the hotels shut down. By the last week of September, all the ships are gone.

The Wells Fargo Bank, the Post Office, the Skagway City School (grades K-12), the Park Service, the police station, City Hall, the clinic (the closest hospital is in Juneau), the ferry dock, the IGA grocery store, and the You Say Tomato health food store all stay open year round, but most of these reduce hours. The liquor store remains open, obviously. All retail stores, except the locally owned Klothes Rush and Radio Shack, shut down. (Similar to the Starbucks, the Radio Shack is a freestanding store that has a franchising agreement with the national chain. During summers, it is a combination electronics, video rental, quickie mart, mountain shop and tanning salon.) No more Alaskan T-shirt Company or Del Sol or Sarah Palin store until next season.

The town's few restaurants open one by one after the first of the year. To satiate the winter cravings of the townspeople, local favorite Starfire, a surprisingly delicious and authentic Thai food spot, sells frozen portions of its most popular dishes to last the winter while it is closed. The international airport (though it does not provide services to large national airlines nor can the runway accommodate jets, it does service flights to Canada) remains open, but service is spotty and dependent on weather. Regional carriers, Wings of Alaska and Air Excursions, fly

mainly to Juneau but also to the nearby borough of Haines. They will even bring food delivered to the terminal in Juneau.

Living in a remote Alaskan village with no chain restaurants (or actual chain stores of any kind, save for a franchise[6] or two) means no fast food or delivery pizza or Chinese takeout—all the convenience food that we take granted in the lower 48. We often choose this type of food as a last resort or when we are pressed for time, but a funny thing about human desire is that we want what we cannot have. The absence of "crap" food makes it all the more desirable. Besides, one huge way that Alaska is *not* remote is that the same American pop culture is nearly as pervasive here as it is in the rest of the country. People watch television in Skagway, as they do in most of the villages, and television programs have *commercials*.

So, for the sake of comparison, let us imagine an average Tuesday night in an average American city. Let's say the time is late, perhaps midnight. *That's okay!* You can walk to Taco Bell; it's only two blocks away. Maybe you are not in the mood for Taco Bell—*that's okay too*! Burger King is only a two minute drive! *Okay*. Reset—maybe you live in the suburbs. Maybe the fast food joints do not stay open 24-7. *No problem!* It may be a longer drive, but almost every town in the U.S.A. has a fast food option open at all times within a twenty minute drive.

Now, if you live in Skagway, and it is during summer season or even part of the winter season when the road is relatively safe from landslides, you can make the two hour drive to Whitehorse, Canada to satisfy your fast food itch. Maybe you cannot personally make the drive,

[6] The distinction between a chain store and a franchise is that the chain store is owned and operated by the parent company, while the franchise pays licensing to use the logo and some merchandise from the brand. The decision, and risk, of opening a new chain store falls on the parent company to advocate expansion into untapped markets; whereas, small business owners who choose to franchise their existing operation are often making a marketing decision to bolster that store in an already established market. I.e., McDonalds or JCPenney or Walmart would never take on the risk of opening a chain store in a place like Skagway, both because of the limited population and because of the added costs of shipping goods.

but a friend is going. You give them some money and write your order on a notepad. If they drive there and back, only stopping for gas and idling in the drive-thru line, you can gorge on McDonald's French fries in just 270 minutes!

Ordering delivery food by plane becomes the relatively easy option for those living in a remote Alaskan village. So, a Skagway winter resident could call Domino's, for example, and pay for pizza plus delivery to the airport—30 minutes or less (ok, technically, Domino's can't legally guarantee thirty minutes anymore, but I'm trying to establish a time frame), wait for passengers and cargo to load first, then food—approximately 20 minutes, if the delivery is timed perfectly for takeoff…Flight to Skagway—45 minutes…Pick up from airport—10 minutes round-trip, unless you live in Dyea—30 minutes round-trip. If the timing works out perfectly, you might have a delicious, all-American delivery pizza in about two hours. Order *before* you get hungry.

Meanwhile, what does winter season look like for the seasonals? Besides the college kids who drive buses or work some of the lower end retail positions, some of the seasonals only work the Alaska summer season—meaning they return to one set home base for winter in another part of Alaska or the continental US. Either they work as independent contractors at home, allowing them to leave, or they own their own businesses that they can leave in the hands of an operating manager. Some manage to save enough to spend the entire off season travelling (or they wander until they fall into another short term position somewhere across the globe).

But a large portion spend the entire winter season working in another locale. Mike, a Canadian whose family owns a brewery/restaurant/bus tour company, runs bus tours in Colorado for ski season. Some of the tour guides lead diving and catamaran trips in Hawaii or the Caribbean. More experienced tour leaders sometimes run higher skill-level expeditions in

Patagonia or Kilimanjaro or wherever the next adventure is. The Westmark Hotel Company recruits mainly in Jamaica, Eastern Europe, and South Asia. Many of their hires are young and return to their families for the winter. Kevin's wife was originally hired by Westmark.

A majority of jewelry salespeople, as well as a representative portion from the other industries, follow the cruise ships to the Caribbean for the winter. It is typical for those originally from India to take 4-6 weeks' vacation following summer season to visit family in other U.S. states and Asia. By November, the ships have redirected south where millions of people flee bad weather elsewhere to bask in the temperate sunshine of the islands.

Within that segment that travels to the Caribbean, the majority head to St. Thomas, United States Virgin Islands. It is one of the most heavily visited islands overall and arguably the most commercial. In jewelry alone, the jobs are abundant, and stronger salespeople are recruited (both within their existing company and by competing companies looking to poach new talent) by the mid-point of summer season. There are over three hundred jewelry stores on St. Thomas alone. Strong sales figures could get you a nice salary offer, but being attractive and/or speaking another language can get you housing and spending allowances.

Throughout December, the Caribbean sales market and the visibility of the Alaskan Northern Lights are peaking. By January, the precipitation level has dropped in the islands enough to allow tourists to enjoy more than one day at a time in the sand without a downpour, and Skagway is hitting its coldest month. The good news up north at this time is that the days are now getting longer, compared to the previous month when residents could only enjoy a few hours of sunlight at a time.

In February, recruiting is picking up again for summer season, and up north, local businesses are opening their doors. One of the first to open for the season in Skagway is Glacial Smoothies, staffed by local high-school-aged to early-twenties bohemian kids, and serving healthier food options than the fried fare at the bars along Broadway Street.

By March, the rain is returning to the Caribbean, and Alaskans prepare for the spring thaw. The road into Canada is particularly dangerous at this time with the threat of avalanches, but locals are restless from months of quiet and dark and wind. Snowfall is moderate in Skagway, which is sheltered on three sides by mountains. But the wind chill breaks the will. It is relentless and evil and punishing. The native Tlingit people even named the area after the word for the white caps on the water that form from the intense wind, Shgagwéi. Ice usually poses a greater risk than snow in town, but the combination of packed snow, fresh drifts, and glacial runoff in the higher elevations creates a hazard that divides Skagway from Canadian civilization.

Caribbean seasonals begin packing merchandise in April, either to move location completely (for the smaller, vagabond style stores like Kevin's) or to consolidate pieces in their flagship stores. Locals in Skagway and throughout Alaska return to hiking, despite temperatures in the 20-40F range. It is springtime, and Skagway is about to come to life once again.

Store owners make final inspections in Skagway during this month. The city feels like a movie set: signs are painted, the wooden tombstones in the Gold Rush Cemetery are touched up with fresh paint; and the wooden sidewalk restoration commences. Hotels and hostels and bread and breakfasts spring to life. The flight schedule will increase soon to accommodate the influx of workers, and dock repairs run night and day.

All the apartments and houses that have been locked up and empty for over six months must be aired out, vacuumed, and examined. The pipes must be cleared of anti-freezing solution, so the water has to run continuously for a solid ten minutes at least to assure that it is potable. Personal greenhouses are active again. The daycare reopens so that locals who make their yearly salaries during the summer season can return to work. Every day, more and more people arrive. By the first week in May, there will be a ship in port.

Back in the Caribbean islands, rain is an almost every day occurrence. The ships have already returned to stateside ports for cleaning and maintenance before they redirect up north. Carnival season[7] begins in late April, and those left behind will bid good luck to their counterparts who depart for summer season. Most stores do not completely close, as there are always a few ships, but they significantly reduce their hours.

In May, Skagway is back in business.

ANN MOORE IS TRU-MOORE

Ann Prodo Elmer lived in New York State when she was first recruited to join the company for which I would later work. She spent a season in Ketchikan, performed well, and was invited back for a second season. Unlike many of the salespeople mentioned so far, Ann was not an actor or model or comedian or magician. She was a married mother of four children who had worked in the jewelry department of a JCPenney near her home.

Her children grew up, and her marriage (the second go-round with the same man; they had divorced and remarried) was dissolving. I asked Ann a few times during the five years I

[7] It is a period of celebration and parades with religious and pagan roots, similar to the world famous Carnival in Brazil or Mardi Gras in New Orleans. Each of the Caribbean islands has its own season with its own traditions, celebrated in varying months among the islands.

knew her about the details of that marriage. She was always guarded, but her reserve seemed to be out of respect for the privacy of the man who was the father of her children.

As a more experienced team member, Ann was placed in Skagway for her second summer. She held manager approval status, meaning she was a closer who could offer additional discounts above the staff limitations. She never abused her power, though; similar to Kevin, she was equally as measured and fair. In fact, she stayed out of other people's sales for the most part and partnered with the other middle-aged salesperson—Andy.

Chain smoking, bug eyed, heavily accented Andy. He was raised in Spain but of Indian descent. He was charming, engaging, a little weird, and prone to tall tales. He and I watched Spain win the World Cup on the big screen at The Skagway Brewing Company on a Sunday morning, drinking bloody marys. He told me that he had been a goalie for the Spanish national team, but I have never found proof of that claim.

All three of us were working in the big store one day, and I was showing pieces to a customer. I called Andy into the sale to close, but the customer waffled on the final decision. Andy wandered away to pick up an item from a showcase, and the customer followed. At some point, Ann pulled into the sale while I was left putting away pieces in another showcase. Because they had an understanding of partnership, they would enter each other's sales interchangeably. I tried to jump back in. The whole thing got too crowded, and they wrote up the sale. I was left off.

It was the only time I ever got angry with Ann. All of the salespeople, even the most even-tempered and passive of the bunch, got into regular fights. No exaggeration—the days that did not end with a long, dragged out conflict resolution were a rare exception. Almost every day saw misunderstandings and tiffs about who spoke to a customer first or who showed a piece or

who sent the customer from one store to another. On top of an already twelve-hour day, we would regularly spend an extra hour after closing trying to resolve disagreements over sales credit. Sometimes we would spend an hour going over credit for sales that didn't even close.

Anyway, I was pushed out of the sale and lost credit, but I didn't stay mad at Ann. I was sometimes more angry with Kevin, who, in his desire to be liked, could be infuriatingly noncommittal. I suppose he was trying to conserve his energy in an environment that was always charged, but I still see it as his biggest flaw as a manager. He failed to stand up to his bullying employees, and he also failed to stand up to his equally bullying boss.

With her motherly reason and unending calm, Ann had a way of letting the constant conflict dissipate on its own. Even when tempers flared or customers became belligerent, she always couched her carefully chosen words in a soft, firm, cadence. She was older and wiser than the other girls, secure in her place in this microcosm, with a resemblance to Mama Cass Elliot--a miniature version in stature and full-blown version in demeanor.

After complaining about a lack of acceptable produce in the local grocery, a group of us spent a night in Whitehorse, Yukon Territory, to go grocery shopping in the big city of 30,000 people. Next to Skagway, Whitehorse is an oasis: fast food chains (both American and the ubiquitous Canadian chain, Tim Horton's), two movie theaters, a sushi place, a Walmart, and big box grocery stores. Upon return to Skagway, I gorged on raw kale for two meals in a row. My stomach started cramping by the end of the workday, and I writhed in pain on my bedroom floor until the heaves came. When I opened my eyes after emptying the contents of my belly into an old mixing bowl I found, I noticed red streaks and panicked. Finding Ann relaxing in the television room, I carried the bowl to her, holding my gut, and said, "I think I threw up blood."

Without as much as a blink of the eye, she responded evenly: “Are you sure? Let me see. Do you need to go to the clinic?” More importantly, she gently persuaded me that I was probably wrong, that if I were throwing up blood, my other bodily functions would be more severely impacted. She was a mom. She had dealt with this sort of thing before.

But Ann wouldn’t let on that she was in the middle of a crisis of sorts, mid-life or whatever it’s called. She carried herself professionally, respected her co-workers, and arrived punctually. The morning after my sick night, I went to work exhausted from vomiting all night only to get permission to return home. But Ann never arrived that day. She called the store eventually with a convoluted story about getting stuck in Whitehorse overnight.

I woke up in the early afternoon and stumbled around the kitchen looking for something mild. As I sat on the couch with a bowl of instant mashed potatoes, I heard a commotion from the front foyer. “Ann with the plan!” I greeted her with the phrase I had assigned her earlier in the summer. I was surprised to see her, but she was even more surprised to see me.

“What are you doing here?”

“What are YOU doing here?”

My answer was easy, but Ann brought new meaning to beating around the bush. First she told me the same story that she had told Kevin, something about getting in a car with a local to make a grocery run. Then the details started to morph. She didn’t have her wallet. They were stargazing instead of shopping. She would promise to tell me the whole story, but would later renege, again and again. Eventually she told me that she had a secret but couldn’t tell me. Eventually she revealed that she had never left Skagway the night before. I remember her staring

at me, eyebrows raised, expecting me to somehow piece together the real story. I was dehydrated and nauseated.

In the years following, her kids would visit. Bruce, her eldest son, would work with me my second season. We would meet up for barbecues and drinks, and eventually the conversation would turn toward that first summer and Ann's shenanigans. Easy to blush, she would always stop me from divulging the dirtiest bits of that summer, even though I am pretty sure her adult children were not naïve about Skagway's version of an adult summer camp.

As most of us made plans to either return home or relocate to St. Thomas that September of 2010, Ann found a place to stay over in Skagway and a winter job at the Wells Fargo branch. Almost every year, at least one seasonal decides to become a year-round resident. It's up to the locally born to decide at what stage the year-round resident becomes a true local. By all accounts, Ann has fully assimilated.

She joined the two local fraternal organizations, the Eagles and the Elks Clubs that stay open after the tourists leave for the season and offer a quieter alternative venue for locals who prefer not to mix with the seasonals during the summer. Eventually, she finalized her divorce back in New York State and moved in with locally born Steve Moore. After a surprise engagement, the two were married on February 14, 2014.

Not many prospectors got rich during the Gold Rush, but a lot of entrepreneurs did. The tiny little landing depot grew into a town when outsiders decided to stay and build businesses. In a town with limited upward corporate mobility, financial success requires calculated risk. The town constantly changes, and for better or worse, it is growing. Find an opening, a need, and fill it. Ann came to Skagway as a recruit, and she stayed on as a prospector of sorts, seeking a major

life change. Eventually she became an entrepreneur when she left a senior position at Wells Fargo.

In spring of 2014, Ann opened TruMoore Courier service with assistance from her new husband Steve. While she ran the business full time, he managed Sourdough Car Rentals, owned by another Skagway native. TruMoore offers package delivery in and out of Skagway, including service to Juneau or Canada, taxi service around town, small group tours, and miscellaneous signatory services. It stays open year round, providing designated driver transportation and messenger service for those unable to get around in winter conditions. As with most Skagway businesses, the bulk of the money is made in the summertime. Ann is not rich yet. But in the true Alaskan spirit, she has found freedom and autonomy in working for herself.

During her inaugural tourist season, Ann found her niche by transporting hikers to and from the Chilkoot trailhead in neighboring Dyea. Maintained by the combined services of the American National Park Service and Parks Canada, hikers are required to register, a process that requires a valid passport and a background check, before undergoing the 33-mile trek. NPS claims that over 3000 trekkers undertake the hike each year, but that doesn't include day trippers and those who turn around at the border without registering. In fact, there is no sure way to know exactly how many people complete the trail, but it is clearly more than the official figures show.

Canadian law prohibits any felon from entering the country. This means any violation that is considered a felony in Canada itself, not in the country where the crime took place. A DUI can keep a person from setting foot inside the boundaries of our northern neighbor. Therefore, stories about entering Canada illegally are abundant. It took me a good many years to finally hike the trail because my most willing and capable hiking buddy, Richard, had a felony on his record that prevented him obtaining legal access.

The present-day trail is an approximation of the most traversed route of the older of two trails used during the Gold Rush. Campsites maintained along the site mark actual camp and town sites from the late 1890s.Wagon wheels, canoes, food waste and other debris left from the stampeders remain on the trail, and removing these relics can be punished with hefty fines. Shortly before I passed over the trail in 2014, an unidentified hiker had collected the memorabilia into several piles, creating a huge headache for the National Park Service. The ranger at Sheep Camp told us of the debacle during the nightly camp presentation, and half-jokingly asked if anyone present was an archaeologist willing to help with the restoration.

Back in Dyea, the road wound up in elevation and eventually rose about a hundred feet overlooking a miniature inlet known as the flats—the transitional marshland between the Taiya River and firm ground. Eagles, bears, caribou and all types of wildlife roam the area, and tourists request Ann's services for a quieter, more personal version of a nature tour than what is typically offered in the packages sold on the ship.

I rode along with Ann early one morning just a few days after I completed hiking the trail. As we waited for our riders while parked in front of the Westmark Hotel, she told me that she had been considering the business venture for at least four years as she "got kind of tired of corporate America" at the bank. Her exposure to both visitors and locals on a regular basis at the branch lent itself to absorbing ideas about how to better service the area.

> "It's a controversial place to work, whereas what's important to this community is services and businesses that contribute to the community and the overall good of the community. A lot of locals didn't see that in the bank and they really wanted their former Alaska National Bank to be here because they felt they had more

> of a connection with the community and wanting to help; whereas, Corporate America Bank is all about—what I hear—all about money. All about business, business, business, and doing things a certain way that may work fine in the lower 48 but not so hot in Skagway, Alaska."

Ann saw her hikers and got out to help them load. They exchanged good mornings and let her know that they still needed to check out of the hotel. She offered the already opened trunk for their packs. "First time on the Chilkoot?" she asked them amiably as I waited in the front seat, trying not to either stare or yawn too much. Still exhausted from the trail and having sleep disruptions like I always did in Alaska, I was in desperate need of coffee. By this point, in late July, the days were getting shorter by close to four minutes a day, but that still equaled about seventeen hours of full light plus another two hours of twilight. At summer solstice in Skagway, there were only about two and a half hours of full darkness.

Ann gracefully interjected a question of payment just as the bags were secured and seating began. The family had driven in two days earlier from Calgary—their first time in Skagway. Ann introduced me and explained that I was conducting an interview having to do with the service she provides. I added, "She's that good."

She offered her assistance in answering their questions; in other words, tour guiding was included in the transportation package. They were quiet. *If their experience mirrors mine,* I thought as Ann drove us onto Broadway Street, *adrenalin and anxiety about the trail has tied their tongues.*

Ann, though, was thoroughly warmed up from chatting with me. She probed them with small talk. Yes, they had a chance to walk around and do some shopping. They ate at the Chilkoot Room in the hotel, and they would recommend it. They had some pizza, visited the converted brothel (The Red Onion), and took in the Days of ’98 historical show.

The dad spoke for all. He was undeniably positive. He gave every outing he mentioned an affirming dose of approval. He started offering other bits of information about their travels related to the Gold Rush, including a stop in Dawson City, Yukon, the site of the original stake that sparked the Klondike Gold Rush. He even mentioned reading books about the era, including those by his fellow countryman, Pierre Berton.

Because of Klondike Highway access, Canadians visit Skagway with frequency. Canada Day and Labour Day both take place during summer season as well as various local holidays that create long weekends. I met a lot of Canadians while living and visiting Skagway. It’s not prudent to generalize about an entire group, but this *particular* tourist from Calgary was exceptionally smart and genuinely polite, and that fact did not surprise me.

Ann recounted some of the research she had done lately, and the Canadian responded to each of her points with an obliging “ayup.” While the American accent varies regionally, west coasters often have an upturned ending to their sentences, as if each line were punctuated by a question mark. I would describe the west coast Canadian accent as similar, but combining the question mark with its own affirmation. For example, an American might end a sentence with a variation of “you know?” The Canadian equivalent would be “ya knooow, yah.”

The Canadian referred again to some of the more famous works of Pierre Berton, who died in 2004 after an illustrious career as a journalist, documentarian, and historian. He even

wrote a book about the national character of his country. There was both a national historical honor and a school named after him. His childhood home in Dawson City hosts a writers retreat for published Canadian writers.

We had just turned on to Dyea Road at this point. Even though we were only a few miles from the pickup point at the hotel, driving was slow through town. Pedestrians crossed quickly and haphazardly, with little regard for autos and buses, and tour vehicles moved slowly in caution and deliberate pacing to allow for scenic picture taking. About a mile up, there was a turnout point that tours often stopped at because it offers a perfect, postcard worthy vista view of the city. This picturesque view includes, to the right—cruise ships foregrounded against a white and green mountain border on either side of the crystal blue of the Pacific. To the left—the bridge that marks the end of numerically marked Skagway streets at 26th, crowning the tempestuous Skagway River running underneath that releases glacial runoff dancing maddeningly over the a bed of smooth rocks until it reaches the welcoming ocean.

The Canadian was fascinated by the stories of the people of the era. With perfect simplicity and equally poetic sentiment, he declared, "Everybody had drama back then." Ann agreed, continuing:

> "There was a lot going on. You had the Depression…you had war. And the neat thing about the Gold Rush was that it brought people from all walks of life once the word got out….There's lots of famous people that came out of it and famous sayings, like 'mining the miners'."

The Canadian had never heard that phrase. Actually, neither had I. Ann explained:

> "People discovered that they weren't going to be able to stake claims because they had already been staked by the time they reached their destinations. They set up tents along the trails, and they carried supplies because Canada had put in a 2000 pound supply [requirement] before they could cross over. They set up tents that would address the supplies needed. Thus, the term mining the miners."

I confess that this study of modern day Skagway is built upon the same principle. Ann and I mined the cruise ship passengers, similar to Kevin's description of the fish and the sharks. She was now mining the hikers. I am pretty sure that I was now mining the miners who mine the miners, but I was doing it for information rather than money.

Ann mentioned that Donald Trump's grandfather built his real estate empire on capital raised from a bed and breakfast on the trail during the Klondike Gold Rush. The Canadian, who seemed to already know most of the information Ann was relaying, was finally surprised. "Is that right?" he exclaimed, in a gosh-darn-it-would-ya-believe-it way. The founder of Nordstrom's, Ann added, sold shoes to prospectors on the trail.

The Canadian dead-panned his reaction. "Most of the people that really got rich up here, except for the few who really struck it rich on a claim…were servicing the miners, easing them of their burden of money." We passed Ragged Ass Road, and he asked Ann if that was the official road name. She confirmed, and he told us that there is another road of the same name in "Yellowknife, eh" that gets stolen a lot. Rather than try to prevent the theft, the locals figured they better start selling the signs in the gift shop. Canadian rock singer Tom Cochrane named an album and a song after it. This time, Ann had learned something new. "You've filled in a piece

of the puzzle for me now," she says. International boundaries were crossed; connections were made.

She continued explaining why most of these road names are new. Skagway, like most Alaskan villages, has no home mail delivery, greatly reducing the importance of physical addresses. Giving directions in town usually involves explaining location in relation to something else, e.g. *go past the church, look for the blue house, you'll see two dogs in the yard*. For those Skagway residents along Dyea Road, as well as the dozen or so residents of Dyea proper, home addresses are marked by the mile marker of their location.

Residents pay for a post office box. The lobby remains open after hours so that the boxes can be accessed 24-7. Socially, the relatively large P.O. Box lobby occasionally takes on the feel of a coffee shop or park—come to check the mail, stay to visit friends. During summer months, the line for the attendants often wraps in a circle around the cozy lobby and sometimes runs out into the street. Even with additional temporary staff (most of the government entities in town take on seasonal employees, including the police station), long lines make for flared tempers and confirm the more universally held belief that the postal workers are grumpy.

As we hit the last portion of the paved section of Dyea road, the Canadian asked the million dollar question. "So how many people live—I imagine this place clears out in winter—so how many people live here year round? What's the population?" If I took a survey of all locals, all seasonals, maybe even Canadians or other Alaskans in nearby villages, I imagine that this would be the number one question asked about Skagway. Ann started with the census, explaining its unreliability, based on home ownership and such, and said that many residents leave for a three to four month period at least each year. She guessed a true total of around 600.

The Canadian intermittently made comparisons to towns in the Yukon and the Northwest Territory that he visits for weeks at a time as his job requires. Life in harsher climates divides into two seasons, manageable and less manageable. Skagway, and a large portion of Alaska, may be called hybrid in this way—American in name but Canadian in practical considerations of climate and lifestyle.

The ore dock in Skagway operates year-round, as an essential export site for Canadian mineral production, and barges import goods through the same waterway. Some of the cruise ships include Vancouver in their itineraries, spreading the wealth brought in by the industry. By extension of the metaphor, both countries mine the miner, but the partnership is largely symbiotic.

We had reached the narrowest part of the dirt section of the road that hugs the mountainside with an ominous drop off to our left side. Private cars and tours usually followed an informal agreement, stopping completely at wider sections to let those approaching from the opposite side pass. As Ann was listing the springtime distractions, including a ski tournament and sled dog racing, a rental car flew past the van with only an inch or two to spare.

"It's a 25 mile per hour zone; I'm already doing 30. I can't imagine what he's doing!" Ann chuckled nervously. I was nervous for her and us. This section of the road is rebuilt every year as the sandy foundation breaks and washes away. The rainforest climate made for relatively mild winters compared to the Alaskan interior, but the precipitation levels also destabilize the soil in the back country. Gold Rush homesteads and business fronts in Dyea and along the trail frequently disappear beneath the soft shifting ground.

The Canadian courteously changed the subject, asking where the town gasoline supply came from. The answer was barge tankers, serviced by Petro, the energy company; and the supply, both automobile and heating fuel, is stored in containers near the airport. Ann did not say how much home heating costs, and I always had it compensated with my work packages. But gas prices ranged from $5-6/ gallon during my entire tenure in the city. In the state where it is drilled, prices are higher than it is in the continental states.

After ambiguously referring to his work in the northern territories, the Canadian now revealed that he was an "oil field guy." He worked for Conoco Phillips, and next he tried to explain Canadian taxes. "More than the cost of the crude is taxes in Canada…so our gasoline and your gasoline cost almost the exact same, but Canada heaps gasoline taxes on there."

His explanation offered little in-depth analysis as to the overall GST (goods and services tax), but his reference to the pie chart shown at Canadian filling stations did shed light on that anomaly for me, at least. The tax system is complicated, but aims to be transparent, varies by province, and requires pie charts displaying tax rates at those filling stations. Anyway, lower Alaskan tax rates incentivize Canadians to visit Alaska and, more importantly for the local Alaskan economy, to spend money.

Alaska is one of five states in the union with no sales tax (income tax is a whole separate complex issue), but local jurisdictions retain the right to charge a city sales percentage. All three main cruise ship ports do so; Skagway charges 5% but only during the summer tourist season. This is why, when haggling over price, more experienced salespeople need to clarify "out the door." Adding hundreds of dollars in tax after negotiating for the better part of an hour is a deal breaker. If an associate forgets to add the tax into the discounted price, the customer usually asks for it to be absorbed. Someone has to pay it, and it must show on the receipt.

The wife remained silent through all of this. Ann mentioned that her brother-in-law flies for Conoco Phillips, and the Canadian was good friends with the aviation safety manager, but couldn't remember his name. He nudged his wife who, still glassy eyed, shrugged. Doesn't matter. Northern residents know a lot of bush pilots. It's a way of life.

Ann's cell rang a pleasant wind chime-sounding signal, and she picked up.

"Hi, Cathy," she said over the line. She must have had the volume up. I heard a woman on the other end respond "Hi, Ann, how are you?" The conversation was short as the cell service started to fade. Ann promised to visit the woman in ten minutes.

The Canadian asked if people live in the Dyea settlement. "Twelve," I said, and they both laughed. "It's a little more than twelve," Ann corrected me. "But not by much."

The Dyea settlement ballooned to 10,000 before Skagway was even a factor in the Klondike Gold Rush. But after the discovery of the flatter White Pass trail, settlers shifted to the land area of what is now Skagway. The WP&YR (White Pass & Yukon Route) Train, built many years later, follows an approximation of that trail, but it has not been restored and maintained like the older Chilkoot. Now a ghost town, Dyea might have been forgotten altogether without restoration efforts from the National Park Service.

I took a bike tour through the Dyea flats my first season. Very few remnants remain except for a sunken manufacturing building, one false front, bits of a tiny shack where pies were sold, and the Slide Cemetery, a burial site for prospectors killed in a horrific landslide on the Chilkoot. Morbid as it may be, cemeteries play a large role in marking the history of the town. I visited a couple along the trail as well.

We had arrived at the Chilkoot Trailhead. The area was busy enough, with two other parked vans, and another cruised past us, making this section resemble a park in a more urban area. Tour leaders were shuttling walking groups to and from the restroom facilities (with non-potable water and no electricity). I recognized one of the tour guides, a young guy with a bowl cut. The company he worked for leads groups up the first mile of the trail where they meet up with more guides to float back down the river on rafts. Our entire staff, minus Kevin and the Puerto Rican actress, took that tour my first year. It was very relaxing.

"Good luck guys," I told the family. Ann helped them unload, and I watched them struggle with monster packs. With cooking equipment, their loads probably weighed over 50 pounds. Ann offered to take their picture, but their camera had a timer so they declined. They were ready to go. As Ann started closing up the van doors, the man offered me good luck in return, then said to Ann, "I hope the lady doesn't slam you or get you in trouble or anything." The statement took me by surprise in its cynicism, but Ann laughed. *Canadians.*

I flipped through some locally themed books that she keeps tucked into the door pockets. She recommended a collection called *Skagway* by Jeff Brady. I would buy an autographed copy of it a few days later at the Skagway News Depot & Books. Brady, a native of my home state of North Carolina, also attended my alma mater, University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, and first visited Skagway looking for summer work. Kismet.

Ann stopped at the Chilkoot Trail Outpost to follow up on the earlier phone call. There were a cluster of little log cabins that hikers can rent on the way in or out from the trail. Each one was labelled with campsite names from the trail and adorned with brilliant flowers at each entrance. I was still sleepy; the lush vegetation affected me like the poppy field in *The Wizard of Oz*. I closed my eyes and leaned my head back on the seat.

I was always able to get away with less sleep than normal when I was in Alaska during the peak hours of summer. Something about the constant daylight tricks the body, it seemed. Plus, constant stimulation kept me alert, whether I was working or hiking or interacting with a segment of the 10,000 passengers who came in by ship on the busiest days. On that day, though, the early morning, the gentle rocking of the van, the wilderness, even Ann's calm voice were hypnotizing me. She returned quickly. I woke up.

With the barrage of reality television shows based in Alaska over the last few years, mainlanders can feasibly study and somewhat understand the level of isolation that comes with living in most of the state. What I don't think is always as easy to understand is the level of resourcefulness that it takes to live what mainlanders might see as a normal life. When not driving tourists, Ann handles courier business for Southeast Alaska natives.

The nearest village to Skagway is Haines, a 15-minute flight or 45-minute ferry ride. However, the ferry costs $31, and the plane asks over $100. One Haines resident found a color of paint that he wanted available in the Skagway True Value Hardware Store. Instead of paying the $62 dollar minimum round trip plus the cost of the paint, he paid Ann cost plus service to buy it and deliver to Wings of Alaska for air delivery.

Easy, non-labor-intensive, based-strictly-in-town jobs do not have a set price. Ann asks the customer to determine "what's the job worth?" and tip her. I suppose the reality of seeing the same people so often maintains a level of fairness in tipping. For more difficult jobs (Ann's example is lawn mowing) she quotes a price and completes the job upon approval of that charge. The customer does not always approve, so she moves on, no haggling.

One aspect of the business that failed was errand-making in Whitehorse. Because so many locals and seasonals rely on the Canadian town to make bulk purchases, grocery and otherwise, she figured she could set up a shopping service allowing people to stay at work. What she forgot to account for is that because the trip is already so popular, friends and acquaintances make requests by word of mouth when they know someone is already going. Besides, a road trip out of a small town like Skagway is a nice respite. Plenty of people I know, myself included, have been willing to take on the expense just to get a change in scenery, including a square mile cluster of sand dunes near Carcross, Yukon Territory, an area somewhat erroneously referred to as the world's small desert.

Some of the services available in Whitehorse cannot be easily delegated. I made two trips up my second season to visit a veterinarian. My kitten needed vaccinations spread out by a month. Despite an overwhelmingly large percentage of residents with pets, there is no in-town vet just as there is no permanent doctor. Travelling specialists rotate in and out of villages all over the state, and likewise, two veterinarians from Alabama spend a week in Skagway each summer taking appointments in a shed behind the police station. I took advantage of the visiting services later that summer, dropping off the cat for neutering. I returned to retrieve him from the tiny room, lined with cages.

The two animal surgeons had set up a small operating table. One large and newly-anaesthetized dog lay on a towel as his owner comforted him. Two other humans waited patiently nearby, and when I found my little guy's cage, facing the operating table, I could not stop myself from staring at what I remember as a beagle or some other small breed, back down and spread eagle on the table, out cold and drooling as the vet removed the poor thing's testicles. My cat, with a cat's eye view of the whole procedure, was noticeably disturbed. I took him out,

cradled him, and walked him back to my apartment. Feeling extra guilty, I gave him lots of treats that day.

Ann had earned a good reputation as a trustworthy and helpful person at the bank. Having a visible position and marrying a native of the city provided her with a strong foundation for publicizing a new business. "So, no one remembers 'Jewelry Ann'?" I asked, and she laughed heartily.

"No. A lot of people will ask me how did I get to Skagway, and if I mention jewelry, which I do, because it is part of my story, I can almost always hear the voice drop off of 'Ohhh…really?'" She continued to chuckle.

We share the discomfort in telling people our connection to the jewelry industry in town. I can understand some of the backlash, as misguided as a lot of it is, but what confounds me is that often people outside the jewelry world will downplay or deny the bias or ill sentiment. To me, the feeling was palpable immediately. First off, I was warned about it by that friend I mentioned earlier when I described the days after my job interview. Secondly, as a hiker/adventurer, I found myself in circles that wouldn't mingle with the jewelry clique. Forgetting that I was part of that world, they occasionally let slip comments about "dirtbags," "suits," "foreigners," and "Indians." Jewelry salespeople, sometimes, are seen as the equivalent of ambulance chasing lawyers; we were the cruise ship chasers.

The jewelry people sometimes earned their bad reputations. They dressed more formally than the rest of the town—suits, shiny shoes, makeup, coifed and gelled hair. Between 7pm and 9pm, the bars fill with half "suits" and half "torn jeans and stained t-shirt" types. Jewelry hours are longer than most others, so the workers don't change before heading out for a beer and

dinner. I have seen the jewelry guys (particularly the men) flash their money a bit too freely, waving bills or snapping at waitresses. The pay scale in jewelry ranks higher than most of the other seasonal positions, and this can foster arrogance.

With money to burn, some of the guys drink way too much. Fights are a regular occurrence in town, and not just among the jewelry crew. However, one of the most notorious troublemakers was a jewelry guy from 2010 season who got kicked out of every single bar in town. The last one was the Bonanza, the favorite watering hole for the jewelry crowd. The jewelry guy threw a fit over being cut off and threw a pint glass at Dan, who is now the bar manager.

Selling and even handling big diamonds and gold takes confidence and ego. One must have a healthy amount of aggression to succeed in sales of any kind. This type of personality can clash with an otherwise earthy, hippie, laid-back or just plain blue-collar community. Often, the jewelry guys stick to themselves (which doesn't help the reputation) because of the longer hours, their age demographic, their religious affiliation, and other factors. Salespeople from different stores mingle because so many have connections that extend beyond Skagway or Alaska. A lot of them grew up together in St. Thomas and the other islands. Ann never got to experience the Caribbean season.

She pulled over as we were talking, and I immediately lost my train of thought. "What are we looking at?" I asked. She had pulled the van to the side of the road, and when prompted she pointed out a bald eagle in a tree branch. Wildlife was always just close enough that you automatically scan the horizon, but just rare enough that an appearance still evoked wonder. I remarked that this was the closest I had ever gotten to a bald eagle (although I have had multiple

close up encounters with bears). Sad thing was, a lot of jewelry folks come for season after season and never saw an eagle or bear this close or climb any mountains or scale any rock faces.

Seemingly oblivious to us, the eagle stood erect on a limb as it swayed gently. I called the scene poetic, and she agreed. “With a misty backdrop,” she added. Layer upon layer, the deeper we examined the scenery the more surreal it seemed. So many tourists carry those massive DSLR cameras, bragging about the candids they stole in the backcountry. Sometimes I would wonder if the images lowered the value of the experience. I found it way more powerful to just sit and watch.

“He has a very satisfied look,” I said. “His little hooked beak.” I meant that it looked like he was smiling. I was reminded in that moment, of the bald eagle’s extraordinary vision. They see more spectrum of color than humans. Ann compared their eyes to polarized sunglasses, spotting fish through water at great distance.

The van got moving again, and we returned to a discussion of the townspeople. “Local opinion is that all the stores are owned by the cruise ships, which is not true. They just are, in great [pro]portion, operated because of the cruise ships.” Walking down Broadway Street, I heard tourists and even vendors making these types of claims. In actuality, the Westmark is owned by Princess Cruise Lines. The hotels service guests not associated with the ship, but having ship-owned hotels in port also plays a function in their combined land and sea tours.

“It doesn’t serve to offend local businesses,” Ann continued. “It actually really helps the local community, having something like that going on because it does draw people in and they do use local businesses while they’re here, because they stay for a couple—two, three days—before they go out of town on their land tour.” The hotel also employs locals. The general

manager of the hotel was my landlord my fourth season. He works year-round for the company. Even though the hotel closes for the winter, he recruits for the next season during the winter, travelling all over the world.

None of the retail shops on dry land are owned by any of the cruise lines. For the local business people, I understand that accusing the ships of a monopoly is a sales tactic to beat out these larger companies. For the tourists, I guess that the misunderstanding arrives from a lack of context. Seeing advertisements on board for businesses on land implies a correlation, but instead of interpreting this as one business servicing another, some tourists assume it to be a conglomerate. In truth, two of the larger companies that operate the ship promotion business (the marketing strategy I described earlier) are contractors hired by the ship. These are separate businesses that operate for the most part, silently. The third, Royal Media, is a subsidiary of the Royal Caribbean line, but even still, this arm is a contractor working for rather than with the retail companies on land.[8]

Further adding to the confusion, all the cruise lines operate retail sales onboard the ship, including jewelry sales. Some of these are actual ship-owned shops, and some are partnerships made with established chains, like *Columbian Emeralds*. The stores onboard and on land also carry many of the same jewelry and watch brands, like *Levian* or *Sophia Fiori* or *Tag Heuer*. It's the same as a person walking into a mall back home and seeing the same coat or necklace or

[8] Just to illustrate how recursive the whole industry is, I want to point out that the cruise ships' real monetary stakes in the promotion game come from the fact that many of the same items sold on land are also sold onboard. While tourists spend just hours in port, the shops onboard stay open during the entire cruise and can compete with the in port stores by having repeated contact with a potential buyer as they compare onboard and in port pricing. This is also a point of logic that the locals and competing businesses fail to acknowledge. Why would the cruise lines own stores both onboard and in port when the increased competition, coupled with negotiable sales prices, drives the final asking price down? The simple fact is that the in port sales market arose because of the cruise industry but independent of it. The promotion business allows the cruise ships to dip back into earning potential that they were losing to the jewelry stores.

shoes or whatever in both Macys and a local chain. For Skagway locals, the difference simply doesn't matter. The ships are the other, an invasion that they tolerate five months at a time until peace and quiet returns in October.

I commented that Ann's point of view was well-rounded. Because she was not born there, and she chose it as her home, she sees it as "paradise." She also realized that those who have lived there their whole lives in this place have witnessed it change, saying "that's the part that bothers them." With increased population and tourism, regulation increases, and that does not necessarily meld with the libertarian spirit of the locals. For example, the state offers little restriction on guns, possession and use, but the NPS monitors all three on federally protected land. Trail access is also subject to a fee where it used to be free.

One of my earliest interactions with Ann's now husband, Steve, involved a heated dispute about the NPS. His opinion was that their presence was largely unlawful. I saw their presence as necessary for preservation. While I still don't agree with his position, I do understand better where it comes from. For locals, their sacred rural habitat now feels too "urban". Despite resistance, the town depends on the tourism industry that provokes these regulations. "Tourism," Ann said, "is the largest employer in Skagway."

Ann thought that the vitriol from the other side, the visitors, toward the massive consumerism in town is directed more strongly toward the jewelry stores simply because these types of shops are not expected. Tour guides also flood the market, vying to catch a piece of the pie, but the displeasure of locals and visitors alike flows less frequently toward these groups simply because wilderness exploration seems congruent with the setting. There is no high pressure selling in the tour world—either the customer wants to go see a bear or not. The only

question is price. Regardless, tour sellers still badmouth other tours, which Ann saw as bad for the whole town.

"There's something for everybody. Let the tours speak for themselves."

Ann's admiration for Skagway speaks for itself. She loves this town—the mountains, the saltwater and the freshwater all in one place. She said that she made a decision to stay just three weeks into her Skagway season, and that fall she felt mostly welcomed immediately. She was 47 when she decided to make this huge change, a shift in more than geography, but she felt that she "needed to stand up for something [she] wanted to do."

We were back in town now, and we passed the Blue House where we lived that summer of 2010. "So, you're here for good," I said, rather than asked.

"I am," she confirmed.

HOUSING AND THE BEARS WHO CLIMB THEM

The Blue House on Tenth Street that Ann and I shared with three other women fell into disrepair long before we got there. Kevin and other co-workers tell stories explaining the origins of various carpet stains and holes in the wall that date back over multiple seasons. Both bathrooms had drainage problems, mold, and peeling tiles and wallpaper. One tub was missing a faucet handle and a wrench stayed permanently anchored next to it to turn on the hot water. But, all in all, we were lucky. We had laundry in that house and a relatively short walking commute (although seven blocks at night in 20-30º weather with the omnipresent threat of bear sightings, especially after a few *Alaskan Amber* beers was less than comfortable).

The town has a housing shortage. Not every employer provides housing, and a common residence for tour guides is a tent along a creek bed. Not only does this present the obvious issues of warmth and exposure to the elements as well as limited access to showers (I even knew a Jewell Gardens waitress who camped out, which is particularly problematic since the job of food server necessitates cleanliness), but bears make it impossible to store food and toiletries. Tales of bear sightings are frequently swapped among the tour guides, not only from experience on the trail but also from encounters in the middle of an average night.

I occupied my favorite apartment in Skagway during my second season. My new company provided, among other things, higher housing standards. I was now working for a ship-promoted, international shop with another prime location (right next to the Red Onion Saloon) and a much smaller staff. I had spent the winter in St. Thomas with Kevin and the crew from Alaska. My co-worker, Filia, had left the first company, out of combined frustration with the amoral husband-wife team and a desire to reunite with her boyfriend working on another island. She promoted a handful of us to work with her, her soon-to-be husband Greg, and three existing employees once we all returned to Skagway.

Greg's old apartment was across the street from the Blue House. He and Filia would now take over the manager's apartment above the store, and I got first pick of the newbies. Now I would live by myself, in a sizeable space (nothing massive, but by Alaska standards, about 500 square feet is plenty), fully furnished with much nicer cookware, a clean, updated bathroom, and an amazing, burning space heater. The only problem was the hungry bear.

Publicly maintained trash cans all over the state have closed lids that require opposable thumbs. Most of the dumpsters in town operate the same way. Our landlord, an otherwise very personable and attentive fellow, apparently saw no need to provide this style of receptacle. We

had the good, old-fashioned big green bins whose lids would snap into place, provided the can was not filled to overflowing. The building actually housed four apartments, with a total of seven people, so that was often not the case.

Not that it mattered. If the cans were properly closed at night, the bear would just turn them over. For almost the entirety of that summer, between 2 and 3a.m., I would hear a thump thump coming from my backyard. Even though I was no longer a rookie, I did not make the immediate connection between the night-thumping and the strewn trash in the mornings. It could have been the neighbors' children having night terrors or drunk people walking home. Finally, my co-worker, Stacy, mentioned that her husband José had been cleaning up after the bear.

We were only two streets over from the campsite where the waitress and other workers pitched tents. Sightings seemed particularly frequent that summer, and the congregation of so many humans in one place, with the food smells that they bring with them, can lure a bear deeper away from the woods and into populated areas. This is why wildlife rangers and legitimate guides will warn visitors less familiar with wild animals not to attempt to feed them. It can be a death sentence for the animal. It becomes accustomed to the food source, returning again and again, getting closer to human populations. When that happens in Alaska, often the bear gets shot.

Carol lived upstairs from me, and we talked more and more about that bear as the season progressed. We were determined to have a real, live, bear sighting, but we agreed that we preferred for it to take place from the safety of Carol's doorway. The entrance to her apartment was upstairs and overlooked the backyard where the trashcans were. I faced the front, and worried about running right into the beast as I turned the corner blind to the trash area. We somehow brought up the idea of leaving some trash or moving the can to the front of the

building, but decided against that when considering Stacy's kids played out front until close to dark most nights.

Finally, it was our last night in Skagway. The whole crew needed to wake up early to catch the morning ferry, and Greg was picking us up in shifts. Carol and I would go first, so we had to wake early anyway. We decided that we would set the alarm extra early, and Carol would keep watch for our trash buddy. Sure enough, my phone rang sometime after 2a.m. I heard it ringing in a dream, moments later opening my eyes to see a voicemail. I listened to the message; it was Carol, breathless. "He's here."

I slipped on warm clothes and boots and stood at my front door and paused. Wait. Did I really just want to walk up and surprise a hungry bear? I opened the door tentatively, scanned the front yard as best I could in the pitch black of a locale unpolluted by city lights. I even stepped onto the porch and peeked around the corner, but I was just too scared to walk back. After I called Carol, she agreed to walk out onto the steps leading down from her apartment. The bear was gone. I met her midway up. We surveyed the scattered bags and litter together. I was disappointed, but Carol's excitement made up for the missed opportunity. She bounced up and down, smiling and oblivious to the deep chill, saying over and over, "I saw him!"

Maybe if I had seen a bear that night I never would have returned to Skagway a third season. But I was determined to come back, see as much as I could, and complete the Dewey Trail system. The town now felt to me like a scavenger hunt, and I needed to check off every tour, every restaurant, and every hidden path. After my second winter in St. Thomas, I convinced my new boyfriend to come with me back to Alaska. He secured a job with another company, and I waited to hear about staffing from Greg and Filia. Because of the size of the company, the final

details for summer season were pushed later and later. Everyone else who was going to Alaska for summer season was getting their flight itineraries and housing confirmations.

My boyfriend's company wanted to send him to Juneau because of the lack of housing in Skagway. He had to agree to find his own place to live in order to get a Skagway assignment, so I felt even more pressure to confirm my own arrangement so that we would have an apartment that could accommodate the two of us. Panicked, I approached another company. I spoke with Indresh, who owned stores near where I worked in St. Thomas. He and his employees were always friendly, smiling and courteous. He was happy to offer me a position in his Skagway store right next door to Greg's, as long as it would not upset the other company. After some conversation back and forth, I confirmed that there would be no hard feelings. My boyfriend, Patrick, and I would share an apartment above my old store.

So, to clarify the geography: on the corner of Second and Broadway is the Red Onion Saloon, one of the busiest and most popular bar/restaurants in town, both during the day with tourists and at night with locals and seasonals. Directly across Broadway Street is the jewelry store that Patrick worked for, adjacent to the liquor store which was adjacent to the Starbucks store. On the Red Onion side of the street, moving away from Second Street on Broadway, is my store from second season, followed by my store from third and fourth seasons. These two stores are actually two halves of one building, and on top of them are two apartments. Looking at them from the street, my apartment was on the left, and Greg and Filia's was on the right.

Both of these apartments could be accessed from a yard area behind the two stores, by walking up one of two sets of rather flimsy wooden stairs to a roof landing. Greg and Filia's side opened up right onto the staircase, but our door sat off from the stairs so that we had a sort of roof top unenclosed patio. Both of these attic-like apartments were built on an angle on one side,

my best guess being because of the need to accommodate for the ventilation systems for the stores[9]. Similar to my bedroom in the Blue House, these attics appeared to be add-ons to the original structures. This type of design occurs frequently in structures all over town, most likely because of the modern-day tourism boom. Storage space probably necessitated the addition, but the housing need superseded it later. The apartment ran long, shotgun style, with lots of oddly placed cubbies filled with boxes of old marketing materials, jewelry displays, and clothes and personal belongings left by previous inhabitants.

Our new home had the one thing I was missing in my previous apartment—convenience. I walked literally only steps to work. Groceries were half a block away, and the bars were only stumbling distance. But the tradeoff was big. The living room/bedroom was small; Patrick and I would alternate sleeping on the single bed and not-full-size couch. The angle that I mentioned extended along the entire east wall. So, in order to avoid knocking our heads into a wall, we had to duck to sit on the toilet. The mirror and sink next to the wall were eye level, but just above that mirror, the wall sloped down at a 45º angle, making it necessary to bend to avoid the ceiling. This also made it impossible to install a shower. The freestanding tub had a detachable shower hose, so I would turn on a space heater, sit on a plastic stool placed in the tub, and hold the shower head above me, alternating hands.

I finally had my first bear sighting early that season. Patrick and I were driving back from Canada. I thought we had jinxed ourselves, running over a grouse by accident on the way in. We were not sure which kind of grouse it was, but the willow ptarmigan is the state bird of Alaska.

[9] Although there is also a clause in Historic District building standards against altering any buildings in this zone of Broadway. Most of these buildings from Second through Sixth were original Gold Rush structures, but many of them had been relocated from their original site and/or already extended in the back from an historic false front façade. The reason for the odd architecturally structure could be related to this as well as the ventilation issue.

The poor things are slow-moving and rarely fly. Unfamiliar with this species, Patrick failed to slow down enough for it to escape. The poor thing was flattened by our rental car, and I was even more upset later when I looked up the bird online and found that some species are threatened. Patrick was more alert on the drive back; he did glimpse the hind quarters of a small brown bear about halfway between Whitehorse and Skagway. He yelled and pointed without running off the road, and seeing it, I was sufficiently pleased with this as my first sighting.

To our great surprise, though, a pair of brown bears was grazing right along the road a few miles past the US border. We pulled over, and one scampered off. The second remained, still fixated on whatever it was eating. Patrick rolled down the windows and was about to throw food at it, but I stopped him with an explanation of bear etiquette. We stared at the thing for several minutes until he mischievously started to call it, hoping to lure it closer for better pictures. He reached toward the sleepy kitten in my lap, threatening to use him as bear bait. I was not amused.

The next year I faced another tradeoff. Indresh allowed me to return for just the peak of the season because of my seniority, but the only available housing was a tiny cabin off Dyea Road. It was far. The store manager, Girish, offered to give me rides back and forth, but I only accepted in the evenings after work. I preferred to get some exercise in the morning, waking up naturally by braving the brisk air and listening to the sounds of birds and other creatures.

Walking the entirety of Dyea Road and looping back into town would take well over an hour. And the incline was way too steep and road too curvy to handle a bicycle, in a dress, each morning. There was a shortcut through a wooded area that linked up with a well-travelled path near the airport. It cut my walk down to less than half an hour, which was perfect. The first few days were blissful. I was excited to be back in my beloved town. The air was invigorating, and the exercise felt rejuvenating and not exhausting.

The cabin was set back in the yard of the Westmark manager's house. Jim and Denise were absolutely lovely, and I even bummed a ride two out of six days with Denise. They kept their garbage cans inside a locked garage, away from bears, and told me that I could just deposit my bags inside whenever needed. Every week they had to load up the garbage and make deposits at the dump. I used little grocery store bags rather than full size trash bags, so they were always light when full. I figured it would be just as easy and less of a burden on them if I carried my garbage to town and deposited it in the city trash cans.

It took a few trips through that short cut for me to start feeling anxious. It was always deserted, at least until I got to the marked trail, and the birdcalls did not bother me, but the twig snaps and rustling of leaves started to unnerve me. It was probably just squirrels. But one day it hit me—there are bears in these woods. And I'm carrying bags of food containers with me, just adding more layers of scent to the already inadvisable list of bear-attracting smells—shampoo, deodorant, makeup, toothpaste, and my Tupperware-packed lunches. There is a reason why people look grubby when they go camping. Not only is there no need to dress up in the wilderness, but also most of the daily conveniences that we utilize in civilization give off odors that wild animals cannot distinguish from food.

I almost slipped a few times when the ground stayed damp after a big rain because I was wearing dress shoes in the woods. I must have looked ridiculous to the hikers I would pass as I entered town, emerging from the woods in a dress or business casual, hair coifed, not sweaty but mildly shiny from the exertion. Girish kept asking me if I was sure I wanted to walk, and my co-workers gave me funny looks when I fanned myself on the colder days as steam rose from my head. If it was raining really hard, I would text him for a morning ride, but in case of the drizzle that was present almost half of all mornings, I would just wear my very reliable Columbia rain

jacket. Instead of dress shoes, I wore boots or sneakers. The dress code was very lax. I continued walking to work, and I never saw a bear on the trail.

One night, midway through my short season, I brought home some smoked salmon from Dejon Delights, a local shop specializing in locally caught fish and other locally-made specialty gourmet items. I remember the evening vividly. I had a box of Sauvignon Blanc (don't judge—anything stored in glass is expensive in Alaska because of shipping weight) in my mini-fridge. The IGA had just started stocking rice crackers. My tiny living space was loft style. I had just enough room to stretch my legs underneath a rectangular table on which my Kindle reader was propped. I sat on a barely comfortable non-reclining armchair and situated my plate and wine cup and extra crackers around me in the seat as I watched downloaded episodes of *Mad Men* on that tiny e-reader screen.

After I finished, I would usually step into the tiny bathroom, brush my teeth, and then climb a ladder into my sleep space. It wasn't tall enough for a full bed. Even with the mattress lying directly on the floor, my head stil would hit the ceiling if I sat up all the way[10].

I finished the smoked salmon and emptied the trash into one of the little plastic bags and hung it from a drawer handle. I do remember thinking that the smell would be noxious in the morning. I had even left tied up trash outside the door before, but never one with salmon. I felt stupidly safe about outside trash as long as it was not salmon. The only reason I was even somewhat cautious at this point was because both the landlord and my co-workers told me that

[10] The dimensions of the space were 6' x 8' but the room was 10' in height. The water smelled like propane, the main heating source for a lot of rural homes there, even though I never used the main heater built into the cabin, opting for a small electric heat source.

bears came into the yard every season. The house itself was pretty deep in the woods, but the cabin sat next to the edge of the trees. I had seen the pictures of furry trespassers.

I heard the scratching sound sometime after midnight. It woke me from deep sleep, so some stretch of time felt like lucid dreaming. The scratches failed to wake me completely, but then the whole structure shook, once, and then again. Something was on top. When I realized that it was not an earthquake, I felt the panic. There was a speedboat parked next to the cabin, and black bears climb. It would be easy for one to shimmy onto the roof from the boat edge.

Did I lock the door? I had heard numerous stories about bears finding their way into cabins. They are smart animals and highly adaptable, so it would not be incomprehensible for it to pry a door open. If it really wanted in, a lock would not stop it, but it would help. Heart pulsating, I leaned over the edge of the loft and pointed my cell phone light at the door. This was the peak of summer, so only a few hours of the night were truly dark. Twilight would be coming fast, but I could not see anything. The window of the door was covered with a think curtain. If I stayed in the loft, a bear could enter and climb up. If I climbed down to check the door, he could knock it open before I could lock it.

Finally, I had to do it. I climbed down quickly, grabbed the handle, and turned. It was locked. Then I heard a tap on the bottom half of the door. I stepped back, barely breathing. I do not know how long I stood there. Something in my head was telling me to pull back the curtain, to look and see if the bear was standing or crouching there. I was frozen. I still regret not doing it.

I climbed back into the loft, but I never returned to sleep. The next morning was a carpool day. I waited until I saw the kids loading the car to leave the cabin. When I examined the

outside door, there were several long thin streaks of mud near the bottom. I told Denise about the previous night, and she relayed the story to Jim later that day. He inspected the marks and confirmed that it looked like bear scratches.

It had taken me until my third season to finally see a bear, but after that, the encounters just kept coming. As I was leaving town that fourth season at the cabin, I stayed in Juneau overnight and almost walked right into one on Franklin Street, one of the busiest thoroughfares in the capital city. The next summer, I had my first grizzly sighting while on the Chilkoot trail. Several tour groups all converged on the Dyea flats the day we had left on the trail. About thirty people all watched as a black bear caught a fish in a stream and scooped it into his mouth. The tourists, mesmerized, gasped and clicked photos, many of them edging closer and closer to the wild thing, mistakenly feeling safe in the presence of so many other humans.

SOAPY SMITH AND THE DAYS OF '98

"Can-can…ragtime…live here at the Eagles' Hall…outlaw Soapy Smith, can-can girls, song and dance…Been running since 1923…"

I was standing on Broadway Street, just outside of the Fraternal Order of Eagles' Hall, between Sixth and Seventh Streets. Jonathan Baldwin, artistic director and star of *The Days of '98 Show*, cajoled passers-by to catch the last show of the day, a 2:30 set of the hour-long show. I had seen the show before, my first season, but I never got to know him during my seasons in town. He was a familiar face, and like many locals, he would wave or nod his head if I had occasion to walk by as the cast was barking for walk-in audience.

The day of our interview, my recorder held at my side, I stood underneath two open windows framing a sign reading *F.O.E. 25* (Fraternal Order of Eagles #25). The girls sat on each

windowsill dressed in period corsets and petticoats and alternate yelling and singing their mezzo-soprano pitches for the show as well.

"Come on in folks, you don't want to miss this true Alaskan treat. Come be a part of Skagway history. You can't catch this show in the lower forty eight."

This end of Broadway Street was noticeably quieter than the strip closer to the train station and the Starbucks store. Across the street from the hall was the Post Office and the Wells Fargo Bank. Locals stood out here, and Baldwin paused between histrionic pitches and improvisation with passing tourists to exchange polite hellos and how-are-yas with friends and acquaintances. Like many of the tour operators in town, the show pre-sold onboard most of the ships, but the majority of business was generated through walk-ins. Baldwin's, and the show's, marketng touched on being different, standing apart from the commercial experience of downtown.

"Ladies, we could use some more dancers for our next show, come on in. One hour Vaudeville musical production live on stage with the outlaw Soapy Smith, and there's no tanzanite[11] for sale. One hour of non-shopping fun here at the Eagles' Hall. The longest running Vaudeville production in the North, since 1923, over 91 years, and we are still going out of business. The famous *Days of '98* show. It's the last show of the day, and there's no jewelry for sale."

[11] A Tanzanian gemstone heavily promoted in the cruise ship markets. Because of its fairly recent discovery (late 1960s), the stone is not often found or sold in most chain or small family stores in small to midsize markets. The cruise ship sales market caters to collectors (both serious ones and amateur ones newly enthused by a port lecturer demonstration); and because of the high volume of traffic, this market tends to focus on products that are more exotic and hard to find. The result is that a rare and exotic gemstone has now oversaturated one specialty market, leading to both bullish sales in this market but also a fair amount of confusion in the minds of less-savvy consumers.

I laughed at the jokes, even the good-natured digs at jewelry sales. His pitch did not change because I was there, but we did exchange glances as I chuckled. He knew my history in the jewelry business, and he seemed like the sort to avoid offending me. The jewelry jokes got attention; I observed the tentative passersby's reactions—everything from polite smile to eruptive laughter. My guess was that their level of amusement directly correlated with the number of free charms they had retrieved. I tried not to distract from his sales pitch—professional courtesy.

Baldwin graciously offered me complimentary entrance; so I purchased a popcorn lunch from the concession stand. I had seen the show before, my first season. The model and I attended a free performance that was given in the evening hours for the seasonals and townsfolk to gain exposure for the show. I remember being entertained despite the undeserved expectation of mediocrity, probably manufactured out of jealousy. The actors were consummate performers. Whenever I passed them in town, either in costume or out, they were always smiling and laughing. During that first summer, especially, I foolishly secluded myself, drowning in exhaustion and self-pity. My job was challenging and infuriating, and I assumed everyone else was having a better and easier time than I was.

Of course, as I got to know the town and the people better, I understood that each job presented its own challenges. *The Days of '98 Show* ran up to four shows a day. While the cast clocked in fewer hours than us retail folks, we were not required to perform kicks in high heels while hitting the high notes. Baldwin travelled to New York each January to cast young, but professional, talent, most of them recent graduates from BFA or conservatory programs.

The theater itself felt congruous with the historically preserved architecture of the town and as far away from the infamous Broadway as a stage could be. It was dark and smelled of old

popcorn and old wood, which was not a terrible smell. The squeaky seats and dust particles in the air gave off a nostalgic authenticity; stepping into the building felt like entering a museum, sheltered from anachronism and tanzanite. The seating divided into three sections, similar to a movie theater, with the center section being widest. I sat down in the front row, right section, so that I could tape the audio. I settled in with a notepad that I never used. Instead, I nibbled almost the entire bag of popcorn during the hour long performance and forgot my role as researcher, enjoying the show as a patron, an outsider.

The stage dressing was minimal. Looking toward the audience from the stage[12], the actors saw a piano stage left, a saloon set stage right, and a staircase behind it. The Alaska flag hung above center stage, and an American flag draped a red velvet curtain entrance nearest the piano. An oil painting of an eagle hung above the stage. The preshow consisted of a one-man presentation. Longtime Skagway resident Michael Baish sang songs and recited the poetry of Robert W. Smith, a Scotchman who worked as a Yukon cowboy during the Klondike Gold Rush. He wore a black Western-style hat that contrasted with the grey beard underneath and a blue workman shirt covered by a worn brown vest. His guitar sat in his lap, and he was seated in a low wooden chair. Top up, he was the picture of a miner. Bottom down, his jeans looked like black Levi's and his shoes had plastic tips on the laces. He introduced his final song by saying, "If you don't wanna know what's gonna happen ahead of time don't listen 'cause I'm going to give away the ending." He then crooned "The Bloody Ballad of Notorious Bad Man Soapy Smith's Wretched and Violent Demise" written by Ed Parrish:

[12] I offer the actors' point of view here to simplify the descriptions of stage left and stage right, which are traditionally oriented to the actors' perspectives.

“Alaska in the Gold Rush days, where life was cheap and thin,

Such desperate times were perfect times for brutal, desperate men.

In Skagway, Soapy’s grifter mob left many miners broke,

And if you weren’t a gambler, they’d just rob you of your poke.

With a pistol in his pocket and a rifle in his hands,

Soapy went alone to fight the vigilante band.

To shoot a few and chase the rest into the icy bay,

They’d wish they’d never messed with Soapy Smith of old Skagway.

Where your life ain’t worth a sawbuck, and your end is just ahead,

And the only law comes from your guns in a lightning hail of lead,

Soapy was the boss man. He ran old Skagway’s crime,

’Til the outlaws got together and said Soapy’s out of time.

With bad men cheating bad men, they’re going to spill bad blood.

They’re outlaws taking trips to hell down through Alaska’s mud.

The Skagway vigilantes couldn’t make him run away,

Soapy came straight at them to chase them into the bay.

With a pistol in his pocket and a rifle in his hands,

Soapy went alone to fight the vigilante band.

To shoot a few and chase the rest into the icy bay,

They’d wish they’d never messed with Soapy Smith of old Skagway.

The bullets started flying a’twixt Soapy Smith and Reid,

Until they both lay on the wharf, and there they both did bleed.

Then Jesse Murphy turned ol’ Soapy’s lever gun around,

And blew out Soapy's heart as he lay helpless on the ground.

When the shooting stopped and cordite clouds thinned out enough to see,

Soapy went to boot hill, with the grifters' guard, Frank Reid.

Nobody mourned old Soapy when they sent him off to hell.

Skagway wouldn't miss him, not so's anyone could tell.

Bold as brass and full of fire, there in the midnight sun,

Soapy went straight at the mob, though he was only one.

He's waiting in the pits of hell now with his guns in hand,

He'll hunt them through eternity – that vigilante band."

Afterward, the show proper opened with an ensemble musical number, and during it, one of the actress/can-can girls checks the back stage preparations by opening a door center stage revealing the street outside. My guess is that this self-aware postmodern filter was an addition made to the script by Baldwin, who says "every year we look at the script and we try to edit a little bit more." New historical information has emerged periodically as well, and Soapy's great-grandson curates continued research into his ancestor.

The actress addressed the audience with a wink: "We've got a backyard bigger than Texas!" The joke did more than acknowledge an idea that many of the tourists had been made newly familiar with, that the landmass surpasses that of the second-largest state, it also commented on the tourist experience in the same way Baldwin had worked tanzanite into his pitch pre-show. One t-shirt shop bestseller in Alaska showed the image of two state outlines—Texas fitted inside of Alaska with plenty of room to spare—and the words "*Isn't Texas cute?"*.

Soapy Smith (played by Baldwin) delivered his soap pitch monologue next, punctuated by the quip, "How are ya fixed for soap?" He improvised with the audience, demonstrating the

snake oil promises the historical figure, Jefferson R. "Soapy" Smith, would make as part of this sales scheme. It was scientifically created by extensive research; it was the "finest cleaning agent" that would make your skin "glow like the moon"; it could reverse baldness, reverse graying, and wash away sins! The bars alone sold for one quarter, but for the price of five dollars a customer could choose a bar guaranteed to be wrapped in a monetary bill with any denomination up to one hundred dollars. The actual Soapy Smith, in his early con man days in the lower 48, would place a plant in the crowd who would rush to purchase the soap and discover a twenty or fifty dollar bill, motivating the onlookers to try their hand. Most of them would unveil a single dollar. In the show, Baldwin demonstrated the trick by asking the audience to show him a ten dollar bill in exchange for a ten. The modern audience, more seasoned to huckstery, needed some prompting before revealing money, but finally Baldwin offered up his ten in exchange for the bill—it was a dime.

Soapy Smith ran all kind of scams in one boom town after another, from Texas to Colorado: gambling and odds making, cards, fake investments, and circus exhibitions. The key to his success was being ahead of every game he played, and he presumably used that instinct in landing in Alaska just months before the big claim that set off the Klondike Gold Rush. He continued most of his old scams once he arrived in Skagway, but he also ran a telegraph scam (offering wired messages before there were actually were wires available) and opened a saloon.

The script in the play portrayed a confessional version of the notorious Soapy Smith, a man who seemed to have truly believed that his self-serving plots saved men's lives. When they left town, without gold and with their tails between their legs, they were sparing themselves the life-threatening trip into the Yukon. The town of Skagway grew rapidly and lawlessly. Soapy's gang policed the town and did prevent mob rule. Two factions of gangsters fought for control,

and members of both walked a line between the right and wrong sides of the law. The bunco gang[13], led by Soapy, was more visible. Eventually, a mob of vigilantes led by Soapy's former employee, Frank Reid, rallied to banish Soapy's gang. This led to the shootout described in Ed Parrish's ballad.

Several audience members gasped after the gunshot sound effect indicated the offstage death of Soapy Smith. The three female supporting characters/can-can girls took turns narrating the conclusion of the tale of 1898:

> "On July 8, 1898, just after nine o'clock in the evening, Jeff Smith and Frank Reid faced each other down on the Juneau Company Wharf. In a clumsy and confused skirmish, shots were fired. A bullet pierced Soapy's chest, killing him instantly. Frank Reid, desperately wounded, and despite frantic efforts to save him, died an agonizing twelve days later. Two thousand people attended the funeral of Frank Reid. He was eulogized a hero. The only people who came to the burial of Jefferson Randall Smith were the Teamster who drove the wagon, Reverend Sinclair of the Union Church, and a mysterious woman dressed all in black and veiled."

JONATHAN BALDWIN AND THE OTHER BROADWAY

Baldwin had a theater voice. Even with ambient pre-show ragtime music playing on loop in the background, and a calm, placid demeanor, his words delivered with precision. His baritone

[13] This is a term to describe gangs of outlaws during this period who ran "confidence scams" based on gaining a man's trust in order to fool him. The updated version of this term is "grifter".

carried to the back of the room, supported by the diaphragm in the way that the theatrically or vocally trained performer learns to control his breath, and his voice and diction rang clear like glacier water. He maintained a mild and soft-spoken demeanor almost contradictory to the force of his elocution. I had not noticed during the performance, but his period clothes and aggressive facial hair also contrasted his refinement. He was a fine actor. His identity did not betray the role.

I may have been misinterpreting exhaustion for his mild-mannered demeanor. He did begin our interview with an aside that the current day was quiet in "comparison to the last couple of days." Baldwin later confessed that most evenings during the summer season, he only had enough energy to eat dinner and watch a movie with his wife, his business partner, and his business partner's romantic partner. He was too exhausted to go out and socialize. I could relate; my summers in Skagway had effectively turned me from a networker to a semi-recluse. My impression of nightlife in the town boiled down to this: locals recede during the winter, allowing the youthful seasonal workers to take over the bars and restaurants, and then the locals re-emerge, socially, during the winter, when free time is more abundant and socialization is that much more necessary to fight off the melancholy of cold weather, reduced population, and pervasive darkness.

Interestingly enough, when he described how he ended up in Skagway, a cast mate from a Broadway musical tour he had been working on at the time introduced the idea of joining the Alaskan production as coming up to "relax and enjoy time in Alaska." Baldwin said he was tired of the travel involved with touring. Besides, Broadway in Skagway on its busiest day has always felt much more relaxed than Broadway in New York on its quietest.

After two seasons as a performer with *The Days of '98 Show*, Baldwin convinced a college buddy to co-invest in taking over the show from the then-owner who was looking to

retire after 37 years. Baldwin was a likely candidate, being both familiar with the show and the town at that point and also having a strong resume. He earned undergraduate and graduate degrees in music, had lived in New York for a decade, and was making a steady living as an actor. Most importantly, in his opinion, was his commitment to the show.

"When I perform, whether it's on this little stage, or a big theater on tour with like 6,000 people in the audience, it's the same intense preparation and art that I like to put into it. I'm not going to lessen my performance because we only have ten people in the audience. [The former owner] saw that I was an honest person. I wasn't doing it to make my grand fortune."

Before we sat down for an interview in 2014, Baldwin had been a familiar face. He would always wave at me if I passed him in front of the Eagles Hall or even if we saw each other buying groceries or walking around after work hours. I had to tell him that I was struck by his consistent energy and showmanship. Walking by the Eagles Hall over four summers, I tell him, I saw that he and the girls were always smiling, all day long, always on cue and in character. Not only did the cast perform in over 300 shows each summer, they were all, especially Baldwin, also full-time salesmen on top of that.

"As an owner, that's the hardest thing… My business partner and I are out there, constantly. We've always had this dream that we can own this show and hire staff, go away for the summer, come in for the beginning and the end. The reality is no one is going to be as invested as we are."

The process of buying the show took place over the year following his second season. Baldwin met his wife in town. She worked in a small jewelry store across the street from the theater. The winter after his second season, they stayed in town despite not having jobs. He

found a musical outlet in the community, first with the annual Yuletide festival and then at the Skagway school, where he is now the full-time music teacher. That position cemented his year-round status, and he gave up his life in Manhattan. He replaced the chaos of the big city for the chaos of juggling two jobs, one summer and one winter that overlap by two hectic months in May and September. Once the transfer of *The Days of '98 Show* was complete, he was able to modify his school position into a part-time one. His wife now works for the National Park Service year-round.

I asked him if he missed the New York theater scene. He told me that he did, and also cooking and food (great produce and exotic cheeses), museums, the symphony (the sound of musicians warming up) and restaurants. "When I go out of town, on a vacation, it's nice to get all that stuff, but I wouldn't trade it for the quiet and lack of hustle and bustle up here. You sacrifice something, living in the city."

Baldwin's role as a travelling performer mirrored the life of any Vaudevillian performer during the Klondike Gold Rush. What he says about the life of an actor in the 1800's could just as easily apply to his own experience: "It's what you did as an entertainer…You perform wherever they're gonna pay you money. And wherever there's money, meaning a boomtown, that's where you go." He explained that the Alaska/Yukon boom mirrored the Colorado and California booms in the lower forty eight. The connection of one boom to another and the story of transient populations was exactly the same theme that had drawn me to a study of modern day Skagway. Soapy joined the circuit early on and farther east as a grifter working shell games and followed the boom just like every other player in this drama: the miners, the dancehall girls, the entrepreneurs.

The connection I had not clearly made before this conversation was this picture of the same cast of characters running in the same circles during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. I had always found it strange, questionable, in historical fiction or even journalistic accounts of that time period when acquaintances and associates crossed paths in new towns or after lengthy lapses of time. It seemed impossible, in the pre-data age, that so many lives could be interwoven and interconnected. But it was no coincidence. The men and women who told the story of the era travelled in the same circles, chasing the story that shaped the era and being an integral part of it as well. History was not made by homebodies.

The original theater that hosts the *The Days of '98 Show* performance was owned by an organization with a simple motto—*People Helping People.* The Eagles club was started in Seattle by six theater owners in 1898, and the Skagway aerie[14] was number 25 out of over 1,500. "The club was formed," Baldwin explained, "so that every town they went to on the Vaudeville circuit they would have a place to stay, and they were protected, and they could get fair wage and food and all that stuff." As the Vaudeville scene moved further up the coastline with growing settlements of prospectors, Eagle's clubs were formed along the Inside Passage.

The club website boasts membership of U.S. Presidents from both political parties, like Kennedy and Reagan, as well as a NASCAR driver, a former Alaska governor and performers, such as Billy Ray Cyrus. Skagway mirrors this eclectic assemblage, with a slightly more evenly divided political registration compared to the state overall[15] and strong presence of artisan types in a community so heavily reliant on commerce and seemingly too small for a depth of culture.

[14] A word that literally means eagle's nest but refers to the club location.
[15] Skagway: 26 Alaskan Independence Party, 167 Alaska Democratic Party, 6 Alaska Libertarian Party, 146 Alaska Republican Party, 13 Other Political Groups, 183 Nonpartisan, 464 Undeclared, 1005 Total

> "What's great is that it's such a small community that even with a political divide, different ideas or philosophy of lifestyle, people come together as a community because they are proud to be up here, and proud to be an Alaskan, proud of Skagway, and love it. We've got big arguments going on about all sorts of things at the town meetings, but when it comes down to it, if it was a matter of life and death, do we support Alaskans or something else. People are together."

Baldwin's vision of Skagway seemed so utopian, so romantic. For his part, Baldwin was also speaking as a politician. He serves on the Historic District council, and he spoke with me that day in the optimistic way I expect from a person representing a civic institution. For that matter, the show that was performed in that restored old dancehall, along with the show performed on those wood-planked lined gravel streets, presented a highly sanguine version of a history rooted in violence, greed, and corruption. I could see that he had found a respite from the chaos of the big city and the daily grind, but I knew that life in Skagway was not so simple.

What about those jokes and jabs at the expense of the jewelry stores? "They have a right to be here like everyone else," Baldwin answered my probe. "It's capitalism. They pay a high rent on their buildings. A lot of them are really nice people. I'm friends with a lot of the workers in the stores and even the owners. But at the same time, though, you sort of resent the fact that

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Alaska: 15,583 Alaskan Independence Party, 72,297 Alaska Democratic Party, 7,727 Alaska Libertarian Party, 135,263 Alaska Republican Party, 3,393 Other Political Groups, 81,475 Nonpartisan, 183,603 Undeclared, 499,341 Total *Source: www.elections.alaska.gov*

they're not even selling a product that is really pertinent to…what we're trying to present here, the history of the Gold Rush town."

This was, of course, a valid point. The state gem is jade, yet that has not been commonly sold in the tourist market. Conversely, though, many of the stores sold Canadian diamonds and fossilized ammolite from Alberta, as well as gold nuggets, nugget jewelry, and quartz from both Alaskan mines and nearby Yukon mines. Beyond that, many tourists simply did not care about historical or geographic significance. I was always amazed to meet those jaded tourists who seemed bored by everything. They had already sailed fjords in Norway or seen snow-capped mountains in Colorado. This made me sad. The experience was far more than a collection of postcards, free charms, and excursions. To me, what makes Alaska unique is the juxtaposition of all those isolated things—the scenic beauty combined with the history combined with the remote location.

"At the same time," continued Baldwin. "There's an obvious reason why people go into [jewelry stores] and buy stuff. As much as people complain, including the passengers, they're still making money."

The essence of taking a cruise often does not help a tourist absorb the big picture—too quick, too packaged, too many expectations. The tourist conversations often felt empty, like a contest of collected achievements. *We saw three eagles, two bears and one moose. I found the same t-shirt in the first port for five dollars less. One more cruise, and we become VIP. Now I've seen all fifty states.*

I sensed that Baldwin's real talent resembled the strengths of the top salesmen I knew. "As much as we laugh at some of the tourists and some of their behavior, I really find it fun and

a challenge, the psychology behind it and figuring out where people are coming from and what's going to make them excited."

Jewelry people, it seemed, were not that different from tour guides or bartenders or historians or train conductors. In Skagway, everyone is selling something. Even if it's just a feeling.

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VITA

Robin Johnstone was born in Goldsboro, North Carolina. Shortly after graduating from the University of North Carolina, she headed west to Los Angeles to work in the film industry. After a decade of balancing freelance acting, writing and production work with more reliable jobs in restaurants, hotels, and fundraising, she left for a seasonal commissioned sales position in Alaska. In 2012, she settled in New Orleans, where she entered the University of New Orleans to earn a Master's degree in English. She still travels as often as she can and is pursuing a second graduate degree. In her free time, she writes as much as she can, volunteers with literacy organizations, and plays fetch with her two cats.