

# Living in Alaska - Arriving in Winter

By Kate Conley

*Kate Conley, a former city employee of Vernonia and resident of Mist, recently moved with her family to the small town of King Salmon, Alaska, on the Aleutian Peninsula. Kate is working for the local government there. We hope to publish periodic updates from Kate about her adventures and daily life in Alaska.*

I turned forty last year and knew with certainty that I was not getting younger. I knew I wanted change and when my employment in Vernonia ended abruptly, it was a confirmation that it was time to make a big change. With that, I found a job and moved my husband Rodney and fourteen-year-old daughter Kelsey to King Salmon, Alaska. This is known as the "bush" country. It is accessible by water or air but not by land. It is primarily a fishing area with a fifty percent native population. I came for change, and this was surely it. What I did not know was how much I didn't know about things I felt I had a secure understanding of - like snow and trees and even the sky.

In Oregon, the weather man has endless ways of referring to the precipitation that falls from the sky. We understand the difference between mist, drizzle, scattered showers, rain, and deluge. Here that same principle applies to snow. I did not know there are snowflakes the size of children's hands that float like autumn maple leaves on their lazy sing-song trip to the ground. Or snow that swirls and bubbles like being inside a snow globe. And there is snow that looks like fine glitter and sparkles in the night while the fine icy dust wheedles its way into your ears, under your collar and into your boots. There is also snow that appears to be alive as it skims across the path in front of you and obscures the way as successfully as Oregon fog.

As I sat in the terminal in Anchorage awaiting my plane to King Salmon, I met a kind native woman whose son adored my dog. As we talked of King Salmon she mentioned that King Salmon had "a lot of big trees." I was struck silent thinking of my previous experience in King Salmon and then asked, "Where?" The trees around King Salmon resemble the Christmas tree farm I grew up on. A lot of blue spruce of all sizes, but the

largest are only twelve feet tall. By tundra standards I have learned these are large trees and easily over fifty years old. There are also a lot of scrubby bushes that are four or five feet tall. I was shocked when someone first referred to these as alder trees. But, indeed, they have the tiny clusters of pinecones distinctive to the alder.

In Lake and Peninsula Borough, which is where I work, we have seventeen small villages. The largest is Nondalton, population 205, and the smallest is Ugashik with twelve. Kelsey has started school in Naknek and is finally adjusting. She had been attending Jewell School district which is nearly the same size as the school district here; there are twelve students in the eighth grade (same as at Jewell).

There is not much to do here for recreation. Basketball rules the winter entertainment. Because each team must travel by plane to get to a visiting game, tournaments are popular. Four or five school teams will converge upon one town and stay for four or five days. The students sleep in sleeping bags in cafeterias, gyms and hallways. The booster clubs serve meals during the event. The games are well attended, and the results are posted in the post office, the store, and the local public radio station broadcasts the play-by-play.

Winterfest was this past week. It was amazing the number of activities that were going on. There was a basketball tournament so there were a lot of extra teens in town. Naturally, there was a teen dance on Friday night and a talent show. Saturday morning was a bazaar and in the afternoon was the penguin dip; twenty-below, and they cut a hole in the three-foot-thick ice so some fools could jump in! After the penguin dip there was a candy drop on the lake; a guy in a small plane flies low and drops candy onto the frozen lake for the kids to run after.

Next on the agenda was the sledding and skating party. Parents drove onto Lapp Lake and parked, while Kelsey, her friends, and all the other kids braved the fifty-below wind chill. There were over fifty cars lined along the edges of the lake, backed in with engines running and lights on to light up the skating rink. Dotted

around the lake edges were bonfires made from pallets stacked up on the ice. A huge hill with a seventy degree slope swoops above the lake and dips nicely onto the ice. Toboggans and skates are provided. I was a popsicle within minutes, so we left Kelsey to play while we went to the local bar to try out turkey bowling.

Turkey bowling for meat is quite popular here. They actually use a chicken, because a turkey is "too heavy for the ladies." The frozen chicken is wrapped in duct tape, and the bowling pins are set up. It sounds easy, but I guarantee, a chicken in duct tape is not very predictable. In addition, there was Cornish hen shuffle board. Again, a frozen Cornish hen is wrapped in duct tape, and the player bends over and tosses the little bird between his/her legs and tries to get it in the highest scoring box. This was pretty hilarious, especially if the individual had a couple adult beverages. Rodney proved to be pretty good at bowling and won a turkey. No comment about my lack of skill. There are a lot of other activities we missed, like the outhouse races and smelt derby.

Surely there are some common factors through out the world. The sky is the same everywhere, right? In Oregon we get some lovely sunsets, especially down at the beach. In this part of Alaska the land is mostly tundra - flat with marsh clumps of grass and mosses. There are mountains, but they are far in the distance and there are no trees to interrupt the skyline. Here the sky is the landscape. It changes with clouds, the sun, the moon, and the stars. I am sad to admit I have not seen the Northern lights, but the sunrises and the sunsets are a balm for my disappointment. The sky changes colors, shapes and textures by the minute, and it is delightful. It is like living inside a stained glass globe.

Things I thought I knew were really only familiar. Certainty is a false security. Like employment or people, one can never be certain of anything. We recognize those things we most commonly encounter, but all experience is filtered through our understandings of the world. This experience has enlarged my world and made my sky bigger, even while my trees have gotten smaller.

# Another Round: More Words of Wisdom about Beer

By Scott Laird

*The positive response to our recent article featuring beer has led us to believe that some of our readers would like another round. Here we bring you a column about hand-crafted beers, beer happenings and events, and where to find really good beer.*

**"Here's tae ye"**- What better way to start a column about beer than with a toast from Scotland.

**Beervana-In Search of the Perfect...** I am always on the lookout for new and interesting beers, my preference being dark beers. This month's search took me to the **Portland Spring Beer and Wine Fest**. This annual event is held at the end of March and along with a great selection of mostly regional beers also features wineries and cheeses, a host of vendors, and food. I go for the beer and food! (Free cheese samples, sign me up!) At this year's festival I came across a number of breweries serving organic beers, a growing trend in the microbrew industry. **Hopworks Urban Brewery**, also known as The HUB (2944 SE Powell Blvd, Portland), is Portland's newest brewery (it is so new, they weren't even open yet; the grand opening was scheduled for Tuesday March 24th) and will brew and serve organics exclusively. I tried their **Survival Stout**. Most organic beers have a distinct taste, what I had described to me as herbaceous. This beer had it bad, almost overpowering. I would like to give them another try once they get the brewery open and work out all the kinks. I also visited **Roots Brewing Co.** (1520 SE 7th, Portland) which claims to be Oregon's first all organic brewery. They were pouring an excellent **Exxxcalibur Imperial Stout** that was full bodied, a little smoky and delicious. **Eel River Brewing Company**, a certified organic brewery from Fortuna, California, had an Imperial Stout that was too light and not as full bodied as I like. **The Laurelwood Brewery** (three locations in Portland) that makes some of the best beer in Portland (and the US for that matter) featured two organics as well. I have recently been drinking their bottled organic **Tree Hugger Porter** which is excellent.

Besides the organics, I also tasted an **Oaken Porter** that was on tap at the **Salmon Creek Brewing** booth. Salmon Creek owner Larry Pratt is usually on hand at the festival and is one of the most approachable brewers. Larry will always make time to chat about his beers, the menu at their brew pub, their patio seating, and anything else related to beer. I am always impressed by their beers; they are usually smooth, well balanced and flavorful, and the Oaken Porter was no exception. Every year I promise myself a trip up to Vancouver to see the brewery in person - hopefully this will be the year. (108 W. Evergreen Boulevard, Vancouver, WA)

For those not so interested in dark beers, I did taste a Belgian style **PranQster Golden Ale** from **North Coast Brewing** (Fort Bragg, California) that was slightly fruity and sweet with a hint of cloves and very complex. Excellent! I was told it is available at New Seasons grocery stores.

**On Tap around Town...** Fresh on the heels of their grand re-opening, the **Blue House Cafe** (62467 N. Hwy 47, Vernonia) is rumored to be constructing a new beer garden and will soon be adding two more taps for a total of four. They continue to serve beer brewed locally by Brett Costley. Currently on tap are Costley's **Cherry Vanilla Wheat Beer**, his **Scottish Ale**, and an **Oatmeal Porter** (haven't tried that yet-guess I know where I'm going for lunch today!) Waiting in the wings, a **Pale Ale** and a **Golden Ale**. No word yet on an official name for Brett Costley Brewing.

*See you next time- for another round.*

SATURDAY  
APRIL 12TH



TEXAS HOLD 'EM  
TOURNAMENT  
AT THE BUCKHORN RESTAURANT

Registration at 5:30pm, Tournament play starts at 6pm  
50% of fees go to Local Charities.

Cash Card Prize Payouts!

To register or for more information contact:  
George Tice 429-3751 or Aaron Miller 429-6049.

PRESENTED BY  
THE VERNONIA LIONS CLUB