

Poems from Alaska Writer Laureate Heather Lende's talk at AASB 2021

Alaskans

— Christy NaMee Eriksen of Juneau for the Rasmuson Foundation holiday card
2019

we are fish people, wood people, the people's people
we are speak up, speak over the river people
steady ship, meandering beach, mountain peak people.
we have to see it for ourselves kind of people.

we are fixer upper, do it or it doesn't get done people.
we sing at church, we kiss our wives, we carve with our door open
we wear suits, we wear boots, we are spring clean saturday people.
we are strange but we are no strangers.

happy nalukataq! bingo! amen!
we share our wins, we celebrate.
tree shakers, promise makers
we are believers

at any moment we are
the grandparents and grandchildren of greatness
genius and luck, noble and gathered
wild miracles

we are wayfinding people.
trace the edge of your mother and it will lead you
to a coast. who could truly tell where
you or I begin
or where any of our legends end?
here, north
is not a direction, it's a bond.
we turn towards each other

For the Newly Elected School Board Member

-- Marie Tozier of Nome from her book, *Anywhere but Here*

Welcome to the ancestral land
Of my people. We
 Already know you:

Bossy white woman
 Thinks she
Owns the world

Rules the school
Wags her finger
 In our face

Preaches love
If only we'd listen.

Please Describe How You Became a Writer

--Naomi Shihab Nye of Texas, former Youth Poet Laureate of the United States

Possibly I began writing as a refuge
From our insulting first grade textbook.
Come, Jane, come. Look,,Dick, look.
Were there ever duller people in the world?
You had to tell them to look at things?
Why weren't they looking to begin with?

(Heather also mentioned "the tender gravity of kindness" from her poem *Kindness*)

A Blessing For Leaders

-John O'Donahue from Ireland (deceased) from his book, *To Bless the Space Between Us*

MAY YOU HAVE THE GRACE AND WISDOM TO ACT KINDLY,
LEARNING TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN WHAT IS PERSONAL AND WHAT IS NOT.

MAY YOU BE HOSPITABLE TO CRITICISM.
MAY YOU NEVER PUT YOURSELF AT THE CENTRE OF THINGS.

MAY YOU ACT NOT FROM ARROGANCE BUT OUT OF SERVICE.

MAY YOU WORK ON YOURSELF, BUILDING UP AND REFINING THE WAYS OF
YOUR MIND.

MAY THOSE WHO WORK FOR YOU KNOW YOU SEE AND RESPECT THEM.

MAY YOU LEARN TO CULTIVATE THE ART OF PRESENCE IN ORDER TO ENGAGE
WITH THOSE WHO MEET YOU.

WHEN SOMEONE FAILS OR DISAPPOINTS YOU, MAY THE GRACIOUSNESS WITH
WHICH YOU ENGAGE BE THEIR STAIRWAY TO RENEWAL AND REFINEMENT.

MAY YOU TREASURE THE GIFTS OF THE MIND THROUGH READING AND
CREATIVE THINKING SO THAT YOU CONTINUE AS A SERVANT OF THE FRONTIER
WHERE THE NEW WILL DRAW ITS ENRICHMENT FROM THE OLD,

AND YOU NEVER BECOME A FUNCTIONARY.

MAY YOU KNOW THE WISDOM OF DEEP LISTENING, THE HEALING OF
WHOLESOME WORDS, THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF THE APPRECIATIVE GAZE, THE
DECORUM OF HELD DIGNITY, THE SPRINGTIME EDGE OF THE INSIGHT-
GENERATING QUESTION.

MAY YOU HAVE A MIND THAT LOVES FRONTIERS
SO THAT YOU CAN EVOKE THE BRIGHT FIELDS THAT LIE BEYOND THE VIEW OF
THE REGULAR EYE.

MAY YOU HAVE GOOD FRIENDS TO MIRROR YOUR BLIND SPOTS.

MAY LEADERSHIP BE FOR YOU A TRUE ADVENTURE OF GROWTH.

Heather also quoted from O'Donahue's poem, *At the End of the Day a Mirror of Questions* in the same book as the leadership one that asks "based on the evidence, why were given this day?"

And she mentioned advice that is in her books *Find the Good* and *Of Bears and Ballots* .

Be kind, be brave, be thankful.

Meet hostility with courtesy.

The entire story of the boys and the rescue is in the chapter titled *The Sinking of the Becca Dawn* in her book *If You Lived Here, I'd Know Your Name*

Heather has a blog at heatherlende.com