

Alaska State Library
Historical Collections

Guide to Collection

Belcher, Dixie

Alaskan Performing Artists for Peace, 1985-1989

MS 279

1 scrapbook of news clippings
3 Videos

Processed by: Jason Russell, Damon Stuebner
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ACQUISITION: The collection was donated in 2013 by Dixie Belcher, noted peace activist. Acc. # 2015-020.

ACCESS: The collection is unrestricted. Selected materials have been digitized:
Scrapbook: http://www.library.state.ak.us/hist/hist_docs/docs/asl_ms279_01.pdf

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PROCESSING: This collection has been described at the item level. All material was removed from the scrapbook (green binder) and placed in acid free folders. Original order maintained. Original VHS converted to DVD, AVI, MPEG2, MPEG4, DVCAM, and Video Files for backup.

See also: Steve Nelson Video Collection, AV25-66: "One Vision, Many Voices" a documentary, KYUK-TV, Bethel, Alaska, 1988.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Born in 1940, Dixie Belcher has devoted her life to helping others and furthering the growth of peace in Russia, America, the Middle East, and elsewhere. Karyn Price's "most vivid memory of Belcher [was] when the two were in high school, ... "she always helped people who needed help. ... It was very difficult to say 'no' to Dixie when what you had is what she needed to help people"" (Evans, 1988, p. 15-18). Dixie Belcher founded the Alaskan Performing Artists for Peace group, later named CAMAI or 'hello' in Yup'ik, in 1982. Additionally, Dixie has "helped found everything from a holistic health association to a wilderness experience school" (Gehman, 1994, p. 1). Dixie currently is, among other activities, spreading awareness about plastic waste and its effects on the ocean. Reflecting back, Dixie states that "it's been an adventure in faith, it really has" (Gehman, p. 3).

Information from:

Evans, L. (1988, October 12). Dixie Belcher: Working to make the world a better place through the performing arts. *Juneau Empire*, pp. 15-18.

Gehman, G. (1994, November 13). Peace Broker Dixie Belcher Puts Faith and People's Money In 'Hope.' *The Morning Call*, pp. 1-3. Retrieved from http://articles.mcall.com/1994-11-13/entertainment/3006143_1_west-bank-muslim-women-celebration.

In March, 1977, while on tour as director of a large folk rock group, I flew to Little Diomed. We were in Nome, had some spare time, and I was curious. We landed on sea ice - on the International Date Line that runs between Big and Little Diomed, and briefly entertained ourselves by running back and forth between today and tomorrow. We arrived at the village of Little Diomed on snow machines, clutching the young Inupiaq drivers that bounced us over sea ice, frozen into high waves.

Little Diomed had about 100 citizens, living in tiny houses guy-wired into cliffs that jut up from the sea. One of them was the National Guard Armory. Inside was a large sign "If the Russians Attack, Surrender". Outside, Eskimos waved through binoculars to people on Big Diomed - 2 Yz miles away - where close relatives had lived- people they had been forbidden to see or correspond with since 1940. The scene was unforgettable and remained with me long after I had left.

Eight years later, in February, 1985, Marti Behr, representing the Palo Alto group "World Beyond War" was in Juneau, drumming up members. Someone sent him to my house. He made a long presentation, ending with his hope of someday taking Alaskans to Siberia. Having witnessed, with my folk/rock group, the incredible power of music to effect change, a preposterous idea instantly formed and I blurted out "Let's take a group of Alaska performers across Russia! Let's try to open the border!"

Thus began Alaska Performing Artists for Peace - 67 Yupik elders and teenagers, Black Gospel singers, Caucasians - and one Tlingit - that, after months of organization and rehearsals, in 1986, performed for three weeks across the former Soviet Union to wildly enthusiastic crowds that sometimes broke down doors to see us.

We met Gennady Gerasimov, Soviet ambassador and spokesman on a preliminary trip. He thought the goal of opening the Alaska/Soviet border was important and said he would help. We finished our tour as guests of Gerasimov at the Soviet Press Center, with international press in attendance.

In 1988, Yupik storyteller and musician, Chuna McIntyre, and I went on a three month U.S speaking tour entitled: "An Eskimo's Vision of Hope: Melting the Ice Curtain". Our appearance in Washington happened simultaneously and accidentally, with Gorbachev's first Peace Summit.

Gerasimov was there, and agreed to a three week lecture tour across the United States, ending in Little Diomed - talking up peace between our countries and the idea of opening the "back door".

In the meantime, other Alaskans thought the idea of opening the border to trade and tourism was a good one and were writing and lobbying Washington. Alaska Airlines wanted to establish flights to Russia and the idea of a Friendship Flight was being discussed. Meade Treadwell, a representative of this group, asked me to fly to Moscow to the June Peace Summit between Presidents Reagan and Gorbachev, to encourage Gerasimov to keep lobbying Soviet leaders to open the border.

I was almost penniless - but people contributed until I had just enough money for a ticket. I arrived in Moscow with \$5.00. Gerasimov met me with the news that no one was interested in opening the border and he was pretty sure the effort was hopeless. I remembered Soviet officials telling us "Of COURSE we're not letting Americans in! We don't even allow Russians there!" I begged Gennady to keep trying.

After the second joint press conference with Marlin Fitzwater, Reagan's spokesman, Gerasimov met me with the incredible news that the Friendship Flight had been approved.

"What about the Eskimos" I said. "They want to visit their relatives"

They can" he said.

"What about tourists?"

"They are welcome. "

"Small planes?"

"Yes, they are welcome too."

"Then the border must be open!" I said, incredulously.

"Must be."

"Can we have a celebration in Anchorage? This is historic!"

"Yes," he smiled "If you invite me".

In June, Alaskans boarded the historic flight to visit their neighbors across the Bering Straits. The following February, 92 Russians landed in Anchorage for a memorable week-long celebration and the beginnings of many friendships and joint businesses - and even marriages!

This experience proved to me that a group of ordinary citizens can, absolutely, effect change.

Dixie Belcher

SCOPE AND CONTENTS NOTE

This is a mixed collection documenting the growing relations between Alaska and Russia. The Siberia-Alaska cultural exchanges were made possible through the efforts of Dixie Belcher, other members of the Alaskan Performing Artists for Peace group, Russian and American government officials, local businesses, and interested parties. The scrapbook covers three of the cultural exchanges that came about as part of these individual's efforts. The first exchange was a two week long tour in 1986, where singers and dancers performed in churches, schools, and community centers across Russia. The second exchange was a trip where 80 dancers, government officials, and journalists traveled from Nome, Alaska, to Provideniya, Russia. The flight from Nome to Provideniya successfully happened in 1988. A year later, Dixie Belcher and others helped to secure a cultural exchange where Russian rock groups, Stas Namin and Rondo, were to play in Anchorage, Alaska. The groups were accompanied by politicians, reporters, and businessmen who had brought three tons of craft goods. Additionally, a video was created with two narrators detailing the 1986 tour.

INVENTORY

MS 279 Scrapbook: *Material removed from scrapbook (green binder) and placed in 4 folders*
This scrapbook details the efforts by Dixie Belcher and others to strengthen Russian-American relations by reuniting Siberian Yup'iks living in Alaska with those living in Provideniya, Russia. This manifested itself in the 1988 flight from Nome, Alaska to Provideniya, Russia and back, and the 1989 concert of Russian rock stars, Stas Namin and Rondo, playing in Anchorage, Alaska.

MS 279 Video 1 - 29:15 minutes

Alaska-Siberia Peace Bridge (Title taken from 1st graphic)

As images are being displayed, two narrators relate their experiences and the experiences of other members of the singers, dancers, and individuals who went on the 1986 trip as they traveled across Russia.

MS 279 Video 2 - 11:54 minutes

Promotional video for the documentary "One Vision, Many Voices"
KYUK-TV, Bethel, Alaska, 1987

MS 279 Video 3 - 34:05 minutes

Scenes from Alaskan Artists for Peace's Visit to the Soviet Union