

The Nome Static

KNOM Radio Mission
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visit us at knom.org

dear friend of knom,

Summer is wrapping up in our corner of the world. That means, of course, that it's a time of change — but also of welcome returns to familiar patterns. As the first touches of frost harden the landscape around us, KNOM's listeners are gathering their final batches of wild berries and processing their last hauls of salmon. Snow is a possibility this month, reminding rural Alaskans that their food preparations now will make for nutritious eating for the many winter months to come. It's a continuation of a subsistence culture whose roots stretch back millennia, a culture we celebrate — through storytelling and song — in KNOM's daily broadcasts.

Our broadcasts, meanwhile, feature new voices this season: those of our 2015-2016 volunteer class. This month, we introduce to you KNOM's two new producers; meet Mitch and Maddie at right.

Pages two and three, meanwhile, offer multiple snapshots of this incredible region your support enables us to serve. In particular, don't miss a vitally important story from one of the places where KNOM listenership is the strongest — St. Lawrence Island — regarding troubling local levels of pollution. It's a uniquely local story with, nonetheless, broad implications, and it's an example of the exceptional service you are helping to make happen.

From all of us at KNOM, *thank you* for your generosity to Western Alaska. As we hope you'll agree, the difference you make in this region is greatly needed and very much unique — as unique as the Alaskan Bush itself.

"God draws straight with crooked lines."

— Fr. Andrew Greeley



welcome, maddie and mitch!

As we transition into autumn, we're transitioning, too, into the service terms of our 2015-2016 volunteer class. Last month, we introduced to you the news reporters of the class of '16; this month, it's our two new volunteer producers, Mitch and Maddie.

Maddie Winchester hails from Portland, Oregon. She's a 2015 grad of Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas, where she earned her bachelor's with a double major in Spanish and sociology with a minor in communications. At KNOM, she'll be creating new episodes of our storytelling program *Story49*, writing and producing some of KNOM's inspirational and educational radio spots, and deejaying in the late afternoons (including our popular afternoon music request show). With a keen interest in outdoors activities, Maddie (short for Madison) says she's eager to explore the many corners of Western Alaska, whether for material for *Story49* or in her free time. This year will be her first experience living in a small town.

Mitch Borden originally called Hastings, Michigan home; he studied art and design, with a focus in photography and a minor in political science, at Northern Michigan University (in Marquette). He says he was attracted to the KNOM program, in part, be-

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cause of how radio is “the opposite of photography” in some respects — a medium of only sound, rather than one of only visuals — and he’s putting that interest to good use. Mitch (short for Mitchell) hosts the *Morning Show*, in which he’s already taken the deejay nickname “Mitch in the Morning,” and in his off-air hours, he’s working on radio spots, like Maddie, as well as on a brand-new series of “audio postcards”: short radio pieces exploring slices of life in our region. They’re like “creating a photograph with sound,” he says.

We know both Mitch and Maddie will be doing great service work for Western Alaska throughout the coming year. Thanks so much for making it possible!

in gambell, a focus on pollution

Earlier this summer, a very special community education course in a key part of KNOM’s listening area — specifically, Gambell, Alaska — highlighted the scientific community’s growing awareness of alarming degrees of pollution in the Bering Strait. An event in KNOM’s backyard, it was a breaking news story with crucial local and *global* impacts. With your support, KNOM was on the front lines.

Gambell is a small community, located on St. Lawrence Island in the Bering Sea, a mere 36 miles from Russia. It’s a village that’s remote even by Bush Alaska standards, and for that reason, it’s hardly a coincidence that KNOM listenership there is high.

Earlier this summer, volunteer producer **Kristin Leffler** took the trip from Nome to Gambell — via a free flight on a regional carrier with whom KNOM has a sponsorship agreement — to report on the unique class on environmental health and justice being offered by the organization Alaska Community Action on Toxics, or ACAT.

The aim of the ACAT class was to inform and engage local community members — and to merge both scientific and traditional perspectives and *types* of knowledge — with regards to potential contaminants in the immediate St. Lawrence Island area.

Over many years, research by scientists and observations by St. Lawrence Island residents have increasingly pointed to dangerous levels of chemicals known as **polychlorinated biphenyls**, or PCBs, and other substances. PCBs, in particular — which, research suggests, can be found in the blood of St. Lawrence Island residents at levels *six to nine times higher than their Lower 48 counterparts* — are linked to high rates of cancer, immune suppression, birth defects, learning disabilities, and hormonal or endocrine imbalances, among other issues.



Lord, Your love is discerned by repetition. Turn and return me to Your love.

Let my fitful human constancy be strengthened in the willing, wheeling wonder of Your stars.

It's believed that PCBs and other substances have amassed in the Bering Strait region in two key ways. The first is through an unfortunate confluence of air and sea currents and other climactic factors that make northwestern Alaska a "hemispheric sink" for pollution. The second is the heritage of US military installations that were active in westernmost Alaska during the Cold War. Known as **formerly used defense sites, or FUDS**, these remote sites are abandoned now, but some claim that the chemicals used in building and operating them may not have been sufficiently removed from the rural Alaska ecosystem.

During ACAT's — and Kristin's — time in Gambell, local residents worked with researchers in discussing the immediate region (and their observations of it) and in field work, collecting samples of pollutant-infected stickleback fish and other organisms and examining them under a microscope. (Examples of these activities are pictured at left.) It was not only a teaching opportunity but also an *exchange* of information — with an emphasis placed on rural Alaska perspectives — and an opportunity for those within KNOM's listening area to make their voices heard. It was an "honor," Kristin writes, "to be surrounded by dedicated change-makers with such a high respect for all ways of knowing."

Thanks so much for allowing us to bring this fascinating and vitally important story to our listening and online audiences. Through your support, Kristin was able to turn her experience in Gambell into a long-form news story: a KNOM Profile which you can hear, and read more about, on knom.org.

(For those looking for even more information, it's worth noting that *The New York Times* also did a piece on the environmental concerns of St. Lawrence Island a few weeks after our story; we'll link to it in the web version of this article.)

recent snapshots of our region

Your support for KNOM — in concert with a sponsorship agreement with a regional airline, which offers us free flights throughout the region — allows our volunteers to do vitally-needed travel to the isolated communities our radio signal reaches. Here are just a few examples: snapshots of the heart of Western Alaska through the lens of recent work trips taken by newly-arrived news volunteer **Laura Kraegel**.

Laura posted the photos at right on our website, knom.org. From top to bottom: an overview of the coast near Wales, Alaska, where Laura traveled to



God gives us the ingredients for our daily bread, but He expects us to do the baking.



If you ever grow discouraged and think you aren't good enough for the task at hand, remember: the Titanic was built by professionals, the ark by amateurs.



report on a new safety patrol to monitor the movements of nearby polar bears; White Mountain, one of the villages closest to KNOM and, in March, one of the final checkpoints of the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race; fish caught with a seine net and, after filleting, drying on a traditional fish rack, both in the eastern Norton Sound, just up the Bering Sea coast from Nome; and, last, an overview of Gambell, Alaska, the same community where Kristin Leffler also traveled to report on ACAT's special community course.

As we hope you'll agree from these pictures, rural Alaska is truly an incredible place! For more, see Laura's blog post "Travelogue" on knom.org.

smoke in the sky!

It's the latest example of why daily life in Alaska is predictably unpredictable: earlier this summer, the region KNOM serves was the host for a series of strange (but, thankfully, mostly benign) weather events. Aside from a few evenings of thunder and lightning, which are very rare for us, perhaps the most noticeable was a several-days long period of *smoke* in the sky, caused by severe wildfires burning in interior Alaska hundreds of miles away.

This summer, as always, KNOM weather reports informed our region when "smoke," not "clouds" or "rain," would be the weather forecast — and our daily news broadcasts explained the reason why.

at mass, welcoming the newbies

For more than four decades, KNOM has enjoyed a close relationship not only with the communities of Nome and Western Alaska at large but, also, with the community of St. Joseph Catholic Church, the parish that is only two blocks from our studios in downtown Nome. It's the church from which we broadcast Mass on Sundays when a priest is in town.

Last month, **Father Vince Burns** celebrated a Mass in which the parish officially welcomed KNOM's newest class of volunteers. They're pictured, at left — Emily, Maddie, Mitch, and Laura — a few minutes before the start of Mass. Thanks to Fr. Vince, and KNOM board member **Deacon Bob Froehle**, for helping arrange this special event!

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