

More on bureaucrats —

Alaska has its own Bermuda Triangle

By DENNIS DEMMERT

Did you know that Alaska has its own Bermuda Triangle? That's right! Fairbanks, Anchorage and Juneau swallow up people who go there on important missions, and we never see them again as real people. We occasionally catch glimpses of them, but we know that somehow they are not the same. Somehow, their adventures in the Triangle have changed them.

The ancient Tlingits knew what happened to people who went to sea and did not return. Those people fell under the spell of Koosh-da-kaa: the mysterious land otter people. They went to live in the villages of the land otter people and became like them. They thought they were still Tlingit — the real people — but we Tlingit knew that they had changed. There are secret signs, which I will not share, but which one knows the Koosh-da-kaa.

In Alaska's Bermuda Triangle, white men have counterparts to Koosh-da-kaa. They live in a world of rules and customs beyond

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the understanding of most human beings. Many who venture into their land on important missions stay there, live in their villages and become like them without ever realizing it. They lack the grand mystery and fascination of Koosh-da-kaa, but they have much power. They are called bureaucrats.

They look like legislators, directors, managers, councilmen, teachers, etc., but there are little signs by which you can detect that they are different.

For example, they speak a strange language which sounds like English, but it has many words made up of only initials. There is much you cannot understand without knowing the language.

Also, bureaucrats are creatures of habit and slaves of rules. If you do not strictly follow the procedures they set forth, you may be denied services to which you ordinarily have a right.

Ususally, they are on the public payroll and have much responsibility for the well-being of humanity, but no matter how hard you try, you can never trace responsibility to anyone with the authority to make decisions important to your well-being.

Finally, you can tell bureaucrats by the trail of useless paper one leaves. It is like following the white mucous trail of a snail. You can't miss it.

Anyone who ventures into the Triangle risks losing his or her identity and sense of purpose. As with smallpox and measles, Natives are not immune. Everyone is susceptible.

Not all who go there are lost, of course. Strong medicine can prevent it. Before going in, you must ask, "Why am I going? Who will benefit from my going?" Without good answers, one must not go.

Once in the Triangle, you must remember your mission. The land of the bureaucrat is a land of testing convictions and will power. Those who are able to maintain contact with the real world are able to shape, rather than become slaves of the rules. Remembering why you are there seems to be the key to survival.

Those who survive and thrive are able to accomplish great things, but the danger is that those who do not survive — those who become bureaucrats — are convinced that they, too, are accomplishing great things. In the land of the bureaucrat, you can never stop questioning your own purposes and the value of your accomplishments.

The Tlingit world without Koosh-da-kaa would be poorer for the loss. The white man's world without the bureaucracy would be impossible. We are richer for the existence of each, but we must constantly be on guard so that they never overwhelm us.

Footnote: More than 150 people applied for the University of Alaska presidency. If advertised much longer, those applicants might well have outnumbered applicants for next fall's entering freshman class.