

Final good-byes for Laura Crockett

By Linda Lord-Jenkins

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More than 100 friends and relatives of Laura Beltz Crockett gathered Saturday to bid their friend, mother, and cousin a sorrowful farewell.

Laura Crockett was eulogized in the memorial service by long-time friends as a "friend, a healer and a mother. From a public standpoint she was most influential and her greatest influence was in providing an example and setting a standard for Native people all over the state and for Native women," said Alaska Senator John Sackett from Ruby.

He said he knew Laura since she was a young mother with four children and admired her ability to live and enjoy life whether she was in a village living traditionally or in a city living in a western style.

"She made the transition easily without embarrassing herself or other.

"She had the ability to make you feel special. That, combined with her true sense of humor, put people at ease and made you feel like you were the only person she was talking to."

Sackett said that he watched her raise her children and as a testament to her work, we have four young people who are wonderful as adults through the love she gave her family."

He concluded by saying "We have been touched by a wonderful person and in the process we gained."

Tom Richards Sr., who is Laura's uncle, said that "to know Laura was to love her,"

He said that "even as a child, Laura had a profound effect on the people around her. She expressed herself honestly and directly.

"At eight or nine years old, she told me her dad could do a better job of flying an airplane than I could. (Richards recently retired as one of the longest flying jet airplane captains that Wein Air Alaska has had). She said that was because her daddy could fix airplanes. He told her when Tommy has a crash, he walks away and comes back home but when Bert (Beltz) wrecked a plane he told her "I fix them up and fly them back."

"If she said something she believed it," said Richards "Laura was transparent in that respect. She had no patience with shallow people."

He pointed out a few things that he did not like about Laura, such as the enjoyment she received by jumping out of airplanes. "Most people thought climbing into an airplane to fly somewhere was dangerous enough but she wanted to jump out of them and float to the ground at the end of a parachute. But then she wasn't most people. She definitely wasn't most people."

He spoke of her lifelong dedication to handicapped people which stemmed in part from the fatal accident that killed

"Charlie Johnson who died because he couldn't hear a driver honking when he was walking in the road."

She learned sign language to speak to deaf people, and made advancement of handicapped people one of her life's priorities.

"Now it is up to us to survive and carry on her work.

Geroge Sullivan, long-time mayor of Anchorage, told of how he organized two major Alaska trade shows in Southern California and Laura appeared in both of them, charming the record-breaking crowds that flocked to see Alaskan people and wares--and her.

"God took Laura at an early age and left behind children who must have great satisfaction that this great lady left behind thousands of friends."

After the service, many of those people attending the memorial gathered with Laura's family in a small reception.

The memorial service was attended by former governors, the heads of many Native profit and non-profit corporations, and many, many friends.

A Native American Prayer by an anonymous author which was said to be Laura's favorite poem, helped sum up her philosophy of life and death. It was included on the program for her funeral.

Do not stand at my grave and weep;

I am not there. I do not sleep.

I am a thousand winds that blow.

I am the diamond glints on snow.

I am the sunlight on ripened grain.

*I am the gentle autumn's rain.
When you awaken in the morning's hush,*

*I am the swift uplifting rush
of quiet birds in circled flight.
I am the soft stars that shine at night.*

Do not stand at my grave and cry;

I am not there. I did not die.