

# Jeanie Greene has come a long way with 'Heartbeat'

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Jeanie Greene, hostess of *Heartbeat Alaska*, has become one of the state's and nation's most watched television personalities by Native Americans. With stations like RATNET, Northern TV in Canada and as far away as Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, picking up the Native owned, produced, and managed show keeps Greene busy as ever.

Greene, an Inupiat who grew up in Sitka and Seward says living two cultures was fun.

"We had a little boat and we used to go out and camp among the islands. I was raised on venison and crab. We lived that life, yet we were Eskimos in Tlingit country," she recalled. "We would get packages from up north, of our Native food: seal oil and stuff."

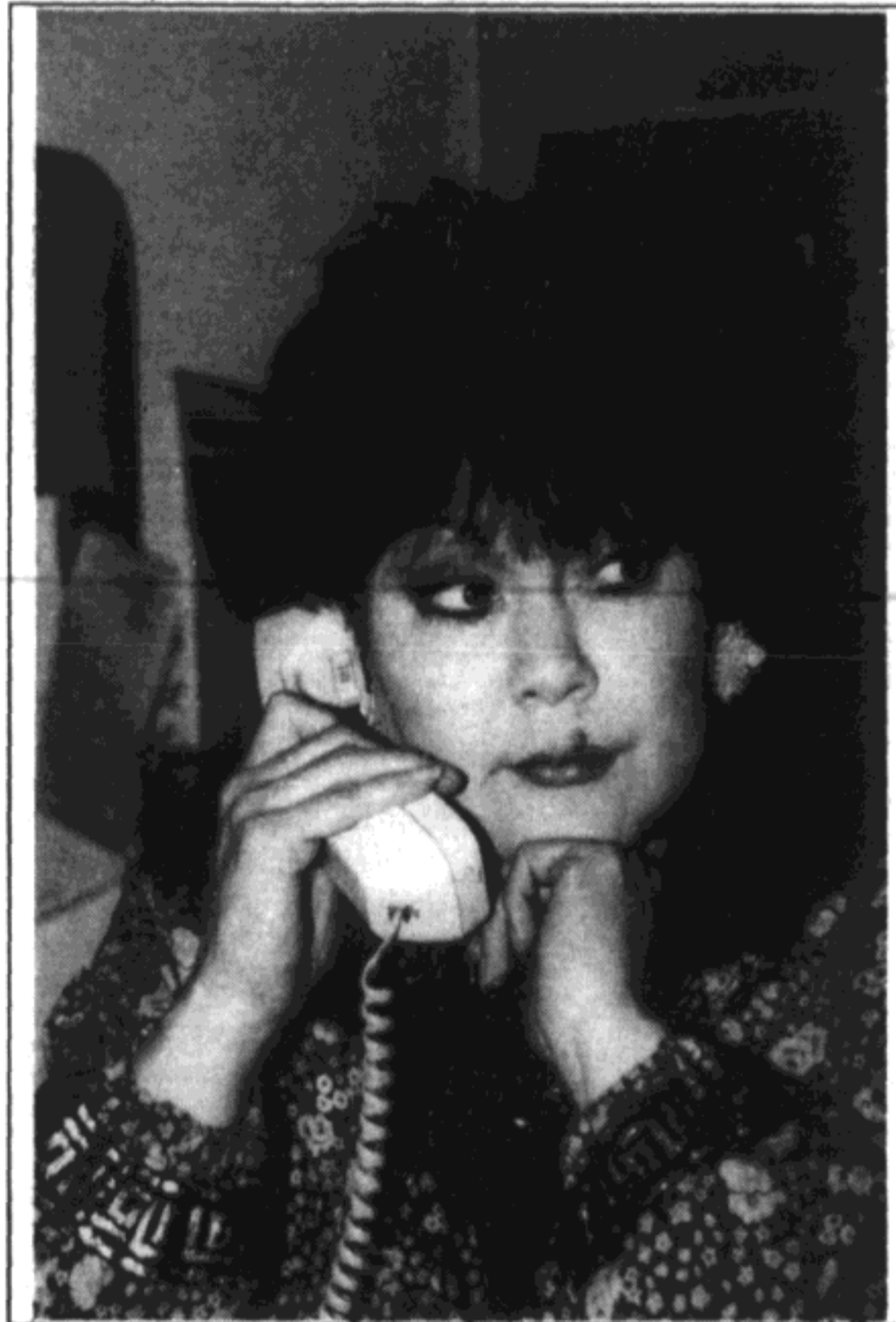
## Her first appearance, finding out about prejudices

She remembered her first appearance in "Rudolph, the Red-Nosed Reindeer," where she felt right at home on the stage. The performance was broadcast live on television. "Television was just introduced to Sitka," said Greene.

Upon her arrival to Seward, just before the 1964 earthquake, she realized that she was a "Native."

"I was tough as a seventh grader," said Greene. "I ended up with migraine headaches because I was faced by an onslaught of prejudices. I tried out for cheerleading. I wasn't allowed to compete as a gymnast, but I was allowed to teach. I was good at it."

Greene weathered the remarks well and came up with at least one



Jeanie Greene

good come back of her own: "This is who I am. You may not like it, but I don't consider that a problem."

## Acknowledging talent

Greene learned early on in life that she would be an actress. This she learned on her own, being independent. Teachers and counselors never encouraged her and she felt stifled, even in her learning processes.

"I was asked by one of my high school English teachers to describe

a fondness of Seward, which she considers her hometown. The residents have been nothing but supportive of her career.

Greene never felt like she really fit in. Not until she met Dennis Greene. She recalled that on one of their first dates, she was asked what she wanted out of life.

"I'd like to be an actress," she replied.

He then asked her when she was going to do it.

"At the next audition," was her reply. And she did. The Anchorage Community Theater was auditioning for *Peter Pan*. Greene tried out for the part of the nurse. After overacting and not getting

into character, she was told that she didn't get the part.

But they did call her back for another part, which she got. She toned herself down and her career in acting advanced, performing in over 50 plays.

"I was back home on the stage," said Greene.

## Different direction

Greene was offered a scholarship to pursue a career in theater but turned it down. Instead, she called Dan Grubb at Channel 13 in Anchorage. KIMO-13 was broadcasting statewide news via RATNET reporting "mostly negative stories on Natives," said

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Seward. I went into a fusive description about the trees, the mountains, the water and sky," remembers Greene. Her instructor read the piece in front of the class and made a laughing stock out of it. "I asked, 'Mr. Ulum, did you not feel anything when you read it? Didn't you even experience anything?' Then in the back of the room, this girl jumps up and cries out, 'I thought it was wonderful!'"

Today, Greene has nothing but

# Greene has come a long way . . .

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Greene. Grubb told her to give him a written proposal on a *Native* segment to be aired twice a week. She did.

She asked for letters from around the state, from people who lived in rural Alaska, stating what they wanted to see. Many of the letters were in concurrence with what Greene envisioned for the rural segment.

She produced the show twice

a week, by herself. KIMO-TV gave her total control of content, but because of being short-staffed, they could offer very little production assistance. Unaware and despite the awkwardness of the production methods, she developed a following.

"I started getting phone calls," said Greene. "One time, I was in the Sears Mall. All of the sudden I was surrounded by these teenagers who said they knew who I was and telling me where they were from. I realized then how important the rural news was to them."

## **Going independent**

Greene decided to go independent and bought some antiquated equipment. She cleared the furniture in her living room and set up shop. This was the birth of *Heart-*

*beat Alaska*.

"I cringe at some of the first shows I did, but I started something that the other journalists weren't too happy about," said Greene. "I didn't care about the 20-second lead-in. You can't do that to an Elder's story."

She received very few negative calls from people who were used to watching the western perspective view on television. She tells them, "watch what you want to watch. If you don't like it, change the channel. You have to give the Natives something that they want to watch."

## **Nationally broadcast**

From day one, Greene says that *Heartbeat Alaska* was seen across Alaska and in Canada.

"It's only been two years. Now we've got *Voice of America*, *People Magazine*, and others doing features on me and the show," said Greene. "Some Russians heard about the show, came to talk to me, then asked me to go to Russia to teach the Russian Natives how to produce their own show."

Greene said she knows of thirty stations nationally that are picking up her show. "Other people are taping the show and using it for teaching purposes. How do I feel about that? Who am I to stop God from doing what he want to do. If it's God's intent to move the show and to inspire people across America everywhere, I'm not going to stop it. It's out of my hands."

"It's not because of my smiling little face on TV, it's because

people are generous and willing to share their lives."

## **Future plans**

"We're finally getting in more money and becoming financially stable," said Greene. "I already began to start *One Sky Foundation*, a non-profit arm of *One Sky Productions*. My dream is to be able to train youth in broadcast media."

Greene says that she's already got instructors lined up to help in the training. Upon approval from the Internal Revenue Service, she will start looking for up-to-date equipment.

"Someone told me one time that if I keep going in this direction, I'd work myself out of a job," remarked Greene. "But I look at it like this, there needs to be more Native programs on."