

Roy Peratrovich sets columnist straight

by Vern Metcalfe
for the Tundra Times

JUNEAU — I'm not at all sure how many readers of this esteemed journal have made the acquaintance of Roy Peratrovich Sr., but I can assure you that I've known him now for some 40 years.

He has changed very little in that time other than in girth, something that also has afflicted your scrivener in that time.

Mr. Peratrovich is a regular caller upon me, since he sees fit from time to time to enlighten me and to tell me in no uncertain terms that I've missed (and messed) certain matters. This is to say he reads everything I write and sometimes reads something into it that I haven't meant.

Everyone is an editor or a critic, and Mr. Peratrovich scores on both counts.

He is not alone in all of this. Another regular caller is another friend of mine (read on, Roy), namely one Harold (Horrible) Zane Hansen, late of Cordova and some eight years of legislating in our first four sessions of statehood.

Horrible came by this monicker somewhat honestly since he has long delighted in puncturing any handy pompous balloon with a vengeance. You can check with any number of former colleagues of his, particularly one John Hellenthal, famed barrister from Anchorage.

As for my friend Roy Peratrovich, his latest sally up the Metcalfe alley came about due to the fact that my number two son (number three offspring — you number them when you have nine) Peter authored a piece for the Aug. 17 issue of this esteemed publication.

The editor deemed fit to utilize a picture of the signing of the Anti-Discrimination Act of 1945 with the



Roy Peratrovich

article, and Roy, ever alert, noted that the cutline was a trifle short in explanation.

While he and his late wife, Elizabeth, were identified, the fact that he was at the time the president of the Grand Camp of the Alaska Native Brotherhood was not noted. The fact that his wife was then president of the Sisterhood was duly noted, and Gov. Gruening also was identified.

Now Roy also pointed out at some length that the others in the picture (reading from left to right) were the then presiding officer of the Senate, one O.D. Cochran, D-Nome; Edward Anderson, D-Nome, a member of the House and mayor of Nome; and Norman (Doc) Walker, D-Ketchikan, a senator who is seen glancing at the ceiling. Walker and Gruening were mortal enemies, which probably accounts for the upward glance. Prayer?

Be that as it may, Roy Peratrovich has long been a burr under many a saddle, ranging from various erring bureaucrats to politicians of all stripes and party affiliations. Roy really came into his own after he retired from the

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Bureau of Indian Affairs, although I'm told he never let his position have any great effect on his First Amendment rights.

As one who has often been termed a "curmudgeon" and worse, I have long admired Mr. Peratrovich for his ability to call a spade a shovel or even worse.

He absolutely delighted me several years ago at the annual convention of the ANB when he listened intently to a minion of the government speak with great passion about how he, newly appointed, would make certain that minority hire was put in place. I sat there wondering what the Tlingit word for male bovine excrement was, and Mr. Peratrovich took that particular bull by the horns just moments later.

The orator was followed by the late Lisa Rudd, then commissioner of administration. When she spoke in the same manner, she made the mistake of asking if there were any questions. Roy spoke up and said, "Tell me, Ma'am, do you have an affirmative action plan in place?"

Someone must have warned Mrs. Rudd that Roy always came prepared

to toss various verbal bombs into any fray, and she paused momentarily, and then said, "No." I dropped me reportorial pad.

About 20 minutes later a representative of Gov. Bill Sheffield raced into the ANB Hall, spied me and asked who he should see about gaining time for his employer. Peratrovich had struck again.

The following day, the governor appeared to pour oil on troubled waters and promised great steps toward implementing whatever passes for minority hire. Even until now.

Might I note that Roy and Elizabeth Peratrovich did indeed guide the anti-discrimination bill through the Legislature. I wasn't present, being off in the hinterlands playing soldier at the time, but I got this information from a very good source.

No, not Roy: No less a person than Ernest Gruening told me so during a 30-minute interview on the subject circa 1962. I remember it all too clearly inasmuch as I introduced the then U.S. senator, asked him for his recollection of same, and managed, barely, to close out the interview as the tape ran out without my ever interrupting the most articulate man I've ever known.

"Had it not been for that beautiful Tlingit woman, Elizabeth Peratrovich, being on hand every day in the hallways, it would have never passed," he told me.

He added that her hubby also did well. E. Gruening was also a burr under numerous saddles and had heard from R. Peratrovich regularly. It takes one to know one, and the good senator — with some urging — admitted Roy also performed nobly.

Hang in there, Roy, and don't blame Peter. He tries hard and is also developing. An apprentice curmudgeon, I do believe.

P.S. Roy served some six terms as ANB Grand Camp president.