

# Genevieve Evangeline Soboleff, 1914-1986

Genevieve Evangeline (Ross) Soboleff passed away on January 27, 1986 in Ketchikan, following an extended illness. Born on December 17, 1914 in Howkan, Alaska, she was the daughter of William Edward Ross, a merchant in Howkan, Alaska, and Eva Skulka.

Genevieve was a member of the *Ts'eilaanaas* (Eagle) tribe of the Haida Nation. She was a member of the Frog Clan, and was entitled to use the Eagle, Frog, and Sculpin crests.

Her parents both passed away at an early age, and she was raised by relatives in Hydaburg, Kasaan, and Craig. At about age 12, she went to Sheldon Jackson School in Sitka on the boat Princeton. At Sheldon Jackson School she came under the care of the Leslie Yaw family who served as her loving guardians throughout her early school years. During summers, she worked in salmon canneries in Kasaan, Waterfall and Craig, and was also a housekeeper between school years at the Goddard Hot Springs resort outside of Sitka.

Because of her excellent academic record, she received a scholarship to attend the Sage Memorial Hospital in Ganado, Arizona following her graduation from high school. The course of study was continuous, and she remained in Arizona from 1933-1937 including the summer months. In 1937 she graduated as a Registered Nurse.

During her studies, Sage Memorial Hospital served the Navajo Indian community from the surrounding area. She became fluent in the Navajo language, assisting the medical staff in translating the language.

She married Walter A. Soboleff on June 1, 1938 in Sitka, and they both returned to Dubuque, Iowa where he was completing his last year of Seminary. They returned to Alaska in

the spring of 1940 to Juneau, where Walter accepted his first ministry at Memorial Presbyterian Church. Together, they nurtured a living, loving and growing congregation in the name of Jesus Christ, among Juneau's Native community.

Genevieve worked as a Registered Nurse for many years, providing excellent care to many patients who still speak warmly about her professional care. Throughout her career, she worked at Sage Memorial Hospital in Ganado, Arizona, the U.S. Government Hospital in Juneau, St. Ann's Hospital in Juneau, and as a matron and nurse for the Juneau Police Department.

With the founding of the Southeast Regional Health Corporation (SERHC) and the formation of the network of Health Aides in Alaska's rural areas, she became the Health Aide for the community of Tenakee Springs, where she and Walter lived following his retirement in 1974. In this capacity, she provided primary medical care to the community, again touching many lives. SEARHC honored her with a distinguished service award upon her retirement.

Genevieve's medical care to her patients was first rate, and throughout her career she pursued further training, and conscientiously practicing until her retirement, which was forced by the onset of Alzheimer's Disease.

She was a member of the Alaska Native Sisterhood, Order of the Eastern Star, a life member of the National Congress of American Indians, and of the American Legion Auxiliary. She always noted with pride that she was a charter member of the Craig Presbyterian Church.

Genevieve lived to serve people, whether she was healing them with her skills, or providing a mother's loving

care to hundreds of foster children and others who passed through the Soboleff family home at 1003 'B' St. in Juneau. Her strength came from her faith in God love of Jesus Christ, her Haida culture, and her personal constitution and drive which were gifts of God.

She had a wonderful gift for languages, first shown in her ability to learn and translate the Navajo language at Sage Memorial Hospital in Arizona. She was an excellent speaker of the Haida Language, both the *Kaigani* (Alaskan Haida) and *Masset* dialects.

In 1971, good fortune brought together Genevieve and Dr. Michael Krauss, a linguist. Genevieve and Walter were at the University of Alaska-Fairbanks where Dr. Soboleff was the first Director of Native studies. The prevalent feeling among linguists was that the Haida language was dead. She disagreed, and identified over 100 current speakers of the language. Throughout that winter, she and Dr. Krauss developed an alphabet for the *Kaigani* Haida dialect that was both scientifically correct yet simple enough to be used by current and future speakers. Using this alphabet, she helped other Haida speakers pull together some of the first Haida language symposia, which ultimately led to the production by the society for the Preservation of the Haida Language of the first Haida books published in 70 years.

Genevieve is survived by her sister Olive Natkong of Ketchikan, her husband Dr. Walter A. Soboleff of Juneau, and their 4 children: Janet C. Burke of Monument Beach, Massachusetts; Sasha I. Soboleff of Puyallup, WA; Walter A. Soboleff, Jr. of Douglas AK; and Ross V. Soboleff of Juneau. She is also surviv-

ed by her grandchildren: Dorene, Deborah, Christopher, and Leanna Burke; Sasha Soboleff II, Maynard M. Soboleff, and Sasha Soboleff; Steven Patrick Soboleff; and Nathan J., Jacob I., and Madeline M. Soboleff. She also had many nieces and nephews as well as many people who called her Mother and Grandmother.

Persons wishing to make contributions may make them to the family c/o Walter Soboleff, Box 535, Tenakee Springs, Alaska 99841. Contributions will go the founding of a scholarship fund for young people studying to become Registered Nurses, or allied health professions. The fund will be administered through the Alaska Native Brotherhood/Alaska Native Sisterhood scholarship fund.