

Fishcamp: Life on an Alaskan Shore. By Nancy Lord. Washington, DC: Island Press, 1997, xviii, 261 pp.

Reviewed by Craig Mishler, Alaska Department of Fish and Game (retired).

Nancy Lord is a seasoned Alaskan writer who lives in the small community of Homer, on the Kenai Peninsula. During the summers she does commercial salmon fishing on the opposite shore of Cook Inlet from where she lives, in an area of ocean beach that largely remains a wilderness. This book reflects back over a period of fifteen years at the fly-in set net site that Nancy and her partner Ken Castner have maintained over that time.

Fishcamp is an autobiography. It is part life history and part essay, as she writes about her life outdoors and her reflections on the natural world. But as autobiography it is only a glimpse, for although we learn something about her childhood in New Hampshire, we learn precious little about her present life away from the fish camp, what she does in town the other nine months of the year. We get the impression that these other nine months are being saved for another book, or perhaps that they are much too pale compared to the adventurous lifestyle she and her partner have carved out for themselves on the beach.

Fishcamp is also an autoethnography. Lord is serious about documenting what she does, recognizing that the shore-based commercial fishermen's culture, even in Alaska, is at best poorly understood and certainly politically and economically endangered. Her ethnographic sensibility is especially vibrant in the chapter entitled "A Day in the Life," where she leads us through a day of work from dawn until dusk. Unlike her other works, which are short story collections, much of this book benefits from the immediacy of writing in the present tense and seems to be taken directly from her journal.

Even in Lord's and Castner's fishcamp not every day is a fishing day, due to limited openings of the commercial salmon fishery. This leaves Lord with time to keep up her journal, play Scrabble, collect agates, and read. She reads widely among naturalist writers such as Thoreau and at the back of the book she provides a list of kindred readings. She has also read deeply into the history and ethnography of the Dena'ina Indians who occupied the coastline near her camp in historic and prehistoric times. She draws many of her local insights from ideas found in these readings and from close observations of the plants and animals that surround her. Although tightly connected with the natural world, Lord is also socially alert and cherishes visits to her charming elder fishing neighbor, George, and his family.

The present work is for the most part non-fiction, but it exhibits a treasure of creative fictional and poetic techniques, such as the extended metaphor when she pretends to be a drop of water flowing down the creek and into her makeshift hot tub, or later on when she tries to think like a berry bush. "Someday, when I die," she writes, "I expect to become sweet salmonberry, rain, spindrift, eagle, dream, fluff on a dandelion seed, webbing between a beaver's toes, a piece of black coal." These imaginative reflections lift the book considerably. Lord has a wonderful way of celebrating the local and the particular, and this is how she locates herself in the universe, creating her own cosmology.

She always comes back to prose, however, to contemplate the economics, politics, and sweat of fishing, for this is a book of values as well as emotions. For example, Lord explains that there is no shortage of wild salmon in Alaska, due to good management, but user groups fight steadily over the allocation of those fish. As the state's urban population and tourism increase, there is a decided tilt away from commercial and subsistence users in favor of sports fishermen. This is because the dollars spent in the state by sports fishermen are growing faster than the dollars spent

Reviews

by commercial fishermen. And this, in turn, is the result of depressed prices paid for wild salmon on the world market due to competition from farmed fish raised in Chile and Norway. While her way of life is threatened by these external forces, Lord clearly favors the allocation of Alaskan fish to Alaskans and cares every bit as much about the ecology of fish as she does about the livelihood of fishing. Sadly, she realizes that because the demand for the resource exceeds the supply, the state is now divided into factions.

Fishcamp is an attractive, thoughtfully produced book. It is printed on recycled acid-free paper and handsomely illustrated with ink sketches by Laura Simonds Southworth on the dust jacket, title page, and at the beginnings of each of the five sections. These sketches contextualize the writing and establish a softened mood and tone for the book.

I read part of this book between flights at the Salt Lake City, Utah airport, where I was constantly distracted by the blaring CNN Airport Network television, beeping electric carts, and people in suits and dresses walking and talking on cell phones as they pulled their wheeled suitcases along. It made me feel good that there is still an opportunity for people like Nancy Lord to live meaningfully and quietly in out of the way places without all the latest technological gadgets. We do have a choice.

Readers may also be interested to know that another book entitled *Fishcamp*, written by an Alaska Native woman, Dorothy Savage Joseph, was also published in 1997 (Bend, OR: Maverick Publications). Joseph's fishcamp, where she spent all of her summers as a child, is located on the Yukon River ten miles below the village of Holy Cross. Although not written on the same literary level as Lord's, Joseph's memoir provides an interesting counterpoint, in that her camp was used by her family for at least three generations for subsistence rather than commercial fishing. Both writers demonstrate fierce loyalty to place and memory. While the two women were apparently unaware of each others' work, the convergence of their minds around the word "fishcamp" illustrates its great power as an Alaskan image and metaphor. Their experiences are vastly different, but it is more than a coincidence that the titles are the same.

The Making of Belize: Globalization in the Margins. By Anne Sutherland. Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey, 1998, 224 pp.

Reviewed by Laurie Kroshus Medina, Department of Anthropology, Michigan State University.

This book asserts that Belize leapt from its status as a British colony to become a 'postmodern' nation, without passing through 'modernity.' According to its back cover, *The Making of Belize* challenges "theories of globalization that paint marginal areas as losers in the world economy" by exploring how the small country of Belize is being made - or remade - in a globalized, deterritorialized world that rewards social and cultural creativity.

The text consists of three major sections, in addition to a preface and conclusion. The preface presents a history of the author's involvement in Belize, through her mother's marriage to a Belizean. Part one, "An Ethnographic History," provides a brief overview of Belizean colonial history and reviews and updates the author's previous book on a small island off the Belizean coast, focusing on family organization and relationships. Part two, "A Nation in the Making," contains chapters on Belizean ethnic diversity and nation-building efforts, the rise of tourism, and