

Elizabeth Peratrovich

Elizabeth Wanamaker Peratrovich was born July 4, 1911, in Petersburg, Alaska. Her Tlingit name was Kaaxgal.aat. She was of the Lukaax.adi clan of the [Raven moiety](#). Her parents died when she was young and she was adopted. She attended Petersburg Elementary School, Sheldon Jackson School, and graduated from Ketchikan High School. She continued her studies at Western College of Education in Bellingham, Washington.



Elizabeth married Roy Peratrovich of Klawock on December 15, 1931, in Bellingham, Washington. They moved back to Alaska to raise their family in 1941. On moving from Klawock to Juneau, they were astonished to discover signs in business establishments revealing blatant discrimination against Alaska's Native people. With the help of then Governor Ernest Gruening and Congressional Representative Anthony J. Dimond, legislation was sponsored and introduced in the Legislature in 1943. However, the "Equal Rights" Bill did not pass until the next legislative session in 1945.

As Grand Camp President of the Alaska Native Sisterhood, Elizabeth provided the crucial testimony that cultivated passage of the Anti Discrimination Bill. It was her response when questioned by the Senate -- Will the equal rights bill eliminate discrimination in Alaska? -- that split the opposition and allowed the bill to pass.

Elizabeth answered,

"Have you eliminated larceny or murder by passing a law against it? No law will eliminate crimes but, at least you as legislators, can assert to the world that you recognize the evil of the present situation and speak your intent to help us overcome discrimination."

As Elizabeth stepped down from the Senate platform, the galleries and some of the senators gave her a rousing acclaim. The Senate passed the bill 11 to 5. A new era in Alaska's racial relations had begun. Elizabeth Peratrovich died on December 1, 1958, after a lengthy battle with cancer. She is buried in Evergreen Cemetery in Juneau.

It was not until many years later that Elizabeth's efforts to secure equality for all Alaskans won recognition. In 1988, the Alaska Legislature established February 16 as "The Annual Elizabeth Peratrovich Day," the anniversary of the signing of the Anti-Discrimination Act. Every year since that day, Alaskans pause to remember her, dedicating themselves to the continuation of her efforts to achieve equality and justice for all Alaskans of every race, creed, and ethnic background.

http://library.thinkquest.org/11313/Early_History/Native_Alaskans/elizabeth.html

