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# Andromeda Romano-Lax shares the publication of her new book:

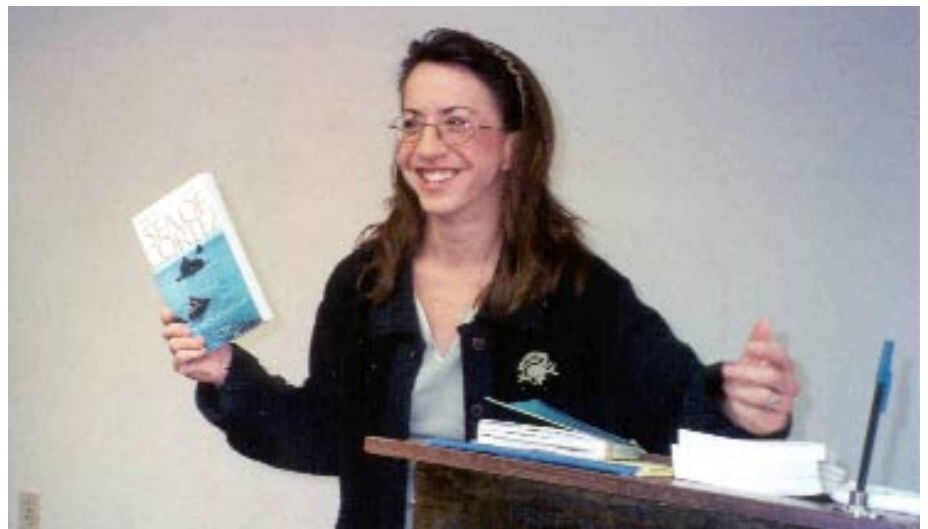
## Searching for Steinbeck's Sea of Cortez

by Barbara Brown

Anchorage writer Andromeda Romano-Lax delighted the October luncheon attendees with stories of her travels and the writing of her book about those travels. (My particular favorite was the search for the nearly-extinct sea cucumber ... with an impatient boatload of tourists who tried to get the boat to leave without her.)

Why the Sea of Cortez? How do you define why you fall in love with a place? From the beginning Andromeda was taken with the area and the incredible richness of its marine life, ultimately bringing her husband-to-be, Brian Lax, to share the place with her. Knowing her own "Sea of Cortez," she wanted to uncover John Steinbeck's "Sea of Cortez" as well. (Steinbeck wrote *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*, but his experience there colored much of his later writing.)

In 2000, Andromeda and her family – including two children ages 5 and 2 – took off for Baja. It was the result of ten years of planning, of "to do" lists full of overwhelming tasks: learn Spanish, teach the kids to swim, get boat. Andromeda already had a graduate degree in Marine Management, but she and her husband did further



Writer Andromeda Romano-Lax speaks at Alaska Press Women's October luncheon.

research into the science of the area, into Steinbeck's journey with his friend, Ed Ricketts. Ricketts was the one who kept the notebooks; she knew all about his erotic dreams by the end. Ultimately, she said, they took off. She wasn't fluent in Spanish, but she could conduct interviews, and they had a boat. It was time.

The trip didn't turn out exactly as she'd planned. The boat episode ended, she felt unprepared for the enormity of the science required, and her daughter became very sick. But

Andromeda likes to point out that even Steinbeck said, "We do not take a trip; a trip takes us." All the twists and turns they took became their search.

Although trained as a journalist, Andromeda felt she "got no respect" as one in Mexico. People expected someone else; she expected to have "normal" interviews. In one hilarious incident, she interviewed a man who tried to teach her the local names for the marine animals; she floundered and had no idea what words and syllables she was repeating. But ultimately,

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this is her story, her "Sea of Cortez." If Steinbeck could try on Ricketts' Taoist way of looking at their trip, so could Andromeda try it on for hers.

Next on her agenda is a novel about a cellist in World War II-era Spain. (Andromeda is learning the cello.) She originally planned to write the story of Pablo Casals; but her ideas, her sense of "what if," and her fascination with the entire historical period kept expanding. The book has evolved into a novel. To do this, Andromeda spent a month in San Juan, Puerto Rico, learning the cello from a professional cellist. He was also extremely attractive and had them playing into mirrors ... to keep track of her bowing form. It's a good story; have her tell you it.

She sets goals for herself in her writing: get a certain amount of work done in a week, and she buys herself fresh flowers. She runs so she can see progress, see how far she's come.

Finally, she gave us all a wonderful gift. Andromeda passed out pieces of paper and asked everyone to write down a Big Dream for the next five years, a really Big Dream. Then we had to break it into parts. And then we had to write down why we were the one – the right one – to do this.

We could all walk out of the room with our own "Sea of Cortez" in the planning stages.



Future Press Woman? Yereth Rosen's young daughter holds her baby doll up to see family friend Andromeda Romano-Lax speak to Alaska Press Women. Yereth is the Alaska reporter for Reuters America, an international news agency.

## The Prez Says

Diane Walters

APW was well represented at the national NFPW conference last month by Connie Graffis, Pat Richardson, and Rose Ragsdale-Hill in addition to our own Ella Wright as NFPW president. I want to thank Connie especially for representing me at the leaders luncheon and other functions at the conference.

I've received several e-mails from national containing comments on the conference. In general, attendees praised the quality of the workshops and the pre and post-conference tours. The following are some notes about the conference provided by Pat Richardson.

Thirty-five affiliates were represented at the conference, with 84 delegates and 29 first timers, including Rose Ragsdale-Hill. Connie Graffis received a Sacagawea teddy bear with a Sacagawea gold dollar sewn on its chest as a prize for traveling the farthest.

NFPW currently has 1,797 members. Donna Penticuff, NFPW first vice-president, who also is in charge of membership, reported that national's number one priority is membership growth. NFPW is offering grants up to \$100 to ten affiliates for membership development. Five grants will be awarded by December 31 and five will be awarded by March 31, 2003. National reported that we are losing 250 members per year. Marsha Shuler will continue the lost members campaign.

There were 989 entries in the commu-



Rose Ragsdale-Hill, Connie Graffis, NFPW president Ella Wright and Pat Richardson at the NFPW national conference.

nications contest this year, with 278 winners. Fifty winners attended the conference. The Virginia affiliate won the State sweepstakes award and received \$150. First runner-up was Nebraska followed by North Dakota. In the individual sweepstakes contest, first place went to Sarah Versey of South Carolina for eight awards; first runner-up was Tammy Swift of North Dakota and second runner-up was Tracy Bryant, affiliate unknown.

The Communicator of Achievement Award went to Kay Wood Bailey from Delaware; the runner-up was Pearl Serbus of Illinois.

The Delaware affiliate is hosting the 2003 conference in Wilmington, Sept. 4-6. Speakers and workshop presenters will include Delaware Governor Ruth Ann Minner, former CNN World Affairs correspondent Ralph Begleiter, Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism professor Steven Ross and U.S. Senator Joseph Biden (D), chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations committee.

Pat will have a more detailed article in the next issue of *Articulation*.

Diane

Carol Day expresses her joy at seeing Joy Cunningham at the luncheon. Joy moved from Anchorage to Wrangell a couple of years ago. She was back in the big city to attend the Make It Alaska fair.



# Plans under way for 2003 Alaska Press Women Communications Contest

Deadline for entries for all categories in the 2003 contest is February 7, 2003.

"We hope to see an even greater number of entrants in this coming year's contest," said Contest Coordinator Karen L. Lew after the contest committee met in early October to start gearing up for the 2003 APW Communications Contest. Last year's contest drew 36 entries, 16 of which won first-place awards and went on to compete in the National Federation of Press Women competition; there, eight Alaska entries garnered awards.

Prospective entrants are encouraged to begin now to collect materials for the contest. All entries must have been broadcast, published, telecast, or printed for the Web from January 1, 2002, through December 31, 2002 (with special exceptions for series that may have begun in 2001 but culminated in 2002).

Entrants must be members of Alaska Press Women to submit materials to the contest, and new members must have paid their dues by the entry deadline. New members who join now will be members for the remainder of 2002 as well as for 2003.

"This year, we want to expand the contest to include more people in college and in parts of the state outside of the Anchorage area," said Lew. "We are working with Rhonda McBride, APW second vice president and rural liaison, and with Connie Graffis, chair of the scholarship committee, to reach these people."

Several additions have been made to contest categories, some categories have been combined, and some of the entry details have changed. All regulations and categories for entering the



Judy Griffin, Dee Gould, and Carolyn Rinehart (seated) met with Contest Coordinator Karen L. Lew at Dee's home to begin work for the 2003 APW Communications Contest.

2003 APW contest are posted at a link on the Alaska Press Women web site <http://www.akpresswomen.com>. Information about preparing materials for the contest is also included on the Web site.

Anyone having questions after reading the materials on the Web, can contact Lew at [KarenLLew@earthlink.net](mailto:KarenLLew@earthlink.net). Anyone who is unable to access the Web site for rules, categories, and entry form may contact Judy Griffin at [jfgriffin@chugach.net](mailto:jfgriffin@chugach.net), and she will send hard copies.

## Life rhythms and patterns different in Bush Alaska

I've got rhythm – but it's different than yours.

When I first moved to Barrow in 1972, I went as a nurse for Indian Health Service. I flew from New York City, where I had been nursing, to a small Eskimo village that seemed to be literally on the edge of nowhere.

Needless to say, I had some things to learn about the different way things were done in Bush Alaska. Specifically, I had a lot to learn about the different rhythms and patterns of life. For instance, in the Arctic you have a light and dark season. You have whaling season, a caribou season and a duck-hunting season.

There is a season to fish in the rivers and lagoons and a season to sit inside and prepare everything you will need for the other seasons. What you don't have are four seasons in any traditional western sense of them.

Then, of course, I needed to learn about the infamous rhythm of time in the Bush. For someone who, if throwing a dinner party at 7 PM has the food ready at 7:01 PM, this was one of the hardest things to adjust to. People felt comfortable coming in anytime from 6 PM till midnight and the occasional diehard would show up the next day looking to see if there were any leftovers. Life was, to

by Elise Patkotak

put it mildly, much more laid back than in the city.

But the one rhythm that was the hardest for me to acculturate to, the one I still have the most problem with, was the rhythm of language and speech. I'd sit in the exam room with a young patient asking all the questions you'd normally be asked in such a situation and wonder why they weren't answering. Well, for starts, they were. If I but took my face out of the chart long enough to look at them, I would see their face working madly to answer me. Raised eyebrows meant yes, squinting eyes meant no. And as often as I repeated the question, they would repeat the facial gestures. Eventually I caught on.

The other thing I did a lot was ask

the questions too quickly. Speech and language are obviously very important in properly conveying how you feel or what problem brought you to the doctor. As such, the Inupiat felt it was very important to clearly understand the question and think through the answer before giving it. For someone use to the rat-a-tat rhythm of the East Coast, these pauses in speech seemed interminable.

Since that space of silence after my question was so uncomfortable to me, I immediately tried to fill it. I assumed my question had been too complicated and tried to rephrase it. Well, now I really had this poor patient going nuts. Here they were trying to translate my first question into the language with which they were most familiar, formulate an answer, translate it back to English and say it to me. Now, I had hit them with yet another question to remember.

Needless to say, the more questions I threw at them, the more confused they looked and the more pain they seemed to be in. On some level it just didn't seem right that coming to the hospital should cause them more pain than they'd arrived in.

What I learned in those early days was that pausing before answering was not a sign the person was stupid or didn't understand the question. It was a sign of the respect that question was being given that the person was working hard to make sure they gave you the best answer they could. I learned that in many Native cultures, body language was as important as what was being said. I learned that raised eyebrows meant yes, not "Yikes". I learned that squinting eyes didn't necessarily mean a person needed glasses.

Most importantly, I learned that the bush beats to a different rhythm and if I want to get information from it, I have to tune into that rhythm and not try to impose mine.

## Elected Officers

Diane Walters, President . . . . . Diane.H.Walters@poa02.usace.army.mil  
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 Historian . . . . . vacant



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