

## Everyday Women of Sitka: June 2020

### Dr. Mary Wegner



#### **1. Can you please tell me a little about yourself? How long have you lived in Sitka? What types of things are you involved in here?**

I seek to transform myself and the world around me for the betterment of humankind, and have been working to achieve the goal of equity in education since I became an educator in 1985. In November of 1989 I moved to Alaska with no job, no place to live, my car full of all of my Earthy possessions, my cat, and \$42 in my pocket. I landed in Juneau because it was the largest city I could get to by ferry and I expected to only stay for about a year. I now have an Arts Council license plate that reads *AKMary* and I don't see myself leaving the state.

I first moved to Sitka in 1997, left after 5 years, and then returned to Sitka in 2010, which means I have a long history of Sitka and with Sitkans even though I didn't live here the entire time since I first arrived. When I lived here the first time I was involved with the Civil Air Patrol and led the youth or Cadet program for many years. Since I returned, my work as first Assistant Superintendent and then Superintendent of Sitka School District hasn't left me much time for socializing; however, I have been active in the Easter Group, now called Sitka Outreach and Support (SOS): Lifeline, where we work to support individuals who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. I am also active in the local Baha'i community.

Professionally, I am involved in statewide, national, and international organizations related to innovation in education, such as being a Board Member of the International Society for Technology

in Education and being a member of the League of Innovative Schools that consists of 114 superintendents and school districts in the nation who are recognized for their innovative educational practices and work towards equity. I also serve as a Trustee on the Alaska State Council on the Arts. I am a passionate advocate of policies and funding that promote the value of public education to society and the necessity of learning in digital-rich environments for success in life.

## **2. What is your biggest struggle right now?**

Achieving equity in education is my biggest struggle and my life-long goal. That alone is a huge struggle, and I have found it to be especially difficult to be a short female leader doing this work who does not follow the paradigm of traditional leadership nor embody traditional physical dimensions. Being a leader who is willing to listen before acting and wants to be collaborative with all parties has been seen as weak by some, and yet these are exactly the skills that are needed if we are to actually achieve equity.

## **3. What does a normal “Day in the Life” look like for you?**

Although every day is different for me, there are some patterns. My workdays are long and by long I mean that a 12-14 hour day with no break is common at least 2 days a week, and on other days a typically work day for me is at least 10 hours with no break. During my work time, I could be doing anything from spending time in a classroom to meeting with a community partner to plan mutual projects to facilitating a budget work session for the school board.

## **4. What makes you proud to be a woman?**

It is not easy to bear the weight of humanity on our shoulders and navigate a world that was designed to diminish our voices. This is true for women, as well as all people who are oppressed. I am in constant awe of my sisters who know their value and also support and honor all people meaning they are not afraid to listen and show respect at all times. Not all women do this nor do all men and yet I appreciate those who do of all genders. I will share that I am especially proud and seek to voraciously learn about strong female leaders throughout history who governed exceptionally and inspired people.

## **5. Do you have something you’d like to say to other women in Sitka?**

I would like to address the female youth in Sitka. I have watched over the years and admired the growing number of strong female youth who are actively engaging in making the world a better place for all. Bravo to you for taking what I have longed to achieve and making it real, and Gunalchéesh for your vision, passion, and dedication. Because of you I have hope for our future.

## **6. Is there anything else you would like people to know about you?**

As a woman in a very public position with significant responsibilities, I took those responsibilities seriously and always made decisions and acted in a way consistent with the highest and best good for all and I believed that others would do the same. I only know how to believe in humanity and am proud of what we have accomplished together.