

Everyday Women of Sitka – Paulette Moreno



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?

My name is Paulette M. Moreno. I am a Tlingit, Japanese, and Hispanic woman. I am a little bit over half a century old, so I've learned a bit but have a lot more to learn also. I was born right here in beautiful Sitka along with most of my brothers and sisters to Phil Moreno Sr. and Harriet Miyasato.

When I was about five years old we moved to Anchorage and came back and forth quite a bit to Sitka. I have lived here as an adult and been involved in the community. You can say I am an island girl. I have two daughters, Shaleena and Marissa. Both of them are wonderful, powerful, strong, amazing women but I am very humble to say they are great mothers and that is what I love about them the most. I have five grandchildren and the sixth one on the way. So that is where the heart is.

I've lived here for about the last ten years. Two of them were in Colorado, though, at the base of the Rocky Mountains. I am be the daughter of Harriet Beleal, so I am very involved, as is my sister Rachel, with my mom. My mom is very young, 86 years old, and she lives here in the house with us. Our days are centered around our mother and making sure she is healthy and well. The things that she wants to accomplish in these years of her life are one of our priorities. Anybody who knows my mom knows and wouldn't be surprised to hear that she runs circles around us. Being a daughter is one of the main things I am involved with.

I am also involved with the community, with the spiritual strength of the community. My love and my priority is highlighted through involvement of action but the root of any action is seeking and praying for peace on a silent and in the world. Some of the avenues is to invite Guwakaann, the peacemaker, deer in Lingit, through the Tlingit and Haida Community Council in Sitka. There are six delegates just elected. This is my seventh year to serve. I serve with wonderful people, and we represent Sitka in our Tribal Assembly.

I am also a past president of the Alaska Native Sisterhood Camp 4. I served two years as second Grand Vice President [of the Alaska Native Sisterhood Grand Camp], two years as first Grand Vice President, and two years as Grand President, and I am currently going into my third term because of the pandemic. The Executive Council and the rest of the sisters decided to continue having us on for another year.

We represent over twenty-one communities throughout Southcentral, Southeast Alaska, and the Northwest Coast, such as Kake, Angoon, Hoonah, Tenakee Springs, to name a few. So being the Alaska Native Sisterhood Grand President is something that you do alongside your Sisters and Brothers. Something that you do is find the best in everybody and lift them up and work together. We are a civil rights organization but we are based on spirit, on love, and on faith. I would say that faith is the most important one right now because the world is a little uncertain and having faith is so important. Faith that our families, villages, and towns will be okay. That we will find a way through this as our ancestors have done. I am very involved in our communities. I also hold other positions but those are the three that I would highlight right now. I try to bring spirit forward in the community through those roles.

2. What is your biggest struggle right now?

I am a people person. I am outgoing, an extrovert in many ways, and this is a pandemic. I've been in Sitka since February and I've not traveled anywhere. It's been a struggle because in making those choices and not going to gatherings and events and different things like that ... I miss that. I miss seeing people. I miss seeing their three-dimensional faces and seeing the contours of their lines, the color of their eyes. Their faces are beautiful because you see their character. But now I focus on their eyes, through the mask. I think that it's a struggle because we wear masks and sometimes it masks our souls. And it is a struggle to see the full expression, if somebody is safe, if they're hurting, if they're happy, joyous, you really have to look into their eyes and that is a learning tool. But one of the biggest struggles for me is the technology, zooming so much and doing all the different things. I understand it on an intellectual level but I miss the connection, the healing connection.

3. What does a normal "Day in the Life" look like for you?

A normal day in my life starts pretty early. I usually wake up between 4 and 6 and I step outside. We have a big balcony and I walk around the balcony several times just to get a sense of the day. Then I usually go back to bed and rest until I am ready to wake up, unless I have an appointment that day. As soon as I am going from sleep to wake I lay there, close my eyes and talk to my Father in Heaven, my Creator, about the day and surrender myself to it. That's the first thing I do, surrender myself to the day. Whatever it is that's set in before me, whatever it is that he would have me do I will do.

And then a cup of coffee. I got in the habit of drinking fishermen's coffee. I hadn't drunk coffee my whole life until my thirties, and then in my late thirties someone gave me fishermen's coffee and I loved it. I went to Canada with the people in the interior, and they drink Nabob [Canadian brand] coffee. They take wood chips that they put in cheese cloth and they put it in the top of the can with Nabob coffee, and the alder or cedar chips will flavor that whole pot of coffee. That is so good. So I started enjoying coffee.

After coffee I check on my mom, see what she needs to do and try to adjust my schedule and then I usually have a lot of different appointments and commitments. There's a lot of meetings as ANS Grand President, committees, the local camps, Tlingit & Haida. An average day is very busy. It doesn't end until very late at night. There are a lot of opportunities to be of service. There's a lot of organizing. I look at it like I have a remembrance of being always abeam and within the deepest part of that sense of being. I always know there is and will be organization. There is organization in a way every star is set in the sky,

every way a raindrop falls, every flow of salmon that goes through the streams. So why is it that we wouldn't be organized? I think organization is very important and I organize my day but I am flexible in my day.

Everybody in Sitka knows that the minute you walk out the door the day takes on a life of itself. I love that about Sitka and what I mean is that you can have your plan to go three different places but in between during all those three different places you see this person, a student or a relative or someone who just came into town, and before you know it you're having lunch with them or you're sitting there trying to help them go find their favorite yarn at Salvation Army. Sometimes you see somebody that's hungry and your day is about turned to be off.

Sometimes, even in our beautiful town, you hear a comment that you know is unkind, directed at yourself or somebody else by somebody who has just merely forgotten that we are one, our human hearts are one, that variation of color is beautiful. And sometimes you hear those comments and you just need to go to a mountain top or by the water and hear the opposite of that kind of comment in nature. So my days are filled like that. It seems that we somehow all gather around a really big dinner. Rachel is a great cook. She has that in her talent basket. I do not. Rachel wants to cook and we always gather around and have a meal almost every night. And I call my daughters. So that's a typical day.

Towards the end of the day before I lay my head down I ask have I done what you've sent me to do? And I go through my day and I look at the people that I've seen and things that have taken place and I make a note if there is a carry over.

4. What makes you proud to be a woman?

Being a life giver. There's energy in the world and there are balances and I love being a woman and I am proud to be a mother, a grandmother, and a daughter. I am proud to be a woman because of our intuition. We have strong intuition and that's powerful because our intuition is like a soul map. You know when you're veering off and you know when you are right on track. I think women have that ability and I am very proud of those moments when I as a woman follow my intuition because it leaves me to authentic living.

I think women have come into our own. Women have fought really, really hard to be recognized to be able to vote and be able to take a place and stand not before or behind but next to our fellow men and women. Elizabeth Peratrovich was very proud to be a woman. There is unknown struggles that we can't even imagine that I see happen to women every day. I am proud that there are more and more women that are living an authentic existence. I am proud to be a woman because I am living in a century that I have my Sisterhood of the world right next to me. It's an accomplishment. Are we done? No, but are we moving forward all the time? We are locking arms like when we're going to cross a river and you're with all your girlfriends. I did that at Indian River with all my cousins and girlfriends. We had to get across the river and I was four years old. It seemed so big. We locked arms and as soon as we went across the river my feet went up in the current and I locked arms with the girls next to me. And we do that today. We lock arms and we get together and we get it done.

5. Do you have something you'd like to say to other women in Sitka?

I have two favorite scriptures. Many have been repeated to me over my lifetime by elderly women that I love very much. One of them is "For I have not given you the spirit of fear but of power and of love and of a sound mind." I think that is so beautiful. Another one refers to "We are that we might have joy." There you go. We are not here to just only struggle. We are not here just to suffer through this life with

our head down. We are here when you have a problem or something to go through at this moment, when you can do something about it. All the moments in between there may be a rainbow or there may be a child who needs some help tying their shoe. There may be an elder that wants to tell a story or there may be a funny way the birds are flying in the trees. There's all these in-between moments that you can have joy. They are there every single day and even in the darkest, deepest hours of struggle ... if you walk outside there is some gift. And that's why they call it the present that you can open. It's a present from God.

I would like to say to the women of Sitka that we are here that we might have joy. We are here to not just only exist but to balance this beautiful landscape, Tlingit Aaní, and let it into every soul and every part of our DNA. And we do that and we feel that joy and I want to say to the women of Sitka to be patient. In slowing down to breathe it's okay. You don't need the status quo. You don't need to be everything to everyone. Just breathing is okay. Slowing down is good medicine, for the earth and for us.

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

I love to gather. I love to go out with the men to harvest herring eggs. This last summer when we went out to harvest herring eggs we got a lot of eggs on kelp. They are really heavy and you pull them up on a boat. The guys just said "Okay, Paulette, bring 'em up." If anybody knows me I am 5'1". You get a kind of strength that you never know you had. When you are happy doing something you have a strength you never knew you had. I don't think that I am accomplishing anything alone. I feel as if I have so much goodness around me, in my family and in nature that I feel that I can accomplish and I don't see a challenge differently.

I also want to say that I know this has really been a difficult year for a lot of people. What I like people to know about me is that I truly believe in the integrity of the human spirit. Thereby our souls are connected, through integrity. Not just pain and loss and love, but through integrity. Because of that we should stand as the beautiful forest of many that we are.