

*GROWING OUR OWN: INDIGENOUS RESEARCH, SCHOLARS, AND EDUCATION*  
*Proceedings from the Alaska Native Studies Conference (2015)*

## Comments of Appreciation and Admiration for Dr. Richard Dauenhauer

In Memory of Richard Dauenhauer

Maria Shaa Tláa Williams<sup>1,2</sup>, Ray Barnhardt<sup>3</sup>, Marie “Kaayistaan” Olson<sup>4</sup>, Jeane T’áaw xíwaa Breinig<sup>5</sup>, Gail Dabaluz<sup>6,7</sup>, and Alberta Jones<sup>7,8</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Music, University of Alaska Anchorage, AK

<sup>2</sup>Alaska Native Studies, University of Alaska Anchorage, AK

<sup>3</sup>Cross Cultural Studies Department, University of Alaska Fairbanks, AK

<sup>4</sup>Independent scholar, Juneau, AK

<sup>5</sup>Department of English, University of Alaska Anchorage, AK

<sup>6</sup>Business and Economic Development, Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska

<sup>7</sup>Indigenous Studies Program, University of Alaska Fairbanks, AK

<sup>8</sup>Department of Education, University of Alaska Southeast Juneau, AK

My entire professional career has been inspired by and supported by Richard and Nora Dauenhauer. It is with tremendous sadness that I write this, as Richard has gone into the forest and is no longer with us. Richard was a consummate gentleman, scholar and mentor. The kind comments that he and Nora shared, not only with me, but also with other fledgling scholars, helped us grow and develop, and kept us on the right path in the arena of Indigenous scholarship.

My first professional position was the Director of Alaska Native Arts for the Alaska State Council on the Arts. This was a position I held from 1991 to 1993. Richard and Nora attended council meetings, and gently inspired me. Looking back now, I was like a very small seedling – maybe needing extra care in a greenhouse before being put outside to eventually yield a harvest. They were so generous with the time they spent with me, conversations over coffee or dinner. They never talked about themselves or their work, but focused on what I was doing and always offering any help. I could always call them and ask for the correct Tlingit spelling or translation of terms and words – and they

never *ever* were inconvenienced, although I’m sure they were, since I called often and at all hours.

In 1993 I moved to Santa Fe to teach at the Institute of American Indian Arts, and they both came down to the Native American Language Institute (NALI) conference. They made sure to schedule a time to have breakfast. They had just completed their major tomé, *Haa kusteeyí: Our Culture Tlingit Life Stories*. They urged me to start writing. I remember that lovely breakfast like it was yesterday, in the Hotel Santa Fe. We talked about music and dancing, and language and how important teaching was. Again, they were ever so gently guiding me and addressing how important education was – and that it was a position of power. “To be a teacher, that is powerful.” At the time, I don’t think I grasped how profound Richard’s statement was, but I always remembered it.

When I had the opportunity to edit the *Alaska Native Reader*, I contacted Richard and Nora and although they were incredibly busy, he said they would contribute poetry. They did not want to turn down my request, no matter

how busy they were. What kindness, patience, support and mentorship!

I hope someday to have just a fraction of the grace that Richard Dauenhauer had, and the gentle guiding hand of a great mentor.

Dick and Nora have been selfless contributors to Native language and culture for over 40 years. To illustrate the significance of Dick's work as a teacher and scholar, I offer the following excerpt from his book, *Conflicting Visions in Alaskan Education*.

"As teachers of English, we inherit a teaching situation not of our making. It is a complex situation but it is one over which we do have some personal control. As English teachers, we are dealing with infinitely complex socio-linguistic factors. It is our responsibility to understand them, to address them seriously, and in all their complexity. As English teachers, we each operate in a very intricate language community. It is our responsibility to

I loved to read his Glacier Concerto; He gave all his students one during his Creative Writing class. That is where I learned there were many ways in creative writing. I also learned how to read poetry, when he recommended a book that was out of print; "How Does A Poem mean?" He taught us how to do the Japanese Haiku, only in English! I fell in love with writing short

With deepest sadness I write these words.

*~Maria Shaa Tláa Williams, Anchorage  
Associate Professor, Music/Alaska  
Native Studies, University of Alaska  
Anchorage*

understand our own language and its interaction with other languages in the community. Unless we begin to do this, we will only recycle the frustrations of the last hundred years. Unless we really understand our language and how we use it in the cultural context, we will never really be teaching English – we will only be teaching a lot of prejudice about English, which is what I think we've been doing for a couple of hundred years."

*~Dr. Ray Barnhardt, Fairbanks  
Professor, Cross Cultural Studies  
Department-University of Alaska  
Fairbanks*

stories, and I still make them up in my mind.

Richard worked very hard, along with Nora. They often had long discussions regarding how to translate one Tlingit word.

*~Marie "Kaayistaan" Olson, Juneau  
Semi-Retired Cultural Educator*

I was fortunate to meet Richard and Nora when I was a graduate student at the University of Washington. They had come down to host a workshop based on their book *Haa Tuwunáagu Yis, For Healing Our Spirit*. What an impressive publication. What a wonderful team! I admire and appreciate the work they have accomplished together and

already miss Richard's powerful intellect and wry sense of humor. Ha'waa!

~ *Jeane T'áaw xíwaa Breinig, Anchorage*  
*English Professor, Associate Dean of*  
*Humanities-University of Alaska*  
*Anchorage*

I first met Dr. Richard Dauenhauer after he and Nora interviewed my grandfather, Judson Brown for the book *Haa Kusteeyí: Our Culture*. Richard graciously shared their fieldwork and expressed his view that Tlingit oratory surpassed many great western literature. As families experience loss, Richard and Nora were always at our side, reminding us of each person's unique contribution, while helping us grieve. I will miss his presence. Memory Eternal, Dr. Dauenhauer, we all

benefitted from your academic enthusiasm, zest for life and documenting our beautiful, Tlingit way of being.

~ *Gail Dabaluz, Juneau*  
*Director, Business and Economic*  
*Development, Central Council of*  
*Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of*  
*Alaska and Indigenous Studies*  
*PhD Student, University of Alaska*  
*Fairbanks*

When I first met this amazing author, Dr. Richard Dauenhauer, I was taken by how humble, gracious, and kind he was, as is Dr. Nora. He put others on a pedestal. Dr. Dauenhauer has been a role model and leader for educators, culture bearers, language learners, and students, not only in Alaska, but globally. He and Nora contributed and passed on an incredible amount of material to Tlingit language, culture, and history. *Doyck-*

*shin/Quyaana!* We are eternally grateful for the contributions in oral narrative, outstanding research, and written works of Dr.'s Richard and Nora Dauenhauer.

~*Alberta Jones, Juneau*  
*Assistant Professor, Education-University of*  
*Alaska Southeast Juneau and Indigenous*  
*Studies PhD Candidate- University of Alaska*  
*Fairbanks*