

Everyday Women of Sitka: Cyndi Cassedy



- **Can you please tell me a little about yourself? How long have you lived in Sitka?**

I grew up in two small Oregon towns — one on the coast, the other at the foot of the Cascade Mountains. I started working in newspapers when I was 16. My dad was a millwright. My mother worked in and owned restaurants, and was an artist. I was the youngest of 10 (7 siblings; 3 foster). Mom and Dad had been through just about every situation by the time I came along, and nothing much fazed them. This probably explains why I'm so laid back. My older sisters and brothers had their own families when I, one of my sisters, and three fosters were growing up. There was happiness and respect in my home and it was where all of our friends wanted to hang out. My father died of cancer when I was 17 and still in high school. I graduated and attended college.

I was working at a newspaper office one day when my roommate informed me she was moving to Sitka, Alaska, to fish commercially with her dad. I followed not long after that, in 1983. Eventually my newspaper roots found the Daily Sitka Sentinel, where I started working in 1988. One of my older brothers, Leo, moved to Sitka in the early 1960s to work at the Alaska Lumber and Pulp mill. He met a beautiful woman, Wilma Joseph, married her, and started a family. Her father was Charlie Joseph, a highly respected Tlingit leader. I often remark how I am related to half the town, as the Joseph family is very large! I am honored to have been adopted into the Eagle Kaagwaantaan Clan. Charlie gave me my Tlingit name, which I then received at his potlatch. It is Yaaka Shoonanein. My Mother also was adopted at the same koo.eex. She passed

away in Sitka in 2004. My daughter and husband were adopted into the Raven Coho Clan at Charlie's wife Annie Joseph's koo.eex.

I met my husband Scott, a commercial fisherman, in Sitka. We were married in a double ceremony – dressed in Alaska Day and Sitka 9th Infantry clothing – by Sitka artist Vyola Belle atop Castle Hill, surrounded by friends, family and tourists. It was quite a wonderful ceremony. My friend and photographer Jana Suchy took a photo which she named "Pure Joy." It depicts the energy, fun and laughter of the event.

We have a daughter, Danielle, 34, and I have a stepson, Neil, and two grandsons.

- **What types of things are you involved in here?**

I work at the Sentinel full time. It has been a challenge under COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, but we are making it work. I feel very fortunate to work with awesome coworkers and bosses. If you have ever sent us a classified ad, PSA, obituary, wedding announcement, or any news release, chances are I was the person you spoke with.

I've been a Sitka Skippers jump rope coach, judge and scorekeeper; I compile the Blessing of the Fleet list of names every year; I have worked on fundraisers and bake sales through the years for many organizations; worked at the Pioneer Bar; founded and operated Baranof Berry Patch; made apparel and other items for Native potlatches; made four Sitka Wearable Arts Runway Show art pieces. I was the White Elephant Shop button lady for years; I managed the publicity for photographer and friend Jana Suchy's photo show at Allen Hall on the SJ Campus; love all types of sewing, quilting, beading, crafts and art; organize events and gatherings; and have written articles and edited for several groups. My favorite art genre is steampunk. One year I made a steampunk fish for the Greater Sitka Arts Council's "Salmon in the Trees" show.

- **What is your biggest struggle right now?**

How the world is being redefined. I'm not comfortable with bigotry, racism, hatred and misogyny being accepted and commonplace. I do not want to leave a world full of hatred to my daughter. I see the gap between the rich and middle and lower classes enlarging, and those of color being disrespected. The Coronavirus is another challenge for all of us. It has changed how we perform our daily tasks and relate to one another. I also never have enough time for all of my projects!

- **What does a normal "Day in the Life" look like for you? What changes happened in this time of the pandemic?**

I'm up early to walk with my grandpuppy (and fitness coach) Cocoa, a mini Australian shepherd. I then head to work. I was fortunate to have both of my hips replaced a couple of years ago. I love medical science! It has afforded me a lifestyle where I can stay active, and I am so grateful. I'm a copy editor, do rewrites on local news, manage classifieds, page layouts, and other duties. Since the pandemic hit, I am the "hub" for my coworkers who now work from home. I love to plant flowers and herbs, cook, live a keto lifestyle, and love being outdoors. The beach is my happy place.

- **What makes you proud to be a woman?**

Mostly, raising an amazing, strong, supportive, beautiful daughter. I am extremely lucky to have her in my life. I am also grateful for my loving family and awesome friends. Life is about the support and love we receive from others, and the connections we make along the way.

- **Do you have something you'd like to say to other women in Sitka?**

Educate yourself. Get out, see the world, and do not believe everyone else's view of it. Travel. Make your own assessments. Vote your heart. Dance. Read. Listen. Laugh. Stay positive. Be in the moment. And don't forget to moisturize!

- **Is there anything else you would like people to know about you?**

I find humor and beauty in most things; I love to travel; I like science, technology, health and current events; I am a mixed-media artist; and I work every day to stay healthy. If I see a worn out or lonely item – clothing, furniture, whatever – I want to take it home and repurpose or upcycle it.