

National Native American Hall of  
Fame 2019 Inductee

**Elizabeth Peratrovich**  
**Tlingit Nation**



**Advocacy**  
**NATIVE RIGHTS ADVOCATE**

1 - 2 50-minute class periods

## **SELECTED COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS**

### **CCSS Literacy SL 10-1**

Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

### **CCSS Literacy SL 10-1d**

Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, summarize points of agreement and disagreement, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views and understanding and make new connections in light of the evidence and reasoning presented.

### **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.1**

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

### **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.2**

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

### **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.3**

Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text; determine whether earlier events caused later ones or simply preceded them.

## **GOALS FOR UNDERSTANDING**

### **Students will understand**

- Elizabeth Peratrovich was a remarkable leader who led a movement and succeeded in passing the first ever non-discrimination law in the United States
- Elizabeth Peratrovich was a forerunner for racial equality and inspired many generations of positive change
- Elizabeth Peratrovich was a member of the Tlingit Nation

- Elizabeth Peratrovich was a smart, savvy and capable leader who blazed a trail for future American Civil Rights leaders, like Martin Luther King, Jr.

## **ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS**

What important law did Elizabeth work to establish in 1945?

Why was Elizabeth Peratrovich considered to be a great leader?

Where did Elizabeth Peratrovich come from and how did she come to represent the Native people of Alaska?

What can we learn from Elizabeth Peratrovich's leadership abilities and qualities to help us understand our own leadership talents?

## **ASSESSMENT EVIDENCE**

### **Suggested Formative Assessment of Learning Outcomes**

Active listening through note taking

Small group discussion

Class discussion

### **Culminating Performance Assessment of Learning Outcomes**

- Students will finish their own small group K/W/H/L charts
- Participate in a small group discussion
- Answer the essential questions when reporting out as a group to the class

## **ENTRY QUESTIONS**

Who is Elizabeth Peratrovich?

What did Elizabeth Peratrovich achieve to be inducted into the National Native American Hall of Fame?

Of which Native American Nation was Elizabeth Peratrovich a member?

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## **MATERIALS**

Computer and internet access for the following videos is required. Additional written materials for printing are at the end of this lesson.

5-minute video about Elizabeth Peratrovich

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDClV94m0d4>

4-minute video describing Elizabeth Peratrovich's history and achievements

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=22&v=oDqPEA4tWN0&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=22&v=oDqPEA4tWN0&feature=emb_logo)

2-minute video about Elizabeth Peratrovich and the challenges she

faced [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_3T6dSfEGZU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_3T6dSfEGZU)

11-minute National Naïve American Hall of Fame “Inspirational Leadership” interview

with grandson, Mike Peratrovich <https://vimeo.com/465242785> The interview is also accessible by scanning the Quick Response (QR) code below with a smartphone or QR Reader.



## **LEARNING MODALITIES**

**Audio/Visual:** Students will watch videos of Elizabeth Peratrovich and Alaska in the 1940's. These videos will provide compelling stories to allow students to gain a greater insight into the history of a critically important woman in time.

**Writing/Recording:** Students will take notes while observing the films, identifying key concepts, sentences or statements that Elizabeth makes during her interview. These notes will be used to complete the K/W/H/L chart in the small groups.

## **OVERT INSTRUCTION**

- 1) The instructor divides the class into groups of four and asks each person and each group to begin making a “K/W/H/L” Chart, which stands roughly for “What they

Know/What they Want to Know/How to Research this topic/What they Learned”

- 2) The teacher can introduce Elizabeth Peratrovich by showing the introductory 2-minute video [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_3T6dSfEGZU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_3T6dSfEGZU)

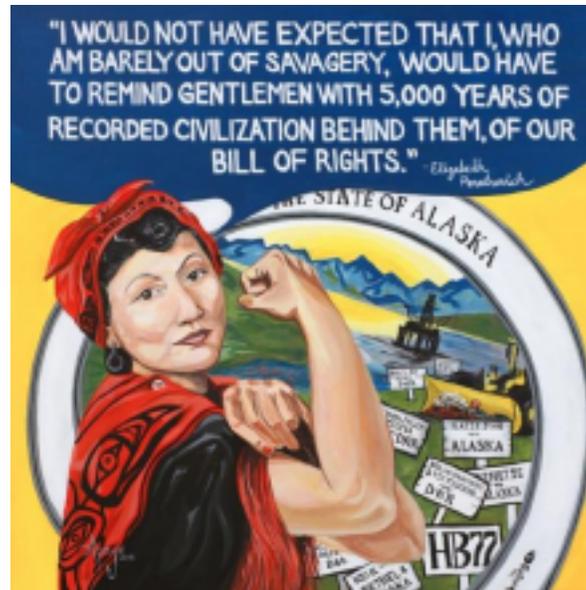
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- 3) Following the short video, students will read the *New York Times* obituary of Elizabeth and use the information in the bio to begin completing their K/W/H/L learning charts. What do we know, what do we want to know about Elizabeth Peratrovich, how can we find out, and what did we learn?
- 4) After about 5 – 10 minutes of discussion and chart work, the teacher will show the class one of the 4- or 5-minute videos of Elizabeth and begin a class discussion about Elizabeth Peratrovich, focusing on three questions:

**Questions**

- a. How did Elizabeth Peratrovich help to change the laws of Alaska? b. What did Elizabeth Peratrovich achieve as a leader for Native Americans throughout the United States?
- c. What types of challenges did Elizabeth Peratrovich overcome on her path to becoming a great leader and passing the Nation’s first anti-discrimination law?
- 5) Following the small group discussions, each group will report out on their answers, and the answers will be included into a class K/W/H/L chart organized by the instructor on a smartboard or projector. The instructor doesn’t have to list all of the small group responses but can focus on themes that become apparent in the class charts.
- 6) The instructor will open the discussion to include any final thoughts, questions or insights about Elizabeth Peratrovich and her career and legacy.

**This concludes the first 50 minutes of the Lesson**



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### **Extension Exercises**

Students who wish to continue their research on Elizabeth Peratrovich and national civil rights and global human rights can follow up by researching the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/index.html> This declaration came 3 years after Elizabeth Peratrovich's great victory for human rights in Alaska, and 16 years before the landmark 1964 American Civil Rights Act. Students can write an essay or an action paper about contemporary civil and human rights, and how the laws have strengthened those rights over time, and what issues still remains? Is Climate Change an issue that affects civil and human rights? How can we address modern problems through the lens of civil and human rights?

### **CRITICAL FRAMING**

Instructors have an opportunity to enlighten students on the struggle for civil rights and human rights around the world and in the history of the United States. Elizabeth Peratrovich's success was stunning from a historical lens, but also from a cultural perspective. There are many ways to highlight the role of leadership in the long journey towards equal rights for all citizens. The words in the US Constitution are words to live by and words to live up to, and this is one of the great challenges that all Americans must meet.

### **DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION FOR ADVANCED AND EMERGING LEARNERS**

Advanced learners can continue their study of Elizabeth Peratrovich and her legacy by reviewing the progress that their state and the nation have made during each decade, to strengthen civil and human rights. The 1964 Civil Rights Act was a landmark but there are other laws that address civil and human rights, and these laws should be given consideration and attention as well. Emerging readers can participate in discussions with their peers about what civil rights are, and why they are important. This discussion should be informed by written resources so that students can refer to them and form opinions about their validity and importance.

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## **BIBLIOGRAPHY AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**



Credit...Alaska State Archives  
March 20, 2019

**By Carson Vaughan**

It was hardly the first affront. They had grown up in a segregated Alaska: separate schools, hospitals, theaters, restaurants and cemeteries. But for Elizabeth Peratrovich and her husband, Roy, Tlingit natives, the sign they spotted one day in late 1941 in Douglas, just across the channel from downtown Juneau, was the final straw.

“No Natives Allowed” read the notice on a hotel door.

“The proprietor of Douglas Inn does not seem to realize that our Native boys are just as willing as the white boys to lay down their lives to protect the freedom that he enjoys,” [they wrote in a letter to Ernest Gruening](#), the territory’s [governor](#), signaling the start of their campaign to fight discrimination in Alaska.

Calling such open bias “an outrage,” the couple continued, “We will still be here to guard our beloved country while hordes of uninterested whites will be fleeing South.”

Gruening agreed with the Peratrovich’s, and they joined forces. In 1943, they attempted to usher an antidiscrimination bill through Alaska’s two-branch Territorial Legislature. It failed, with a tie vote of 8-8 in the House.

In the two years that followed, the Peratrovich’s redoubled their efforts, urging Native Alaskans to campaign for seats in the Legislature and taking their cause on the road to gain support. They even left their children in the care of an orphanage for a summer so that they could travel across the state more freely.

By the time the new bill reached the Senate floor, on Feb. 5, 1945, Congress had increased the size of the territory’s Legislature, two Natives had been elected to it, and

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Alaska’s House had already approved the bill. Though the odds of passage were high, the bill set off hours of passionate debate and drew so many onlookers that the crowd spilled out of the gallery doors.

Senator Allen Shattuck argued that the measure would “aggravate rather than allay” racial tensions.

“Who are these people, barely out of savagery, who want to associate with us whites with 5,000 years of recorded civilization behind us?” he was quoted as saying in Gruening’s 1973 [autobiography](#), “Many Battles.”

When the floor was opened to public comments, Peratrovich set down her knitting needles and rose from her seat in the back.

Taking the podium, she said: “I would not have expected that I, who am barely out of savagery, would have to remind the gentlemen with 5,000 years of recorded civilization behind them of our Bill of Rights.”

She gave examples of the injustices that she and her family had faced because of their background and called on the lawmakers to act. “You as legislators,” she said, “can assert to the world that you recognize the evil of the present situation and speak your intent to help us overcome discrimination.”

Her testimony, *The Daily Alaska Empire* wrote, shamed the opposition into a “defensive whisper.”



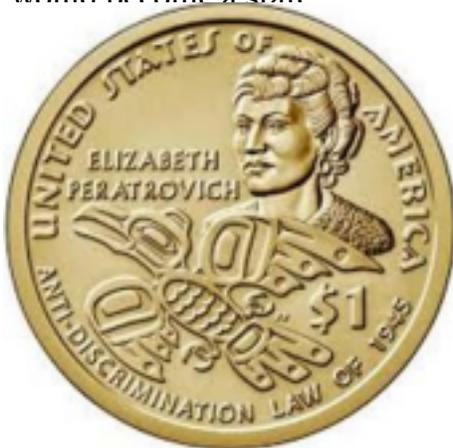
The gallery broke out in a “wild burst of applause,” Gruening wrote. The 1945 Anti Discrimination Act was passed, 11-5.

Peratrovich and others on Feb. 16, 1945, with Ernest Gruening, Alaska’s governor, as he signed legislation that entitled all Alaskans to “full and equal enjoyment” of public establishments. Feb. 16 is now celebrated in Alaska as Elizabeth Peratrovich Day. Credit...Alaska State Library, Alaska Territorial Governors Collection.

Gruening signed the bill into law on Feb. 16 — a date now celebrated by the state each year. The legislation entitled all Alaskans to “full and equal enjoyment” of public establishments, setting a misdemeanor penalty for violators. It also banned discriminatory signage based on race.

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It was the first antidiscrimination act in the United States. It would be nearly 20 years before the federal Civil Rights Act would be passed, in 1964, and 14 years before Alaska would become a state



In 2020, the United States Mint commemorated Peratrovich on a \$1 coin. A gallery of the Alaska House of Representatives has been named in her honor, and a bronze bust sculpted by her son Roy Jr. adorns the lobby of the State Capitol.

And yet, aside from her lauded speech, “most people know very little about her,” said Annie Boochever, whose biography, *Fighter in Velvet Gloves*, written with Roy Peratrovich Jr., was published this year.

“My mother was determined to stand her ground, but she would always do it with grace and dignity,” Roy Jr. wrote in the introduction.

She was born on July 4, 1911, in Petersburg, in what was then the District of Alaska, the daughter of a Native woman and her mother’s Irish brother-in-law. The two left her in the care of the Salvation Army, and she was adopted by Andrew Wanamaker, a Presbyterian minister, and his wife, Jean, a basket weaver. Wanamaker was a charter member of the Alaska Native Brotherhood, a nonprofit organization formed to address

racism.

Elizabeth grew up speaking Tlingit and English and living at a subsistence level with her parents in Sitka, a coastal city in the archipelago of southeast Alaska. When she was 10, the family moved more than 100 miles further southeast to Klawock, a Native village on Prince of Wales Island. There she met her future husband, the son of a fisherman from the Balkans, and a Tlingit woman. Though they had attended separate boarding schools, they both graduated from the public high school in Ketchikan, about 70 miles east of Klawock. The school had been integrated after a Tlingit leader successfully sued the school board.

They married in 1931 and returned to Klawock, where Roy Peratrovich worked as a policeman, a chief clerk and a postmaster. He then served as the village mayor for four terms. He was also a member and grand president of the Alaska Native Brotherhood.

Elizabeth raised their children, Roy Jr., Frank Allen and Loretta Marie. She loved to dance and enjoyed watching wrestling on television; she knew all of Gorgeous George's moves and often yelled at the screen as she watched.

“Dad just looked at me and said, ‘That’s your mother,’ ” Roy Jr. said in an interview. “We laughed.”

In 1941, the Peratrovich's moved hundreds of miles north to bustling Juneau, the capital of what was by then the Alaska Territory, to play a larger role in regional politics. By the

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time Elizabeth was elected grand president of the Alaska Native Sisterhood, a counterpart to the Brotherhood, in 1944, Roy was leading the Brotherhood.

Together they would lay a civil rights framework for future generations, said Paulette Moreno, the Sisterhood's current grand president.

She likened their efforts to “house posts,” the often beautifully carved structures upon which a traditional Tlingit house stands. Yet, she said, “The shelter is not solid or complete because we witness discrimination and harassment in our communities today. But Elizabeth and Roy have given us role models.”

In 1954, Roy Peratrovich accepted a position with the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs and moved the family to Oklahoma. But when Elizabeth learned in 1956 that she had breast cancer, they returned to Juneau. Once her illness worsened, she entered a Christian Science care center in Seattle, where Roy Jr. was attending college.

She died on Dec. 1, 1958, at 47. She was buried in the shade of a Sitka spruce in Juneau's Evergreen Cemetery, beside a plot reserved for her husband, who died in 1989. Every year, a groundskeeper opens the bollards that block street access to the grave for one day, on Feb. 16 — Elizabeth Peratrovich Day.

# Alaska Native leader Peratrovich commemorated on \$1 coin

By **Alex Demarban** AP Member  
Sat., Oct. 12, 2019timer3 min. read

ANCHORAGE, Alaska - A young Alaska Native woman left an impression on Alaska's territorial Senate in 1945, delivering a speech that led to the passage of the nation's first anti-discrimination law.

Now, the late Elizabeth Peratrovich is leaving her impression on a \$1 coin.

The U.S. Mint unveiled the design of the coin Oct. 5 at the Alaska Native Brotherhood and Alaska Native Sisterhood convention in Anchorage. The 2020 Native American coin will go on sale early next year.

The coin will feature a portrait of the late civil rights leader — composed and graceful, her hair in tight rolls — above words that highlight her legacy: “Anti-discrimination Law of 1945.” An image of a raven, depicting her Tlingit lineage, soars near her.

“The coin will be a lasting tribute to Elizabeth Peratrovich and her relentless efforts to tear down the wall of discrimination against Alaska Natives,” said Patrick Hernandez, acting deputy director of the U.S. Mint. “Perhaps Elizabeth was like the raven, crying out until the darkness of discrimination was dispelled.”

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The coin will teach the world about Peratrovich's brave acts and “what Alaska was like” and wants to be in the future, said Gov. Mike Dunleavy, speaking after the coin's unveiling.

“This is history in the making,” said Dunleavy, who on Saturday also signed a bill that establishes November as Alaska Native Heritage Month. “There will be people not just in Alaska, not just in this country, but in this world that will understand what this courageous woman did for all of humanity.”

Peratrovich and her husband, Roy Peratrovich, championed the Alaska Anti Discrimination Act depicted on the coin.

During the World War II years in Juneau, they were appalled by the “White Trade Only” signs they saw outside public establishments, said Jackie Pata, a Tlingit and former executive director of National Congress of American Indians.

Leaders of the Native Brotherhood and Sisterhood, the Peratrovich couple travelled to Alaska communities, building support against discrimination, Pata said. They sought

help from territorial Gov. Ernest Gruening, who signed the bill into law on Feb. 16, now Elizabeth Peratrovich day.

At the age of 33, Peratrovich uttered her memorable testimony after a territorial senator suggested that people “barely out of savagery” shouldn’t associate with “whites with 5,000 years of recorded civilization.”

“I would not have expected that I, who am barely out of savagery, would have to remind the gentlemen with 5,000 years of recorded civilization behind them of our Bill of Rights,” she answered.

Elizabeth’s passionate testimony changed the vote, Pata said Saturday. The bill guaranteed equal access in restaurants, hotels and other places nearly 20 years before Congress approved the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

“That small woman who stood there in that Legislature, had more power than those she stood amongst,” Pata said.

Later, Elizabeth fought for health care and educational rights, and for Alaska Natives to become part of the National Congress of American Indians, Pata said.

The Native American coin program, the result of an act passed by Congress in 1997, honours a Native American person or tribe each year. One side always features Sacagawea, the Lemhi Shoshone woman who assisted the Lewis and Clark expedition.

The Mint worked with Alaska Natives to help design the Elizabeth Peratrovich coin, officials with the agency said.

It can be spent or collected and will be produced at the U.S. Mints in Denver and Philadelphia, said Michael White, a spokesman with the U.S. Mint.

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A roll of 25 will cost \$32.95, a bag of 100 will cost \$111.95 and boxes of 250 will cost \$275.95, White said.

Peratrovich died in 1958, at age 47.

“Even at this moment, she is still speaking,” said Paulette Moreno, grand president of the Alaska Native Sisterhood.

## **When My Spirit Raised It's Hands about Tlingit civil rights heroine Elizabeth Peratrovich**

SUNDAY, MARCH 29, 2009 AT 10:51 PM



*Diane Benson takes her final bow as Tlingit civil rights heroine Elizabeth Peratrovich*

**There was a reason** that I drove to Anchorage yesterday and got myself caught in falling ash - to see Diane Benson act in her final performance of the one woman play, "When My Spirit Raised It's Hands." Here, at the end of the play, she takes her final bow as Tlingit civil rights heroine Elizabeth Peratrovich.

Diane first put the play together over a decade ago to create a simple but effective device to teach Alaska schoolchildren something about how Alaska's Natives had to fight racism and prejudice to secure their rightful place in their own homeland.

Afterward, she explained that she feels it is time for a younger Native actress to step up and take the play over. "I don't want to be the grandmother forever playing a woman in her thirties," Diane explained.

**In 1941, Elizabeth Peratrovich** moved from the tiny Tlingit village of Klawock to Juneau with her husband Roy. There, she was surprised and deeply hurt to find signs, such as this one depicted outside "Mel's Diner," that banned Natives from certain establishments. These are the actual words that Elizabeth found herself confronted with - and such signs were common in Alaska cities, from Juneau to Fairbanks to Nome.

**Elizabeth was the Grand President** of the Alaska Native Sisterhood and Roy the Grand President of the Alaska Native Brotherhood. They teamed up to lead the fight for civil rights for Alaska Natives in Juneau, the territorial capital. The US entered World War II and a higher per-capita percentage of Alaska Natives and American Indians entered the military to fight the Axis than did any other racial group.

To make a statement, Elizabeth had the "No Native or Dogs" moved the sign from in front of the diner to the recruitment office.



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**Elizabeth and Roy** allied themselves with Governor Ernest Gruening, who expressed revulsion when they showed him what kind of discrimination Alaska Natives had to face. Along with allies in the Territorial Legislature, they helped draft an anti-discrimination bill. The effort took years, but finally Alaska's Anti Discrimination Act came before the legislature in February, 1945.

The Act passed in the House, but ran into stiff opposition in the Senate.

"Who are these people, barely out of savagery, who want to associate with us whites, with 5,000 years of recorded civilization?" mocked Juneau Senator Allen Shattuck.

Another Senator proclaimed that he should not be forced to sit in a theatre alongside an Eskimo, because the Eskimo smelled.

It was after that, in the moment depicted above, that the spirit of Elizabeth Peratrovich raised its hand. Her right to speak was honored. She stepped before the Senate.



**Standing between the American** and Alaska flags and the traditional clan blanket that Identified Elizabeth as a Lukaax.adi clan of the Raven moiety, Diane recites the speech that the ANS Grand Camp president delivered that day.

"I would not have expected that I, who am barely out of savagery, would have to remind gentleman with 5,000 years of recorded civilization behind them of our Bill of Rights. When my husband and I came to Juneau and sought a home in a nice neighborhood where our children could play happily with our neighbors' children, we found such a house and arranged to lease it. When the owners learned that we were Indians, they said 'no.' Would we be compelled to live in the slums?...

"There are three kinds of persons who practice discrimination. First, the politician who wants to maintain an inferior minority group so that he can always promise them something. Second, the Mr. and Mrs. Jones who aren't quite sure of their social position and who are nice to you on one occasion, and can't

see you on others depending on who they are with. Third, the great superman who believes in the superiority of the white race..."

Shattuck challenged her. He asked if the act of passing the bill would actually end discrimination.

"Do your laws against larceny and even murder prevent those crimes? No law will eliminate crimes but at least you as legislators can assert to the world that you recognize the evil of the present situation and speak your intent to help us overcome discrimination."

Peratrovich finished to silence - and then loud applause. The Act passed, 11- 5: 19 years before the US Civil Rights Act was enacted in 1964.

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**After the play,** Diane sat down to take questions, but was interrupted by Tony Vita, who presented her with a plaque from Roy Peratrovich, Jr. Her emotion showed.

Unfortunately, Elizabeth Peratrovich died before Alaska became a state in 1959. Diane came along too late to meet her, but as a youth she did get to

know Roy. Diane had led a tough life, had been in many foster homes and had experienced abuse, both physical and sexual.

Roy firmly told her not to drop out, but to finish school and make something of her life. She agreed that she would.

Just as Elizabeth predicted, there were those who still discriminated against Natives, despite the act. As a girl, Diane once went into a restaurant in Ketchikan where a waiter refused to serve her.

Her father complained. The waiter was fired. That might not have happened, had no such act been in place. After the play, Diane stressed that racism is still strong in Alaska, and urged all present to continue to fight against it.

Diane is the mother of Latseen Benson, an Army veteran who lost his legs fighting in Iraq. As a past candidate for Congress and before that, for Governor, Benson has strongly stood for the rights of veterans.

In this, she also echoes Elizabeth Peratrovich, who, as ANS President, organized fundraisers and drives to help World War II soldiers of all races, including prisoners of war.

When her son went to war, Diane was helped through the turmoil of all that happened by her cat, Romeo. The story is right here, on the [No Cats Allowed Kracker Cat Blog](#).