In April of this year, the Great Bear Foundation lost two of our four co-founders within the space of a few weeks—Dr. Charles Jonkel, more familiarly known as “Chuck,” and Frank Ponikvar. These two men, along with Bill Callaghan and Lance Olson, came together in 1981 with a vision to form an organization to “give voice to the bear.” A year later, the IRS granted the Great Bear Foundation status as a nonprofit 501(c)(3) dedicated to the conservation of the eight bear species and their habitats worldwide.

This was a time when grizzly bear populations in Montana and the Lower 48 states were facing dire threats in the form of habitat loss and human-caused mortality. The US Fish and Wildlife Service had classified these populations as threatened under the Endangered Species Act, but conservation efforts take time, and the future of grizzly populations outside of remote, sparsely developed areas in Alaska and Canada looked grim.

In Missoula, where the Great Bear Foundation was born, the grizzly bear was a symbol of the University of Montana as well as the wild nature of western Montana—but grizzlies had not inhabited the city limits for decades, and the region’s populations were declining. Images of grizzlies adorned businesses across the city, many of them taking their names from the iconic bear, but the urbanization of Missoula, the lack of tolerance for predators, and the bears’ preference for wild, open spaces pushed them beyond city limits, and even the populations in wilder, protected parts of Montana were in trouble. Inspired by grizzly bears but concerned with all bears, the founders of the Great Bear Foundation aimed to “aid the grizzly initially, aid all bear species of the world eventually.”

A hand-painted sign from those early days, likely created by artist, Frank Ponikvar, hangs in our Alaska office. It describes the Great Bear Foundation as “a new, nationwide, international nonprofit group to aid bears” through “memberships, artwork, programs, posters, letter appeals, donations…to make money FOR bears, rather than to make money for someone else.” As members and supporters of the Great Bear Foundation, you help us to achieve the goals set forth by our founders, and implemented by the countless volunteers and staff who have devoted their time and hearts to the benefit of bears under the auspices of the Great Bear Foundation.

Thirty five years after the meeting of these four minds, the Great Bear Foundation continues their vision and spirit through our educational programs, research projects, field courses, on-the-ground projects, and events aimed at helping people and bears to coexist, conserving bear populations and their habitats, and improving understanding of the sometimes-mysterious world of the bear. We continue to value the intersection of wildlife and culture, working towards ways that humans and bears can share habitat with minimal impact on one another. We thank you for your support of our work, and for helping us to carry on the legacy of our founders for the benefit of bears and their habitats worldwide.
The Great Bear Foundation welcomed the bears out of hibernation this May with the revival of the annual Bear Honoring. During back-to-back weekends at a remote site on the Going to the Sun Road, GBF staff welcomed the bears out of hibernation at Bear Honoring Celebrates Ecological and Cultural Role of the Bear

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A booming voice silenced the precarious two-year-old in my charge. She grabbed my hand and pulled me toward the commanding, lyrical tone. It was Chuck, in the UM student union talking to children about how to navigate living with bears.

“You just talk to them! You expect them to be there, and when you see them, you thank them for being there, and you give them lots of space!”

I was so tickled the first time we went to the coast, and he ran full tilt into the surf on a cold November day, then flopped down like he was settling into his favorite recliner.

The day Chuck died, I was in Bozeman off to the coast, and he ran full tilt into the surf on a cold November day, then flopped down like he was settling into his favorite recliner.

Chuck gave himself and our dear mutual friend, Jeff Henry, down at Snow Lodge in Old Faithful. Jeff had encouraged me before, but now he fairly well goaded me into going with Chuck to Churchill.

Several years later, I had dinner with him and our dear mutual friend, Jeff Henry, down at Snow Lodge in Old Faithful. Jeff had encouraged me before, but now he fairly well goaded me into going with Chuck to Churchill.

Chuck gave himself and our dear mutual friend, Mike Tercek, a deal on the trip in exchange for some extra portering duties and a few presentations at the Northern Churchill Study Center. It meant so much that he’d helped design, I was struck by being in the presence of a goldfaden of wildlife research and conservation. It was all the more precious to be seen by a fellow traveler by the name of Craighead. It was her husband who was one of Chuck’s contemporaries in the south. I was surrounded by passionate ursothelists, and these experiences melded into my work as a naturalist in Yellowstone. To have been taught by a master, and to be touched by his take on tundra buggies and dogs being occured in entire bears, learning from his passion, knowledge and experience to keep bears wild and on the landscape, I found myself to be an active champion for all things wild.

The river still runs on, Spring grass greens the valley now. The old bear is gone.

By Jean Schuelenberg

Field course instructor, Dr. Frank Tybor photographed this lovely polar bear amidst the blooming flora on the Great Bear Foundation’s Berries, Belugas & Bears summer ecology field course in Churchill, MB this August.

Western Hudson Bay polar bears come ashore in the summer when the sea ice breaks up, and the bears disperse across the landscape, conserving their energy until the ice starts to form again in November.

Tybor and his co-instructor, Education and Outreach Coordinator, Elissa Chott brought a group of 12 students to Churchill this summer to look for polar bears, watch belugas whales with their calves in the Churchill River, gaze up, and the bears disperse across the landscape, conserving their energy until the ice starts to form again in November.
Book and songs are written about many people, but rarely have so many met, learned from and been touched by one person as Chuck Jonkel.

Where does one start when considering the experiences and the meaning and the many faces of Chuck—Dr. Charles Jonkel—during his short life? He was a highly respected wildlife biologist and scholar with many papers published in wildlife journals, and a professor at the University or Montana in Missoula. He was also a naturalist, a good sport, a hard worker and a family man. As such, he is sorely missed.

And Chuck, Jonkel was much more than just a wildlife biologist. In fact, he was a true renaissance man. He was known for his ability to communicate complex scientific concepts in an engaging manner. He was a true outdoor enthusiast, and his love for the natural world was evident in everything he did. He was passionate about wildlife conservation and was a tireless advocate for the protection of bears and their habitats.

One of the first times I met Chuck was on a crisp June morning. He was meeting us in Yellowstone’s Lamar Valley during one of Great Bear Foundation’s field outings in 1995. He had been looking through his monocular for a grizzly with a freshly eaten carcass, and I was behind him with a group of others watching the same bear. Wearing his usual blue denim shirt, Levis and some black work boots, he was engaged in conversation and gesturing with exaggerated hand movements. He turned around and saw me closer and asked if he could join me. I said of course and he of course welcomed me. Very much the outdoorsman, you could tell he was a true bear lover.

Chuck was involved with the creation of bear see on the campus of the University of Montana. Working with others and bear experts, he was able to determine just what it was that would work and put it into practice. As was his way, he was always open to new ideas and would engage in thoughtful discussions and debates.

Another important aspect of Chuck was his involvement with the creation of the Great Bear Foundation (GBF). Along with the late Dr. Frank Funk and others, he worked to establish the Border Grizzly Project for the study and conservation of bears in the U.S. and Canada. Furthermore, due to what he realized was the alarming increasing amount of archeological sites and natural features, he founded the International Wildlife Film Festival (IWFF). Through this, he wanted to provide a forum for those who take the time and put in the extraordinary and others. He worked to establish the IWFF and put it into practice. The IWFF provided a place for their work to be shown and judged fairly. It was a place where their work could be appreciated for what it was.

Anyone who got to know Chuck and his broad range of interests is sure that he was direct, forceful, generous, committed, optimistic, and extremely funny, but also extremely hardworking. His dedication to bear studies, in their various contexts, their impacts, their worlds and other aspects, took up much of his time. He was also well known for his fondness for the bear, and his writings and teachings about bears were greatly appreciated.

Chuck was a writer and editor of numerous outings. Chuck was often seen at the GBF office where he would read reports, papers and journals. He was the first of its kind. Chuck was an extraordinary person. He took the time and put in the extraordinary way to connect with anyone. He was a true outdoorsman who appreciated the beauty of nature and the importance of conserving it.

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The Great Bear Foundation has offered high-quality, low-impact polar bear field courses in Churchill, Manitoba for 32 years. We now offer multiple options and smaller group sizes, so you can choose which trip suits your interests best.

**Intro to Polar Bear Ecology**  
October 23-31, 2016

Explore the tundra and taiga, watching polar bears by day, and spend the evenings learning about polar bear ecology and northern culture, socializing with the group, and if it’s clear, watching the northern lights!

**Sharing Habitat with Polar Bears**  
October 30-November 7, 2016

Combine wildlife-viewing with a unique learning experience! This field course focuses on how humans and bears have coexisted historically, now, and how that may change in the future. A great follow-up to Intro to Polar Bear Ecology, or a stand-alone course.

Traveling with the Great Bear Foundation, you can be confident that your polar bear experience will combine wildlife-viewing opportunities with high quality educational content, while minimizing our impact on the bears, their habitat, and climate. The Great Bear Foundation’s field courses are the lowest-impact option available in Churchill.

All proceeds from our field courses directly fund bear conservation.

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Bear News is the newsletter of the Great Bear Foundation, a member-supported non-profit 501(c)3 founded by Dr. Charles Jonkel, Frank Ponvikar, Lance Olsen, and Bill Callaghan in 1982 to conserve and educate about the world’s eight bear species and their habitats worldwide.

You can help us conserve bears by renewing your membership with a tax-deductible donation to GBF via PayPal on our website, www.greatbear.org, or sending a check to:

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