



BEAR NEWS

Volume 22, No. 3 - Summer 2016



PUBLISHED BY THE GREAT BEAR FOUNDATION • PO BOX 1616, HAINES, AK 99827 • PO BOX 9383, MISSOULA MT 59807

Remembering Dr. Charles Jonkel, 1930 -2016

*A note from the Executive Director,
Shannon Donahue*

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 Olsen, 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.

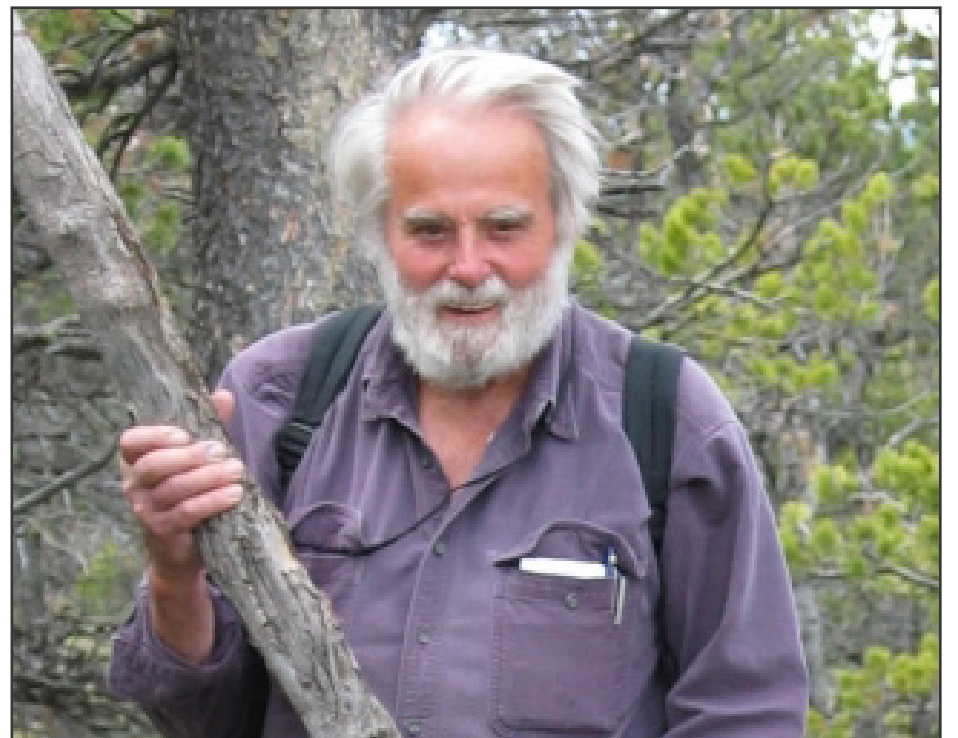
This was a time when grizzly bear populations in Montana and the Lower 48 states were facing dire threats in the form of habitat loss and human-caused mortality. The US Fish and Wildlife Service had classified these populations as threatened under the Endangered Species Act, but conservation efforts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



Dr. Jonkel loved to share his igloo-building skills. Igloo photos by Jeff Henry



Right: Dr. Jonkel in front of a polar bear den. Photo by Dick Russell



Top of page: Polar bear photo by Jeremy Patrick

Remembering Chuck Jonkel, mentor and friend

By Shannon Donahue, Executive Director

Chuck Jonkel changed the course of my life in ways I never anticipated. As a young bear enthusiast living in Southeast Alaska and working for the US Forest Service at a remote bear-viewing area, I was inspired to go back to school and become more serious about my career, hoping to find ways I could give back to the bears that had inspired me in my days in the wild, abundant rainforest of coastal Alaska. I looked into graduate programs in Alaska and Canada, hoping to stay in my beloved north country, but I chose the University of Montana for the opportunity to volunteer with the Great Bear Foundation, and to learn the ropes of bear conservation from a biologist I admired, Dr. Charles Jonkel.

I showed up at the Great Bear Foundation's old Front Street office on a golden September day, resume in hand, and found Chuck outside on the lawn, pressing apples into cider with a hand-built cider press. He'd been a hero of mine for many years already, and I was nervous meeting this legendary bear biologist, but his friendly welcome put me at ease, while his ursine nature intrigued me. He handed me a little paper cup of fresh apple cider and looked over my resume.

Chuck invited me to go "pick apples for bears," which meant the opposite of what it sounded like. Instead of picking apples for the bears, we picked apples for their benefit—in Missoula, and in communities throughout bear habitat, apples and domestic fruit actually draw bears into residential areas, where they take advantage of an easy, high quality food resource. By helping residents to pick the apples from their trees, we eliminated a wildlife attractant, helping to discourage bears from entering the neighborhoods where they inevitably find trouble, and often wind up dead. Chuck started this program about a decade and a half ago, and today it continues to be a hallmark program of the Great Bear Foundation, preventing human-bear conflict, bringing people together, and making good use of a healthy, locally grown food resource.

I started hanging around the Great Bear Foundation office, helping with the apple project, learning everything I could about bears and bear conservation, writing for Bear News, helping out around the office, and listening to Chuck's stories. He intrigued and inspired me with his unique, bear-like personality, outlandish stories, and most of all, his dedication not only to bear conservation, but also to his community, and to people



Dr. Jonkel and Executive Director Shannon Donahue. Photo by Corky Clairmont

everywhere. I traveled with him to Churchill, Manitoba, helping out with the foundation's Polar Bear Ecology Field Course, and watched him connect with people of all backgrounds as we traveled across Canada, feeding our group and other travelers on the train, handing wooden toys to the local children riding the train, and sharing his vast knowledge with people around him, but also listening to their stories, taking sincere interest in their lives.

Chuck retired from our Polar Bear Field Courses in 2012, and for the first time, that November, we boarded the train without him and his coolers full of deer and elk meat, apples and plums, home-grown veggies and signature Clamato bottles, the crates of apples he loved to distribute across Canada as we traveled, and the boxes of books he packed as resources for our course and for other travelers on the train to Churchill to learn from. We still brought donations of warm clothes and household items for the Inuit Transient Centre in Churchill, a reasonable selection of books, and a couple coolers to feed our group and the people we met, but despite our cargo's diminished size compared to what Chuck would have packed, the boxes felt heavier, not having Chuck's spirit to keep them light.

We've been traveling to Churchill without Chuck for four years now, and I'm proud and honored to carry on his legacy, but I have yet to make it through my introductory talk on the history of the Great Bear Foundation and our polar bear trips without shedding at least a few tears in front of our group, knowing that Chuck was nearing the end of his time on

Remembrance,

by Jerry Molinari

I met Dr. Jonkel through the Nature Conservancy Bear Program which I attended several times.

He was so passionate about bear conservation and his knowledge and commitment to that end was palpable.

Entering grizzly habitat with him was special, he morphed into a bear showing us their food stores, scratching trees, their spoor, scat, tasting their food like mountain bell, biscuit root, elk thistle and berries. He would point out winter

den sites, bone piles and explain the seasonal shift in bio-centers culminating in hyperphasia then hibernation.

He would teach the critically relevant protocol when hiking in grizzly country. First and most important was to check arrogance at the trail head. Respect not fear was essential in thinking clearly, processing the surroundings and tailoring behavior to resonate with safety and enjoyment.

Dr. Jonkel was a humble compelling

figure. His expertise in bear biology was only exceeded by his acute understanding of human resistance to change and the factors that could penetrate myth, misunderstanding and cultural bias.

It was indeed an honor to know Dr. Jonkel and share time in grizzly country with him. He will be missed. His legacy will live on forever.

Right: Fred Bruemmer photo, used by permission

Remembrance,

by Larry Evans

Chuck and I both worked the Saturday Farmers Market in Missoula, me selling mushrooms and Chuck selling knapweed flower leis, rose bushes, and charm. He probably converted more people to the cause of bear awareness and survival from that pulpit over the years than one can count.

One day he brought me in a paper bag full of dirty fungal nuggets. "What's this?" he asked. "I found the deer eating them." As he explained it, he was stalking deer "for fun" and saw them pawing at the ground and (he was close enough to hear) crunching down on these mysterious golf ball sized lumps. So he shooed the deer off their find, and filled his lunch bag with these Elaphomyces, suspecting they were some kind of truffle. When I described these underground fruiting fungi and their importance as a protein source for deer, we bonded, and in the coming years a few of his grad students and others studying the diet of bears came to consult me about the various mushrooms that bruins eat.

My best memory of Chuck was back in the 1990s at an Earth First! camp and logging road blockade near Dixie, Idaho. We both were giving workshops (one of many for me) on living on the land to the activists. One of the perhaps somewhat wide-eyed participants asked Dr. Jonkel if he had ever been lost in the woods. Chuck took a moment to adjust to his questioner's perspective.

"Ya know, when I'm out there in the pines, with the huckleberries on the bush, trout in the creek, sitting on a couch of moss, I'm home." He replied with a chuckle, "sometimes I can't remember where I parked my truck, that may be true."

Remembrance,

by Vicki Watson

When I first moved to Missoula and my son was a baby and then a toddler, we had a garden in a vacant lot beside Chuck's house. Chuck had convinced the owner of the vacant lot to let folks have food gardens there.

My son loved to crawl around and then toddle around in the garden, and was known to eat dirt if you didn't keep an eye on him.

Chuck said – eating some good clean dirt is good for you. All the animals know that.

He called my son a little bear, and my son called him "The Bear Man."

In fact my son who is now 32 when he heard of Chuck's passing emailed me – Rest in Peace, Bear Man.



Bear Honoring Celebrates Ecological and Cultural Role of the Bear

The Great Bear Foundation welcomed the bears out of hibernation this May with the revival of the annual Multicultural Bear Honoring. Dating back to 1999, GBF has celebrated the bear's awakening with a weekend of festivities, educational programs, and explorations in bear habitat. The events celebrate the bear's ecological importance as well as its significance in cultures around the world wherever people and bears share habitat.

This year's events kicked off with evening programs in Missoula's Greenough Park, a natural park of considerable size that is popular with both humans and black bears alike. People enjoy the park for its natural beauty and recreational opportunities on the edge of the city, and bears take advantage of the abundant food sources and vegetative cover along Rattlesnake Creek in the valley bottom—a perfect place to honor the bears.

The events this year had a bittersweet tinge to them, falling on the heels of founder, Chuck Jonkel's death, but they offered a fitting venue for GBF members, staff, and bear enthusiasts to come together to honor the "Bear Man" as well as the bears.

Salish poet, Victor Charlo opened

Remembrance,

by Tracy Wirak

I first met Chuck Jonkel in 2005 when I was attending the University of Montana. A friend's sister was volunteering with the Great Bear Foundation and she invited us to join her. We met Chuck and he took us to an old apple orchard in the Rattlesnake. We spent the afternoon picking rotten apples off the ground and harvesting apples off the tree. We boxed the apples and took them back to the Great Bear Foundation headquarters. Chuck showed us how to juice the apples using the cider press. He brought out a variety of recycled bottles and we could fill as many as we like! After that first experience I was hooked! I enjoyed volunteering with the Great Bear Foundation and removing apples from trees to keep bears out of trouble. I also enjoyed getting to know Chuck and learning more about his passion for the Great Bear Foundation.

Over the 4 years I spent in Missoula every fall I would take trips out to the Rattlesnake with Chuck to pick fruit. Sometimes I was able to recruit a group of friends to go pick apples, but usually it was just me and Chuck. I remember one time in particular when it was just the two of us and Chuck took me to a secret

Remembrance,

by Lorraine E. Brandson

Chuck Jonkel was a man of passion and a highly devoted advocate for the natural world. The North, its wildlife and our community of Churchill held a special fascination for him. Yes, he loved polar bears and brought that love to hundreds of students and participants of his fall field courses at Churchill. No one could spot a bear off or near our road system better

the Friday night event by reading "First Polar Bear" from his book, Put Sey (Good Enough). Charlo wrote the poem for Chuck after traveling with him to Churchill, Manitoba on a GBF polar bear field course many years ago. The final stanza of the poem reads:

You remember teacher signing who
Walking Bear
was as you scratch your joy deep in
smooth, hard stone
and Walking Bear comes finally home.

Charlo accompanied with Walking Bear's Song, singing Chuck home with a voice that rang through the Rattlesnake Valley.

The Wind River Bear Institute of Florence, Montana delivered a fun and educational program on their "bear shepherding" work with highly trained Karelian Bear Dogs and their handlers. WRBI staff set up a mock campsite riddled with bear attractants, and when the "bear" showed up (really a person under a grizzly bear hide), the dogs worked their magic, hazing the bear away from the campsite, and back into the forest. They followed up with a talk on the importance of managing bear attractants, and on the innovative



Photo by Jeremy Patrick

apricot tree. Apricots! I was so excited to spend the afternoon chatting with Chuck and picking apricots.

Volunteering with the Great Bear Foundation never felt like work, but it had such a positive impact on the community and I was inspired by Chuck's dedication to harvest fruit from every abandoned tree in Missoula to keep the bears out of trouble and out of town.

work they do to address and prevent human-bear conflict.

Finally, GBF board member and treasurer, Jeff Stetz of Sinopah Wildlife Research Associates, gave an engaging and informative talk on bear morphology.

Saturday brought the Bear Honoring north to Glacier National Park, where GBF staff led a walk up Going to the Sun Road, exploring bear habitat and looking for bear sign. While the bears remained elusive, one did leave its "calling card" on the roadside, indicating a healthy diet of spring plant matter. Stetz and his research associate, Mike Sawaya, also of Sinopah, led some interesting discussions on bear biology and research.

The honoring wrapped up with a potluck dinner at the Glacier Park Inn B&B in Hungry Horse, Montana, hosted by GBF Vice President, Mark Robertson and his wife, Mary, a long-time supporter of the foundation. GBF President, Frank Tyro and executive director, Shannon Donahue screened an excerpt of their documentary, "Walking Bear Comes Home: the life and work of Charles Jonkel," due out later this year. The film takes its title from Vic Charlo's poem.

In Memory of Frank Ponikvar, GBF Co-founder

By Lance Olsen, Co-founder



Frank Ponikvar was the gentle soul amongst the four GBF founders. Affable, easy-going, gracious and patient, he helped us work our way through the early days of deciding what GBF should do for the cause of bear conservation in a context of unavoidable complexity and controversy. His grace under pressure was a huge boost to getting us past the inevitable disagreements among any group of people making an effort to do something important to living species and systems.

Frank knew from the start that bears needed public support, and that education was essential to it. He was instrumental in designing the initial issue of Bear News, and in deciding that it would be GBF's first effort and its primary means of contact with members and the general public. He was wholeheartedly in favor of GBF's early program of buying books about bears to provide as gifts to public libraries in western Montana.

He understood that GBF would need to work with a collection of scientists, agencies and conservation entities large and small. And he knew that it wasn't going to be easy for an organization that started without a penny to its name. But his confidence persisted all through the early days of getting GBF up and running, and in subsequent efforts to broaden our focus beyond Montana grizzlies to do at least a little something for the conservation of all the world's wild bears.

Frank didn't come to bear conservation steeped in ecosystems, biology or wildlife ecology. He came as an artist, but he was quick to grasp that wild bears need space, productive home ranges, adequate numbers to ensure a future, and security from human disturbance, harassment, and killing. All these features of habitat were at considerable risk for the grizzlies of the lower 48 at the time GBF was founded, and remain in rather serious question even now.

Frank never sought the spotlight or a high profile role for himself. His concern was that GBF be a solid source of support for bears. Although his contributions may never be widely known, he was a friend to the end for bears and the places they call home.



gifts that demonstrated the pride he had of his home in Montana – huckleberry jam, jerky, and many other souvenirs. He will be remembered fondly by many here and elsewhere for his determination, his mentorship and unconditional friendship. God bless you, Chuck. We miss you.

Remembrance, by Ashea Mills

A booming voice silenced the precocious two-yr-old child 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, and when you see them, you thank them for being there, and you give them lots of space!"

We both sat spellbound for over an hour listening to him as he spoke to these kids, teaching them how to talk to bears and keep safe. It was all brilliant, and accurate and helped form my passion for teaching about bears.

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 myself and now-husband, 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 really wanted us to experience the north, though at the time, it wasn't in our budget. I could write a novel in details on that trip but a few memorable moments stand out. I loved him serving cured elk on the train north, making us feel like one of his guests. As he came by, I asked him a question about viewing polar bears. Pointing out the window, he said, "Yeah, yeah, you'll see bears, but more importantly, you'll see how they fit into this landscape!" When we went out for our first hike, he motioned us all over to introduce us to some native

vegetation. He announced, "Once you know the names of the plants, you can never really be lonely. You're surrounded by friends!"

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.

When he showed us the old traps he'd helped design, I was struck by being in the presence of a godfather of wildlife research and conservation. It was all the more precious to be next to a fellow traveler by the name of Craighead. It was her husband who was one of Chuck's contemporaries to the south. I was surrounded by passionate ursophiles, 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 overfed to entice bears, learning from his passion, knowledge and perseverance to keep bears wild and on the landscape, I found myself to be an active champion for all things wild.

The day Chuck died, I was in Bozeman giving testimony to USFWS, stating my strong support for keeping grizzlies listed. I'm so grateful to count myself as one among masses of conservationists, scientists, citizens and lovers of wilderness inspired by this humble, forward-thinking, passionate man.

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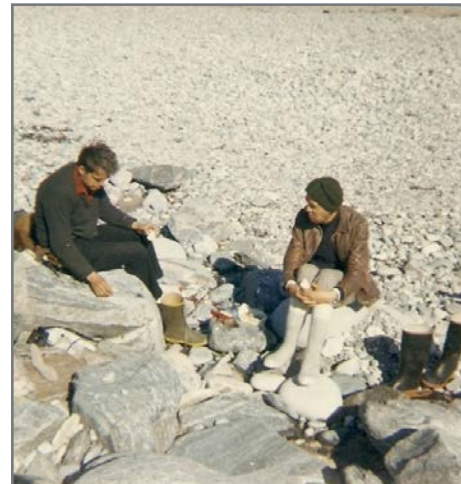


Photo by Ashea Mills

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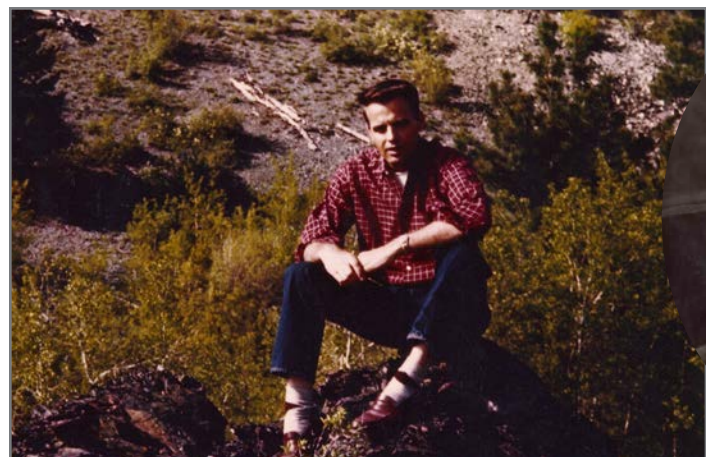
Devon Camp in the Canadian High Arctic. Photo by Dick Russell.



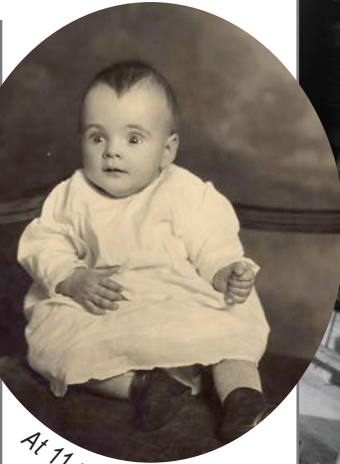
Jonkel and Fred Bruemmer take a break from polar bear field work. Photo by Dick Russell.



Coats Island camp in the Canadian High Arctic. Photo by Dick Russell.



Jonkel in 1957



At 11 months



Jonkel and son James



Jonkel setting traps for pine martin research in Northwest Montana. Photos above and below by Jim Williams, Montana FWP.



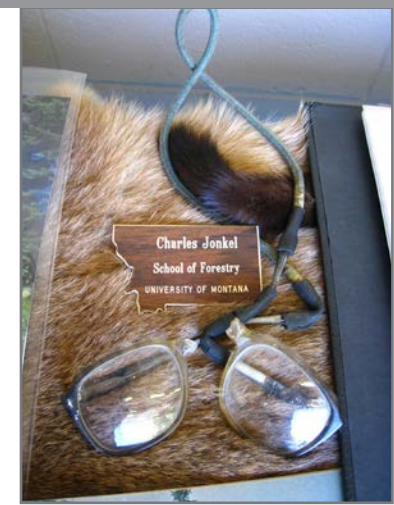
First meeting of the IUCN Polar Bear Specialist Group, Morges, Switzerland, 1968. This was the first effort to coordinate polar bear research and conservation on an international level among the 5 polar bear nations. Jonkel represented Canada, and is seated in the front row, far right.



Chuck could often be found making "Montana Leis" with flowers from his garden at the Missoula Farmer's Market. Photo by Gene Bernofsky.



Dr. Jonkel could often be found tending the Northside Community Garden in Missoula. This summer, Garden City Harvest dedicated the raspberry patch there to him. Jonkel gardened there "since the beginning" and planted and tended the raspberry patch with love. Garden City Harvest photo.



Photos taken at Dr. Jonkel's Memorial in Missoula, July 2016. Jonkel was known for his denim jacket and bear pins. Photos by Elissa Chott



Jonkel in his element. Photo by Jeff Henry.



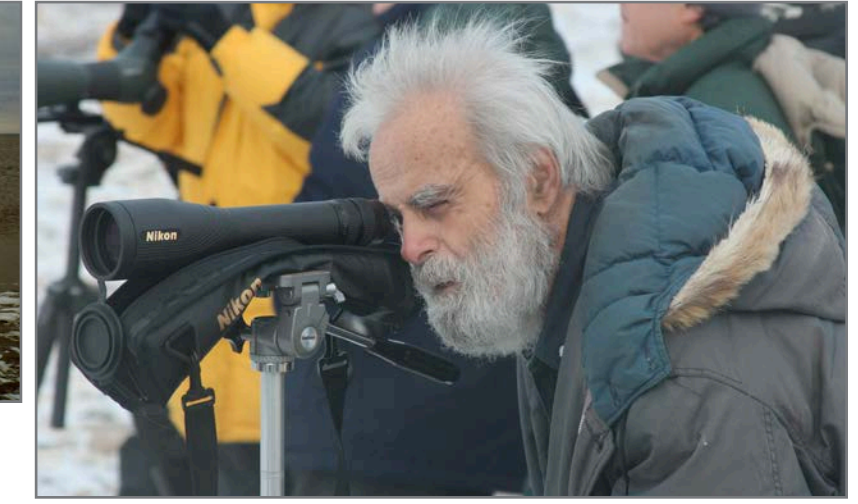
Unloading at North Twin Island in Hudson Bay, Canada, researching polar bears for the Canadian Wildlife Service. Photo by Dick Russell

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

By Jean Schulenberg



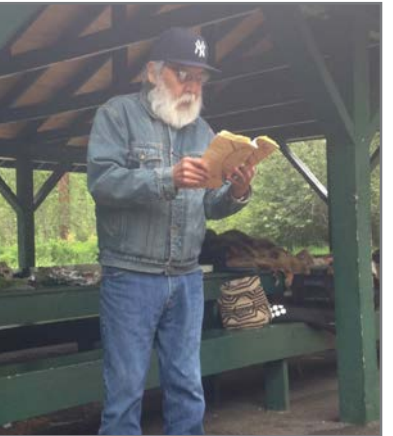
Jonkel and Dick Russell researching polar bears on North Twin Island in Hudson Bay. Photo by Dick Russell.



Jonkel teaching a polar bear ecology field course in Churchill, MB. Photo by Mary Laxmi von Hofmann.



Examining a rub tree during a bear ecology field course in Montana. Photo courtesy Mike and Carla Pitelli.



Poet, Vic Charlo sings Walking Bear's Song for Chuck at Bear Honoring, May 2016. His poem, First Polar Bear, was written for Chuck.



Photo by Frank Tyro.

Field course instructor, Dr. Frank Tyro photographed this lovely polar bear amidst the blooming fireweed 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.

Tyro 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 beluga whales with their calves in the Churchill River, gaze at the aurora borealis, and explore the taiga, tundra, and beaches on the western shore of Hudson Bay. Stay tuned for a full account of the trip in the fall issue of Bear News—make sure your membership is up to date in order to keep receiving Bear News.

You can sign up for our fall polar bear trips at www.greatbear.org, or by contacting our offices in Missoula, Montana or Haines, Alaska.

Remembering Chuck, A Great Bear-Man, Gone Too Soon

By Jack Tobin

Books and songs are written about many people, but rarely have so many met, learned from and been touched by someone who has truly earned it.

Where does one start when considering the experiences and the meaning and the many lives that Chuck-Dr. Charles Jonkel—touched during his 85 years? He was a highly respected wildlife biologist and scholar with many papers published in wildlife journals, and a professor at the University of Montana in Missoula. He was also a naturalist, a very good tracker and ethical hunter, an organizer and advocate and a husband and father for more than 50 years.

And Chuck Jonkel was much more. For one thing he was a trailblazer both in setting up the Great Bear Foundation (GBF) with the late Dr. Frank Ponikvar 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 unethical nature filmmaking, he created the International Wildlife Film Festival (IWFF). Through this, Chuck wanted to provide a forum for those who take the time and put in the extraordinary effort to film and produce accurate wildlife films. The IWFF provided a place for their work to be shown and judged fairly. It was the first of its kind.

Anyone who got to know Chuck and his broad range of interests saw that he was decent, fair, generous, committed, optimistic, and extremely funny, but also concerned. Very concerned about those in power, their vested interests, their decisions that affect the human condition at its most basic level. And of course about how their decisions affected the needs of bears and other wildlife and biodiversity and ecosystems—“habitat, habitat and more habitat” as he would put it. And with that he engaged GBF repeatedly in the debate about delisting grizzlies in the

“lower 48” as was covered with myriad other bear-range issues in the Bear News several times.

Another important development Chuck was involved with was the creation of bear spray, while doing research at the University of Montana. Working with others and captive bears, he was able to determine what could do the job and be put into general use. What was ultimately developed was a product that now allows outdoor enthusiasts to hike more safely in bear country. Just as importantly it allows for both parties, people and bears to survive an encounter and walk away, without a lethal interaction. Its development has forever changed how we see, access and enjoy some of the truly wild places left in North America.

The first time I met Chuck was on a crisp June morning. He was standing 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 that had been reported earlier feeding on a carcass further down below. And I was behind him with a group of others watching too. Wearing his usual blue denim shirt, Levis and black work boots he appeared both easygoing and unpretentious. He turned around and waved me closer and asked with a smile if I was aware of the others that wanted to join the group. Confused I asked what he meant; he pointed behind me and said “take a look.”

I turned around and saw three shaggy big brown bison watching app. 300 feet up behind us. I thanked him for his “heads up.” He then offered me some elk pepperoni and told me that me the big ungulates had probably smelled the bear before we even arrived. A bit later with no bear in sight, our group made a slow detour around the bison, back to the vehicles at the roadside. Over many years and different journeys, I got to know and

learn so much from Chuck, a rare and remarkable “two legged bear.”

Chuck’s passion for wilderness defined him as a person, as did his love for bears and sound conservation policies. From what I remember he was in many respects a realist, and an optimist, but a realist without illusions. Through the many challenges he always kept his sense of humour. He liked a good laugh and to joke and share funny stories telling about his adventures and listen to others. However, when making a serious point instructing his class Chuck then became Professor Charles Jonkel. He was focused like a laser instructing us about the needs for large creatures to survive, particularly grizzly bears. Chuck was very honest and direct with the students he taught about grizzly bears and their survival in workshops in Glacier and Waterton Lakes National Parks.

He was precise and wanted us to understand clearly in no uncertain terms that survival for the bear (though they are big and strong) is often tough. He didn’t hold back letting the eager students know the grim facts that a lot of habitat would continue to degrade and a lot of bears will not make it past their 5th or 6th year of life. He spoke to the classes about the ongoing problems that bears will continue to face. The stresses, ranching conflicts, relocations, calories gained and lost, rising mortality would continue to take their toll. He spoke about the potential problems that bears will continue to face, and as he put it “good bear management often really means good people management.”

But whether he was speaking to a group of school kids in grade 4 about wildlife and habitat in Phillipsburg, Montana, adults at a town meeting about grizzly bear policy, or students in one of his GBF field courses, Chuck had a remarkable way to connect with anyone. He also emphasized to the people in the audience, not to just listen to him or others but to get out there and learn and see for themselves.

While on his travels with others or during his field courses he had a remarkable sense of geography and geology. He understood the forces that shaped the land, and the types of habitat that supported the life found there, whether it was birds, otters, pine trees, cougars, elk or bears. His sense of place and diversity was truly remarkable.

It was fun being out in the forest with him. Chuck would find a tree in B.C., Montana, or Alberta that had distinctive claw marks on it. He would point out how the bear had shimmied up the tree showing us the claw marks on the back of the trunk where the bear had gripped the tree with powerful front legs. The series of marks showed where the stout claws dug in. On the front of the tree he’d point out, there was another series of marks indicating where the bear had used its muscular back legs to help push it up a tree. As he studied the claw marks on the trees he would, as he put it “read it like a book”. Sometimes on these outings he could be seen scratching his back on a suitable tree just like a bear, not surprisingly. During numerous outings Chuck was often seen picking up garbage along the trail, trying

to leave wilderness a little better than he found it.

One of the animals, over the last 20 years of Chucks life, he really developed a fondness for was the “spirit bear”, which he called “the prettiest of bears”, also known as the Kermode. It is a white phase black bear found on the north coast of B.C. He made several trips to see them and meet with Heiltsuk people in Bella Bella who revere the spirit bears. Chuck was very interested in the bears genetics, and that a black female bear could give birth to three cubs with two being black and the third having a creamy white coat.

One year I was invited to go with him and some others, it really was a fun and amazing time we had during the trip to B.C.’s north coast and Princess Royal Island. Along the way we spotted several “ball deagles” (as Chuck jokingly called them) perched in a tree, orcas, seals and a pair of humpback whales. At one inlet we saw a grey wolf near the shore and heard its companions howling in the distance. To visit and walk in the primordial pacific coastal rainforests with their mossy green carpeted ground and reindeer snow was wonderful. Over the 4 days of sailing we only glimpsed a spirit bear briefly on a rocky shore some 500 feet away but Chuck and the rest of us were delighted.

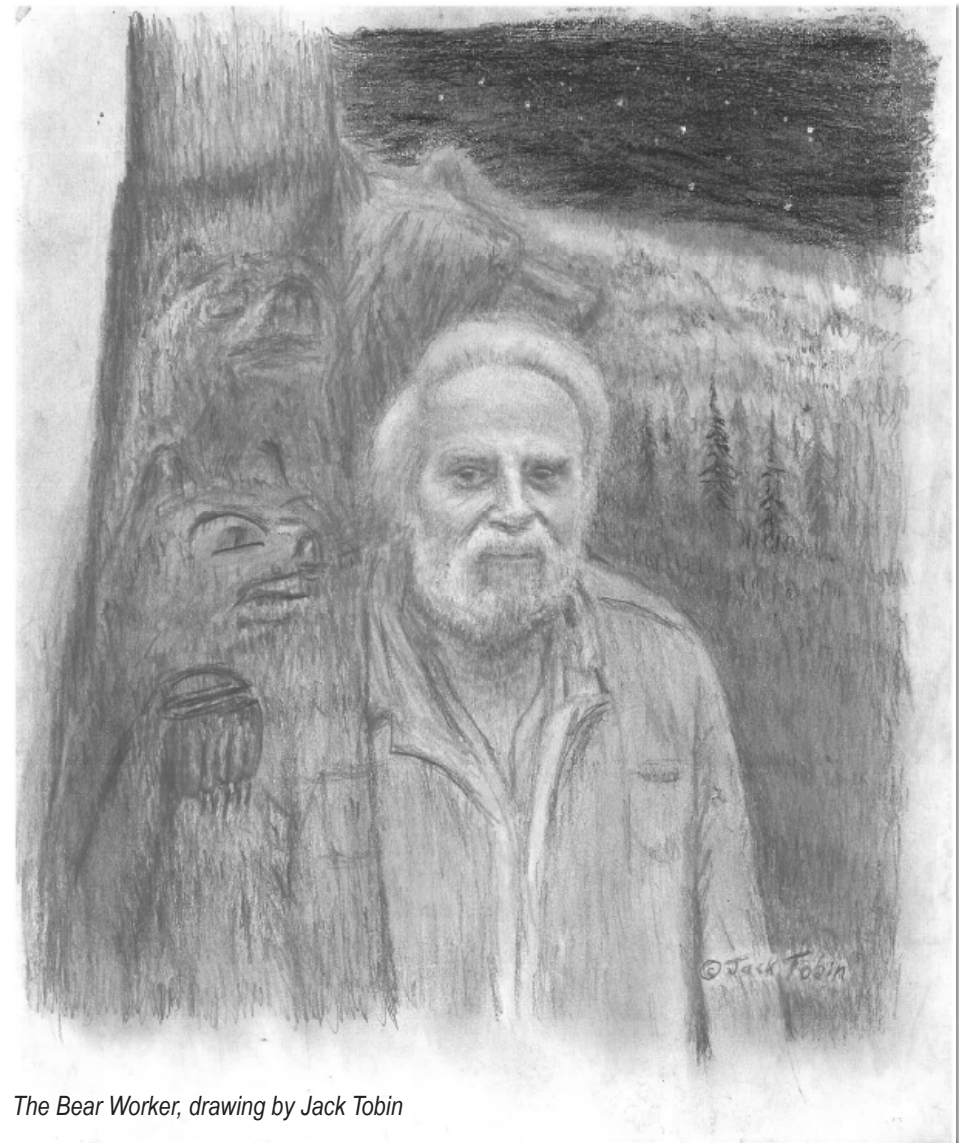
Among other things Chuck continued and expanded was GBF’s outreach programs and introduced the spring Bear Honoring. Over the years these gatherings have helped others to enjoy ‘bear foods’ including glacier lily salad, berries and salmon and to take part in various cultural events. They also helped participants to learn about other Native traditions and welcoming the bears from back after their long winter sleep.

During his Waterton’s Bears field course at Waterton Lakes National Park, Chuck was explaining the importance of different foods and the animals varied diet and that protein of all sorts was really important for bear’s survival. Along the way he “volunteered” me in front of the class to sample a grub taken from a log, some cow parsnip and a large black carpenter ant. This was done as he said, to educate others about how bears forage everyday and find different foods to eat. Chuck scooped up the ant for me to pop in my mouth and said with a chuckle “chew ‘em quickly they have strong jaws”! I did so- after throwing the insect in my mouth (which was a bit tart). I told him I appreciated the advice, but it really wasn’t necessary.

Among the many experiences Chuck told us about was the time he was in a small shack in the woods. He was awakened one night after a black bear stuck its head through the window. Chuck said the bear’s breathing and the wall shaking woke him up in time to see the snout just above his head. He quickly reached up swung his fist and punched the bear right in the nose. The bear jumped back with a startled snort and took off. Chuck said that he could then get back to sleep.

One time at the GBF office I remember one of the staff had brought in two little kittens after picking them up at the vet on her way to work. She let

Continued, next page



The Bear Worker, drawing by Jack Tobin

Continued from left

the little cats wander and play in various rooms in the office and there was some rambunctious action for a couple of hours then all was quiet and they were no where to be seen. Some time later, Chuck came back from an errand and called her and the rest of us into his office. He was smiling as he showed us there behind his desk on his chair, were the two little fur balls curled up together asleep. He just left the little critters there and moved to a table in another room to do his research.

Another “Chuckism”: I remember seeing him in his garden plot in Missoula he would grow all kind of things including zucchini and tomatoes and rhubarb. Some of that zucchini along with elk or deer meat would be generously handed out and served by Chuck to people on the train- that included all kinds of passengers walking through, not just the GBF Churchill group (that was simply, who Chuck was..). One of the things I remember he loved to make was fresh boiled rhubarb and then serve it hot, mixed with sugar in a bowl. He taught me how to make rhubarb fruit leather in the kitchen at the GBF office. This involved boiling it and putting on greased pan and letting it dry over a day or two. He also would have Friday night get togethers at the office with Moose Drool (a elk beer), deer steaks baked potatoes and local sausage.

Chuck wrote about the needs of others and the how unfair things often seem to be. When he wrote in the Bear News about “How a Brown Bear Might

Chuck Jonkel: Pioneer, Rebel, Advocate of Bears and the Wild

By Louisa Wilcox

On April 12, Dr. Charles Jonkel, a mentor and hero for nature, passed away. Chuck was a pioneering bear biologist who paved the way for countless researchers who followed eagerly in his footsteps. He was an educator, who made the natural world come alive in the eyes of kids of all ages. He was the epitome too of a conservation advocate, who saw the destruction of the wild and would not be silent. And as anyone who met him intuitively knew, Chuck, with his lumbering gait and heavy build, was at least part bear.

I can’t recall when I first met Chuck, after corresponding with him in the early 1980’s while in graduate school writing papers about grizzly bears. By the mid-1980’s, when I took on grizzly bear conservation professionally and moved to Montana, Chuck just seemed to be part of my ecology, more than willing to share his insights on bears, natural history, and our moral duty to protect the wild. In the field, I remember him making points while rubbing his back on a pine tree, just like a bear.

As a 20-something greenhorn from back east, I knew just enough to be dangerous, and Chuck set me straight on many fronts. By then Chuck was one of the top “go to” experts on bears, having gotten his start in 1959 in Canada in an early, ground-breaking study on polar bears. He had received his PhD on black bears in Montana’s Whitefish Range. But we found ourselves mostly talking about grizzly bears at a time when their future in places like Yellowstone was very much

See Things” he tried to tell us from the bear’s perspective in a realistic way what it is like to try and survive in a changing world with continual human disturbances. How these animals must cope with interference, harsh extreme measures, exploitation, captivity and much more. In it Chuck was trying to get the readers to change places with the bears amidst their struggles and in some way empathize with them. He showed us how these vulnerable beings have suffered so much to the point where they have been destroyed entirely in some former ranges (Arizona, Colorado, California etc.) and been demonized so much at the hands of man.

Regarding the human condition, right after the towers fell on September 11, Chuck wrote a poignant piece in the Bear News. He spoke about the suffering of others and about why others countries may be angry at the US. He recognized the need to see and change the deliberate waste and consumption that is so much a part of western society, and how others perceive it.

It was not surprising that Chuck had a piece of paper on a cupboard door in the kitchen of the GBF office amidst various Far Side cartoons (often featuring bears). It had a quote from another strong wilderness advocate and author—none other than the late Ed Abbey. It reminds us that it is not enough to fight for wilderness but to get out and also enjoy the virtues of wild places, “to bag the peaks, encounter the grizz, to breathe that sweet clean air” away from those avaricious types that



have their lives locked up in safe deposit boxes. Ed Abbey assures and reminds us that if we get out and enjoy wilderness “I promise you this, you will outlive the bastards”. Chuck I think wanted all of us to remember that too.

.....
Chuck, you as Lance Olsen wrote so perceptively right after your passing were, “and always will be irreplaceable”. Others, rightly so, have referred to you as “the father of Bear Biology”. You remain an original, one in a billion and well into your 60’s and 70’s you kept on fighting as long as you could. I have no doubt that a great many bears are still alive and doing better because of your noble and good work.

You were unwavering and undaunted with a strong and inspirational commitment to bears and wildlife in general and the wild places they must have to survive. You also, through being an excellent teacher who had an enormous

depth of practical experience, opened the eyes of so many others to what bears and other wild animals need, and will continue to need. Furthermore, you did your best to see to it that what we see and believe on film about wildlife has some proper safeguards to ensure accuracy and that wild animals are filmed ethically. You were and are a great example for all who met you.

May you forever find many new trails and tundra to walk upon where there are other “footprints”— those of the great bear.

Jack Tobin is a long-time volunteer and member of the Great Bear Foundation and contributor to Bear News. He is an artist and conservationist living in Ontario. This is a condensed version of Jack’s remembrance of Chuck Jonkel, and some sections have been re-ordered for continuity. Contact us at gbf@greatbear.org for Jack’s full-length tribute.

in doubt, and their numbers may have hovered down around 300 individuals total – perhaps their lowest ebb ever. I will always remember what Chuck told me about keeping things simple: saving bears is about protecting habitat and not killing too many. The more wilderness, the better. The more human tolerance, the more bears can live near people. Although the world of bear research and conservation has gotten lots more complicated over the years, Chuck’s message still rings truer than ever.

When I read research papers now that report highly sophisticated modeling, complex statistics, or algorithms that I cannot understand, I sometimes wonder: does this bring us closer to fundamental bear truths or further from them? I see ever more clearly now how easy it is to get caught up in the latest fancy statistical method, and lose track of the purpose and the point. Chuck never did. For years, I shared an office suite with staff of the Great Bear Foundation, a bear advocacy organization that Chuck started, which brought me closer to his philosophy and style. (I was then Program Director for the Greater Yellowstone Coalition). They were always hatching new educational programs to improve relations between people and bears. The community apple gatherings in the fall, for example, combined Chuck’s commitment to preventing bears from becoming conditioned to human foods, and his own love of food, as the apples made for great cider.

In 1990, I had an opportunity to see Chuck in action with his peers from around the world at the International Bear Association meeting in Missoula. These meetings still convene hundreds of the world’s bear experts, and at this one, Chuck was a center of attention, introducing panels, leading workshops, chatting to everyone. Many of the scientists were on their best behavior so as to avoid offending bureaucrats and scientists from government agencies, which were the source of most research funding and jobs. The younger students, many looking for jobs, also tended to be supplicant and non-provocative. It seemed like Chuck’s mission was to speak truth to power, and share his views that the world was going to hell for bears as a result of human intolerance and habitat exploitation. And that we all – scientists, agency reps, students, members of the media – needed to get out there and do something about it.

I was amazed at the response. Chuck, the most outrageous person in the room, was applauded, numerous times. No one disagreed with him, not even the Russians, who it seemed to me then hailed from a kind of bear paradise, far from the hell realms. But like the rest of what Chuck said then, his warnings have since proven to be tragically true, as bears of all species worldwide face ever greater perils – and even the tiny Sun Bear of Bornco, not much bigger than a Newfoundland dog.

One thing about being around Chuck is that his passion rubs off on to you. He inspired me to get more angry and outspoken than I already was about

the plight of bears. After 30 plus years of activism on behalf of bears and wild places, I have mellowed on some scores, but not, as with Chuck, when it comes to their fate or to the importance of humans’ choosing a less destructive path. Chuck himself had a peculiar gift of speech, which had a way of nailing his points into your skull. I recently ran into a Chuck-ism, while preparing comments opposed to the latest round of efforts to delist Yellowstone grizzly bears. One key argument is the need to reconnect long isolated Yellowstone bears to other populations in the Northern Rockies, rather than rely on artificial importation of bears from Canada to keep the population healthy. Here’s Chuck: “Dropping a bear from Canada into Yellowstone is like dropping a naked man into eastern Turkey. He might be able to survive, but probably not.”

You might try to forget Chuck-isms, but you have to work hard... and I for one, don’t want to.

Chuck has travelled on. Whatever path I take in what remains of my life, it is richer for the many lessons he graciously offered, like the abundant fruits from his home garden.

Chuck’s legacy continues through the work of the Great Bear Foundation and through the many students who he inspired. For more on Chuck, here is a link to a film produced by GBF and Salish Kootenai College: “Walking Bear Comes Home: The Life and Work of Charles Jonkel”: <http://greatbear.org/projects/#docfilm>

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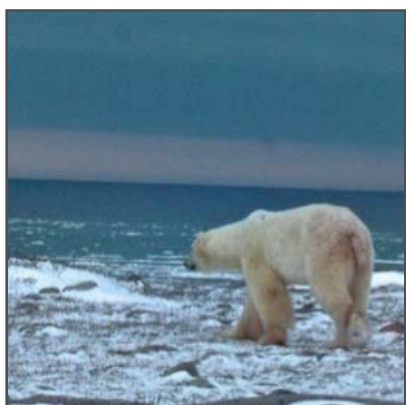
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