

Brother Asaiah...

*As Remembered by Martha Ellen Anderson
and friends...*

*Brother
Asaiah...*

**as remembered by
Martha Ellen Anderson
and friends**

**A Books To Believe In Publication
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PREFACE:

Attempting to capture the essence of Brother Asaiah seems akin to trying to catch a moonbeam in a mason jar. A glint or two from off its glassy sides may reflect fragments of this simple/complex soul, but his vibrant free-wheeling spirit prevents one from screwing down the lid.

That I hardly knew him is a deprivation I lament, for perhaps no one so impacted for the better that funky little town at the end of the road called Homer than did he. And as disparate a mix of town folks as one can possibly imagine seemed to love him for it.

Toss into a blender 1 part eastern mystic, 2 parts Old Testament prophet, 3 parts wounded warrior, 4 parts aging flower child and from the mix at least the essence of the man emerges. In this book, Author Martha Ellen Anderson commendably keeps the speed control a notch or two below “puree.”

Even some who might initially have thought him to be a “crackpot” came to cherish Brother Asaiah’s benign presence and the benevolence and grace which seeped from those cracks to so enrich their lives.

To simply say Brother marched to a different drummer overlooks the fact he not only fashioned, tuned and beat that drum; but, rather than “marched,” danced a slow and stately saraband through his later years to the accompaniment of cosmic rhythms but indistinctly heard by those incapable of fully tuning in to wave lengths he received with clarity. From the following pages hints of their proper frequency can be derived.

*~Jay Hammond, 1922-2005,
Beloved Governor of Alaska, 1974-1982*

THANKS TO:

Eva Saulitis and her Creative Writing Class who fed back to me their responses to my beginnings. As a result, my intended audience has extended from those who knew Brother firsthand, to those of you who can only know him through this book.

Authors Shelley Gill, Hal Spence, Randi Somers, Nancy Lord, Amy Bollenbach, Kyra Wagner, Charles Wohlforth, Nate Keene, Frank Tuoti, Anton Schmalz, Stan and Freya Anderson, who, seeing the worthiness of the project, donated their expertise. Thanks most of all, to Will Files, who “let me be” while I sought the best way to convey Brother’s story. I cannot measure how many times computer guru Will rescued me from losing the whole book.

INTRODUCTION

SO WHO AM I, ANYWAY, TO BE WRITING THIS?

I was born about the time that Brother Asaiah, as a teenager called Claude Bates, was choosing to sing around the campfire instead of attending his Baptist orphanage school. My brother Stan, about Brother Asaiah's age, had waited a long time for a little sister. When Dad called from the hospital to announce my arrival, Stan dropped the phone and ran around town shouting, "I have a sister, I have a sister." All called me "Sister."



Brother Asaiah, Donnis and Stan Thompson

Brother Asaiah...

As a kid, I could count on my big brother Stan to come into the kitchen, pick up a dish towel, and recite the newest love poetry that he had soaked up like a sponge. His passion for life and poetry was my lifeline. Thirty years later, after an unchosen but liberating divorce, I returned to my parents' home in Kenai, Alaska, just a few driving hours from Homer where Brother Asaiah lived. Stan was now Kenai Peninsula Borough Mayor. Brother Asaiah visited him often. Stan brought out Brother Asaiah's poetic love letters.

My heart soared.

By now I KNEW that loving is what life was all about. I knew we all must change and heal our dark sides, but so open and public about it? Right in the newspaper? Not me! This is not the way personal spiritual stuff is done! Still, I hypnotically picked up each *Homer News*, in the hopes of finding a Brother Asaiah letter, as I had been drawn to my brother Stan's poetic sharings as a kid. Asaiah was expressing publicly what I felt privately.

Life is sometimes what happens while you are planning it, and I ended up sharing a home in Homer with Brother's good friend, Will Files. I often cooked dinner for Brother and Will. Though Brother noticed every detail about the meal, there was more importantly a spiritual presence that made each meal a sacrament. Bro (as we had come to call Brother Asaiah) would often bring a tape from a New Dimensions radio program on science and spirituality, one of his *Letters to the Editor*, a quote from the Bible or the Kaballah (the Jewish Book of Life), or Carl Jung or Krishna Venta's writings. After the meal, Will would go up to his computer and Bro and I, the philosophers in the trio, would sit in quiet until the ideas began to flow.

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I would not be aware of the weather, gestures, smell, sight or sound, those senses that most people trust. His unique phrasing and wordage, his facial expressions and body movements, memorable to many, I cannot capture in words.

It was his life understandings, and the refreshing new way that he lived them, that drew me in. Bro and I shared a serious passion: how can we live today, in a way that supports life and makes a life-supporting difference, now and in the future. The pace of change has accelerated. What of that change sustains life? What is an aberration, a wrong direction? What is God's will, and what is our response-ability.

Sometimes my words hit his inner knowingness, and he would nod an enthusiastic "yes." Sometimes his ideas propelled my questioning, causing him to reflect again. From our sharings, I have tried, with integrity and prayer, to extract his intent. If your experience differs from mine, trust it. Write your own story in the empty pages in the back of this book. As you will soon discover, this book is really a community remembering. Walk with me through the grocery stores, libraries and WKFL Park. Hear what people are saying, as I try to understand what this now-legendary man is all about. I will be your guide.

When words are a direct quote from his published writings, they are in this Brother Asaiah font.

One day, as Asaiah was preparing to leave this earth, I said, "Bro, somebody should write your life story."

He stood up, gazed slowly out the window overlooking the hamlet that he loved.

He seemed to be looking above the town itself. He reflected a long time.

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Ceremoniously he turned toward me. He looked me straight in the eye.

“Yes,” he said, soberly, “you.” He picked up a scrap of paper and wrote out his request.

I thought of you who are skilled published Homer writers. He read the question in my eyes. He grinned and pointed confidently to the scrap of paper.

It clearly said my name.

Humbly I begin. With the kindness Brother extended to all, please take the kernels that speak to you and let the chaff fall to the wind. Thank you.

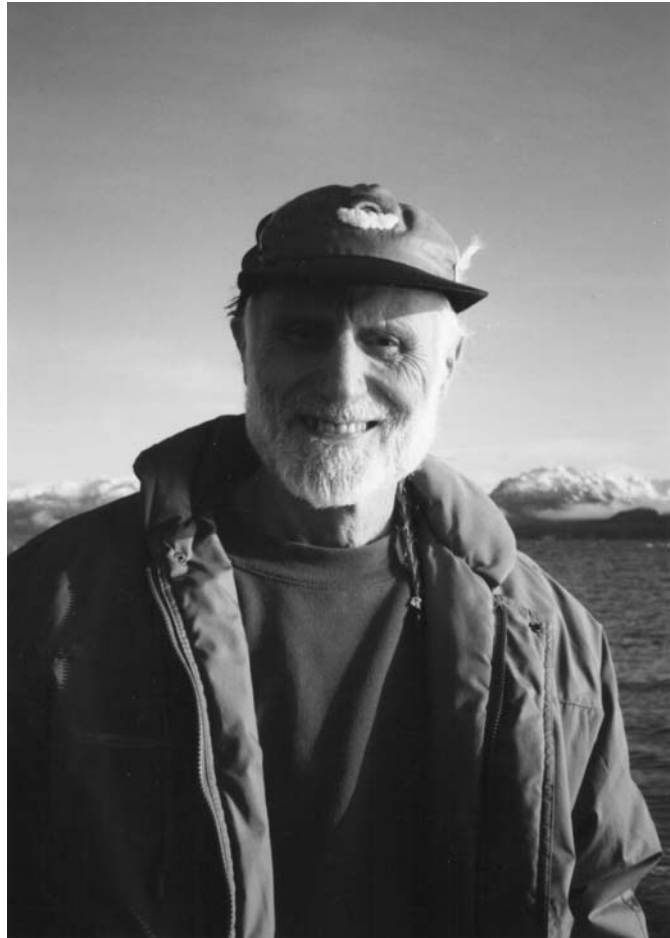
For those of you just meeting Brother through these pages, know that I know my words are inadequate. To paraphrase from *The Sound of Music*, “How do you catch a rainbow in your hand?” The life of the spirit and soul is timeless and measureless, and beyond words. As you read, look for the depth, passion and wisdom imparted, the communion, the value of the gift toward which the words are aimed. See it as a call-to-be created just for you.

If you belong in these pages and are not here, please know that these pages are just a shadow of what they are trying to reflect. You had the real thing.

If you don't know the real people in these pages, know that it doesn't matter; this book is not about worldly labels like names. Brother Asaiah called them all Brother or Sister anyway. You will find them with different names in your own community.

If you are new to our community, welcome. Meet the man who epitomized, who lived, expressed and inspired our community soul.

Introduction



Brother Asaiah

Great souls, whose sudden visitations daze the world, vanish like lightning, but they leave behind a voice that in the distance far away wakens the slumbering ages.

~Krishna Venta

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CHAPTER 1

ISLAND SEA

“A Place Apart To Center The Heart”

1990. The End of the Road,
Homer City Council Chambers, Homer, Alaska.

Like an island in the midst of a roaring sea, he sat anchored in his chair.

Around him, the angry mob raged. The Homer City Council chamber walls buckled out, and the floorboards swayed under the pressure of the largest attendance ever to flood its hall. The turbulent wave of furious humanity roared on, splashing their insulting ire at this silent slouching man. VFW and American Legion veterans came in full uniform, brass sparkling, and macho chests exploding. This silent man was, to them, a turncoat, a traitor, a deserter, deserving of their worst and they gave it. A common unspoken assumption flowed underneath the surface. It screamed to them, like heavy ocean waves, seeming to say, “In war we fight. We stick together against the enemy, and our president tells us who the enemy is. When they say fight, we fight. We learned how to war as children, not a thinking thing, only to feel it and know it, washing through our flesh.

“Why does that stupid man sit there silent, not getting this truth that we all know?” If words had

gunshot in them, this old man, silent in the middle of the infuriated mass, would be dead now, and no problem to anyone, but he just sat there unmoved. A primal energy as obvious as an iron chord ran all the way from those fighting in Desert Storm Gulf War through the media to Homer living rooms, revving up war juices.

A livid man, under the influence of alcohol, had come from Anchor Point, 20 miles away, to support his VFW war buddies, who he imagined to be attacked. His penetrating steel gaze shot directly on the silent man, as he bellowed out, without waiting for recognition from the chairman, "You are crazy!"

When the slouching old man didn't move, he accelerated his accusation. "I tell you, you are crazy. You should see a psychiatrist. You should be sent to a mental institution." His ire penetrated through the crowd like a spear, swelling the wild guffaws and rage of the crowd into one united arrow aimed at the quiet old man who sat grounded and secure in his stable chair.

The silent man waited.

Sue Case was chosen by her Legionnaires to speak at this pivotal meeting because of her ability to stay cool in tense situations. She reached over, touching the silent Brother Asaiah's hand: "It was a calming thing to me," Sue said. "I saw the sadness, confusion, and frustration in his eyes. He looked so resigned, so hurt. I had never seen his shoulders slump so. He usually has such a calming influence on people. He felt so bad that people's feelings were hurt. He loved the veterans, and he understood them, for he was one of them. Two sides of him were pulling in opposite directions. He understood the pull, the drama of war. He also understood something most of the others did not

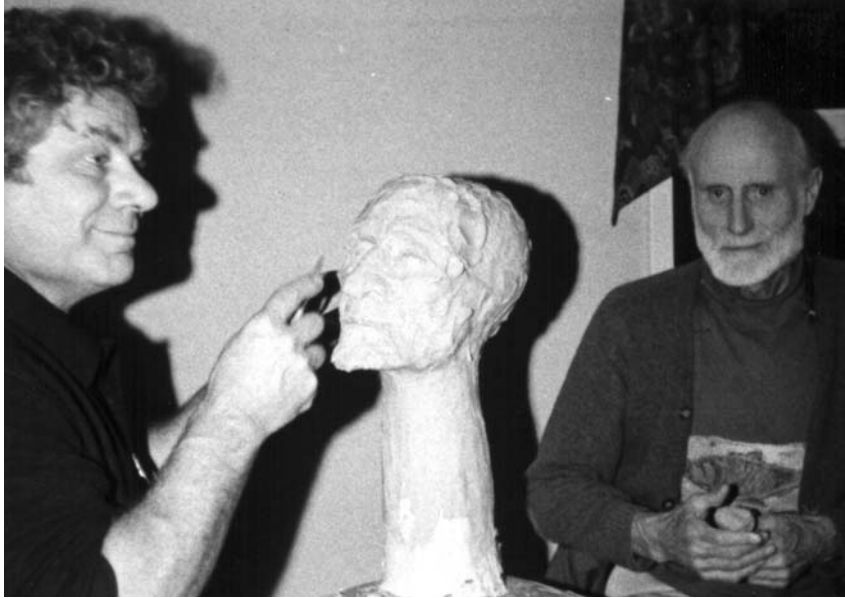
understand, and that was how to deal with his own warring nature. Krishna Venta, who gave him this park land, had taught the war child within him a better way. He had taken time to integrate this into his own life. There was something internal about him that was indefinable. Some thought him an oddball because he was different - the pony tail - I guess.”

Unremarkable in appearance was this old man, shoulders bent, balding grey hair pulled back into a squirrely ponytail. His thin clear skin stretched tight around finely hewn bones. His well-worn jeans were clean; a frazzled sweatshirt had a rainbow painted on it. That internal something is the draw. Is he waiting for a higher power than the crowd? He just sits there.

When the fury of the crowd calmed, he arose. He addressed the chairman with a quiet nod. He looked his accuser in the eye with a compassionate understanding, noticeable to all, and turning back to the chairman, he kindly and tenderly said, **“Will you please tell that man that I love him?”**

Silence.

Warmth, as if from the sun, bathed the hall. For a moment, all seemed to breathe, like a breath of grace, in unison.



Leo Vait sculps our beloved Brother Asaiah

So where is this Homer anyway?

Homer is a mystical womb of a village curving around Kachemak Bay, exchanging tidal flows with Cook inlet and the Gulf of Alaska. As I enter on its only road into town, gazing down into the cavity where the town nestles, I see a community sandwiched between high hills to the north and vast snow-capped mountains across the Bay to the south, reflecting in the Bay.

Why, with all this vast expanse of spaciousness and grandeur, would anyone make a fuss about a park the size of a handkerchief in the middle of the town!

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There must be more to this than just a little piece of land.

I began asking. It seems that this battle had been stewing for some weeks. This quiet man, Brother Asaiah, had given some land to the community for a park. Patriotic veterans, war juices revved up watching the Desert Storm Gulf War over television, felt an urgency to erect their memorial honoring veterans in the park. Homer City Council voted approval before Brother Asaiah found out about it. Brother Asaiah said no, he did not want anything in the park honoring war or those who had gone to war. He wanted to honor an alternative to war that he had discovered after his own war life. He wanted to celebrate the wholesome wonders of brotherly love. It was to be a peace park.

Now, Homer is known for its outspokenness and individuality: strongly divergent views are common, and voiced openly in front of the whole town. But this was not an ordinary Homer disagreement. This was war, right in the streets. Neighbors who had been on good terms yelled at each other. Both were certain they were right. People who had been hugging friends turned a cold shoulder as they passed in the grocery store. Husband and wife became as separated from each other as foreigners on the other side of the world. The community was polarized, black and white. They were either for the veterans' memorial, or for a peace park with no in between. The memorial had become a symbol of being for or against war.

But why was the massive unconscious undertow so eager to pull him under if this Asaiah guy is the man of peace he is reputed to be. Why do they call him Brother?

If he cares about these people, why doesn't he let them have their way? I was touched and curious. There

is something about this silent man that draws me, like a storm-tossed remnant, seeking a stable root.

“I don’t remember what I said,” said accountant and friend Bob Thaggard, who had the foresight to attend this pivotal meeting, “but an unusual wave came over me and I knew in that moment I would have given my life for him.”

So begins the Legend of Brother Asaiah, told and retold over and over in our “Cosmic Hamlet by the Sea.” Legend says:

**Brother Asaiah
was a poor orphan boy from Appalachia.**

**He never met his father.
His mother was too ill to care for him.
He was out on the street at age six.
He was sent to an orphanage.
He never went past third grade.
His profession was a janitor.**

Yet, oddly, in this seaside village of Homer, none of that seemed to matter.

When he left his body in 2000, flags in Homer were flown at half-mast. He was honored by the Kenai Peninsula Borough and the State Legislature.

Valentine’s Day is Brother Asaiah Day in Homer. Why do I see his photo in the hospital, doctor’s offices, restaurants, bookstores, town hall and dozens of homes?

“From the moment I set foot in Homer, I sensed that Asaiah was different from others,” said sensitive, young Steve Augustus, who left Homer because, like many others, he could not find paying employment. “I

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had a fear of the unknown probably, but I was in no way prepared for the terror of what really happened. Asaiah scared the living bejebes out of me.”

How, I asked, for I had understood that Asaiah was a gentle man.

“I was always in awe of him,” Steve explained. “He was so spiritual, you know, and I wasn’t, so I kept my distance, observing him from afar. He was a legend, and known. I was new and shy. Though I wanted to face his penetrating eyes, in reality I looked down when I passed him on the street. Then one day, as I was just standing down on Lucky Shot Street near his home, my dog leaped away from me and attacked Asaiah, chewing an ugly bleeding gash in Asaiah’s leg. Brother Asaiah let out a horrible yelp, screamed low-down street language at my dog, and limped in pain into his nearby home. I was in shock. I couldn’t think. Still in terror, I fell into the comfort of my own bed in my trailer. I couldn’t sleep and I didn’t know what to do. I had never spoken to Asaiah. I didn’t even know if he knew who I was. I loved my dog. I was unemployed, without money to even pay for repairing Asaiah’s leg. My dog was usually so gentle, and had never even tried to nip at anybody else before.”

“Brother called me that day to take him to the hospital and I did,” said Asaiah’s long-time friend Will Files. “Yes, he was angry, but his leg mended.”

Asaiah went home and pounded away at his little old hunt-and-peck typewriter, the tool that he used to think things through, and then decided to call Steve on the phone. “Brother Steve, I just don’t want you to feel you need to put that dog down or anything, you know,” Asaiah said. “He was just doing what dogs do.”

“Others call me a wordsmith,” said Steve, “but before I could think of what to say, Asaiah hung up.”

“Brother Asaiah is an institution,” wrote Charles Wohlforth in the Anchorage Times, 1989. But what kind of an institution, I wondered, if dogs single him out for their ire.

“I am terrified that my daughter might grow up without the concrete symbol of everything this community stands for, that Asaiah has been for the rest of us,” said Billeen Carlson when Asaiah left this world in 2000. This quiet unremarkable appearing man who so many are now attacking is the same gentle man that people call upon when they need support for their own path?

“My Christian Church leaders told me to stay away from Asaiah’s WKFL Park, because, not being Christian, it was of the devil. Now that I have found a personal life with Christ, and think for myself beyond the church brainwashing, I no longer judge Asaiah,” said a vital, mature Homerite.

What did his life stand for, I wondered, and why do faces light up or look down, years after his body has left this world, at the mention of his name?

On 9-11-2001, the year after Brother Asaiah left this world, a huge sign appeared in the center of WKFL Park, “**What would Brother Asaiah do?**”

“What would Brother Asaiah do?” I wondered, and then called President Bush’s office and other decision makers with my ideas. One thing is for certain, Brother would have had his say.

Visionaries are gifted with the ability to see ahead of time, to see how certain actions in the present could manifest in the future, and how a change would look further down the path. Was Asaiah a feeder root for a new paradigm, a new archetype for a more adaptive way to live on the earth as it is now? Was he nudging us away from blind compliance and a false sense of

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security to something more authentic inside each one of us? Was he an old fashioned prophet? If so, how does he know what he knows?

Do the early years of a child's life predict his adulthood? Does wisdom really begin in the cradle, as I had been taught?

When Asaiah's half sister Pearl, eighty-six years old, still living in the town of their birth, Pilot Mountain, North Carolina, invited us to visit her, we went.

Martha Ellen Anderson

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