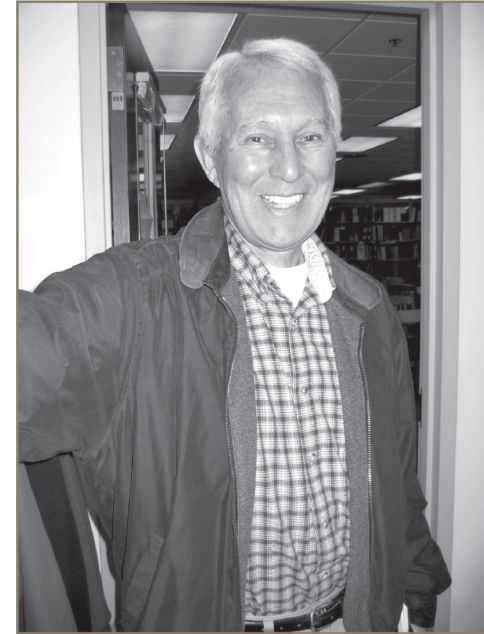


Sam Demienteiff, born and raised in Holy Cross, was one of the people who initially conceived of the People Awakening Project, and has remained very active in it, including serving on the Coordinating Council and being involved in other aspects of the research. He has also been very active in the statewide Alaska Native sobriety movement. Sam's story carries a message of recovery and those things that have been most important for his sobriety. Sam was 62 at the time of the interview.

*“So I go in there and go to my bed, got down on my knees and now I can really pray good at this moment because here I am in this protective covering. I have absolutely good feelings. The experience is totally overwhelming and I just said, “God, I want to stop.” Because it’s obvious to me that I don’t want to die and all these other things I have experienced. And I’m old enough. I’m adult enough to make up my mind. So how am I going to do it now? I got up and walked around to the mirror. I looked right in the mirror and I just shook my head and I said this is unbelievable. I’ve never talked to myself before. I could see the muscles in my face jerking and I was scared. This is amazing. How can I be scared of myself, nervous of myself? So I did just like he said. I looked right into my eyes and I just slowed down and said okay, make up your mind, make your decision. And “Okay, from this point on in my life I’m never going to drink alcohol again. It’s not going to be part of my life. Every time I see anything that relates to alcohol, it’s going to go right over my head. I don’t want to comprehend it or think about it or anything. That’s what I want. Do you understand?” And I said, “Yes, I understand.” Okay. And that’s it, that’s it. Okay, from this point on never more -- never again in your life, never again in my life. And so I kind of relaxed. This tension kind of left me you know and I’m done, that’s it. Life starts now.*

*We lived a fantastic life. I never realized it, but the life that we lived on those rivers every year up and down and meeting so many people and going through so many experiences and seeing so much of the Alaska river country. (...) It was 1992 I think. I went down to Holy Cross and I was there and I remember telling my dad. What I did is I just told him I loved him. And, but later on I told him, “Dad, you know our lives when we grew up on the boats and everything? That was the best life that you could provide for anybody and I thank you for it.” I just told him that and he just -- he was kind of shaking you know, but when I told him I loved him the first time he visibly shook; he was in shock I think. I was leaving Holy Cross and I was getting ready to get on the plane and I went over and shook hands. And he just shakes hands, so I shook hands but I just pulled him towards me and I put my hands around him and I just hugged him and said, “Dad, I love you.” And he just kind of shook. He didn’t know what to do. What do you do? I just let him go and I just smiled and just went over and hugged mom and told her the same thing and I left. But I made sure I thanked him for that, because it was a fantastic life.*



Sam Demienteiff

*Life can be so great. There’s so much beauty in the world... The whole world has beauty like that and if we were there and seen it, I think I’d like to see those things and appreciate them. And besides that there are so many people that have had the same experience I had, only different and I’d like to hear their stories. How did it happen to them? What’s going on? Do they have the same questions as we do about life? Do they have the desires? Do they have this understanding of development? Did they know about the high language? Do they know how to talk to the spirit? So I think it’s like coming above the surface. (...) It’s not a new life. This is the way life is supposed to be.”*

— Sam Demienteiff was interviewed by Gerald Mohatt on November 11, 2001.