

CAPITAL CITY FRONT PAGE NEWS

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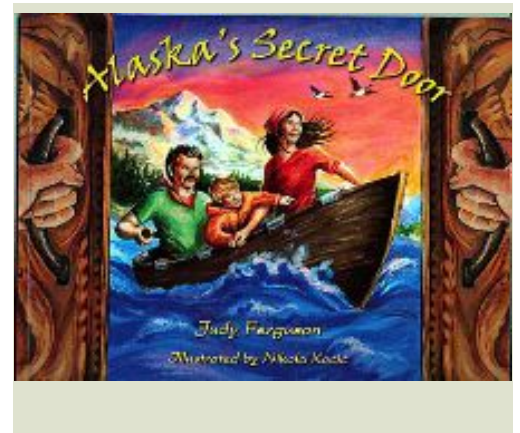
Children's books capture the magic of living in Alaska

By Christina Holmgren

To children Outside, books about Alaska tell stories about a mythical landscape; to Alaskan kids, reading about their own reality - or that of their friends in other parts of the state - can validate the importance of their own life, or add to their knowledge about their state.

Among this year's crop of Alaskan children's books are two books by Fairbanks author Judy Ferguson, illustrated by Nikola Kocic. "Alaska's Secret Door" tell the story of a young boy who calls the banks of the Tanana River home, and how he and his family follow a toy boat he carved down the Tanana and up the Yukon River, meeting people and wildlife along the way. The story effortlessly weaves Alaska history, geography, and traditional ways of life into the trip on board the small, three-person canoe.

"Alaska's Little Chief" lets us meet 93-year-old Athabascan David Salmon who recalls memories of his childhood - going by dogsled with his father to learn how to trap and hunt; when the mission house burned down; and when he and his sister met his father's new wife for the first time.



Ferguson's deep familiarity with her subject matter makes her books great reading for children, whether or not they can relate first-hand to the culture described. Kocic's illustrations fill the pages of both books, and are more an integral part of the book than actual "illustrations." Both books make for awesome reading that impart knowledge while being exciting both for children and the parents that read to them. The length of the books made them a bit too long for my preschooler, but my six-year-old wants to read them over and over, and she also admires and comments on the art in them at every reading.

Judy Ferguson: "Alaska's Secret Door" Illustrated by Nikola Kocic. Glas Publishing, 2004; Judy Ferguson: "Alaska's Little Chief" Illustrated by Nikola Kocic. April 2005.