

We were Born to be Wild!

Description

My Alaska 1960's Experience



Photo from the *Anchorage Daily News* when I played guitar during the October 15, 1969 Anchorage Moratorium March.

2019—a group of the same students who always did this stuff, organized the 50th year reunion since my *East Anchorage High School* graduation occurred—but I didn't attend. Those were not good years for me and I didn't care to hear from many peers who are still stuck in the 60's.

I have moved on.

But I look back with mixed emotions on where I was then, where Alaska was at in context with the rest of the country, and where we have come as a state having tremendous oil wealth.

Our class song was ***Born to be Wild***, by **Steppenwolf** the theme song from the 1969 classic movie ***Easy Rider*** with **Peter Fonda**, **Dennis Hopper**, and **Jack Nicholson**.

From the song:

Get your motor runnin'

Head out on the highway

Lookin' for adventure

And whatever comes our way

Yeah Darlin' go make it happen

Take the world in a love embrace

Fire all of your guns at once

And explode into space

Nationally 1969 was a Year of

Social and Political Drama

Political

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President Richard Nixon appointed Alaska Gov. Walter Hickel as Interior Secretary

January 20, **Richard Nixon** was sworn in as the 37th **President of the United States** in the face of a groundswell of social unrest from Pres. **Lyndon Johnson's War in Vietnam**. On June 8 President Nixon and South Vietnamese President **Nguyen V?n Thi?u** met at Midway Island where Nixon announced that 25,000 U.S. troops would be withdrawn by September. On September 14 the **US Selective Service** held the First Draft Lottery, changing the way men were drafted into the military. Although the war was winding down, on October 15 hundreds of thousands of people took part in **Moratorium to End the War in Vietnam** demonstrations across the United States.

We had those demonstrations in Anchorage, too. I marched and played my 12-string guitar in the bitter cold on the streets of Anchorage, concluding at the **Sydney Lawrence Auditorium**. Many young men of my generation joined the military or were drafted to fight in this conflict. I opposed the war on principle but never had to face the prospect of being drafted because I went to college and I got a high lottery number.

Environmental



[Girl Scout in canoe, picking trash out of the Potomac River during Earth Week.](#) Thomas J. O'Halloran, photographer, April 22, 1970. U.S. News & World Report Magazine Photograph Collection. Prints & Photographs Division

January 28, a “blowout” on **Union Oil’s Platform A** spilled 80,000 to 100,000 barrels of crude oil into a channel and onto the beaches of **Santa Barbara County** in Southern California. On February 5 the oil closed Santa Barbara’s harbor and inspired Wisconsin Sen. **Gaylord Nelson** to organize the first **Earth Day** in 1970. ((Earth Day: In July 1970, the [Environmental Protection Agency \(EPA\)](#) was established in response to the growing public demand for cleaner water, air, and land—its mission to protect the environment and public health. Earth Day also was the precursor of the largest grassroots environmental movement in U.S. history and the impetus for national legislation such as the Clean Air and Clean Water acts. At the turn of the twenty-first century, the EPA announced new requirements for improving air quality in national parks and wilderness areas and establishing regulations requiring more than 90 percent cleaner heavy-duty highway diesel engines and fuel.

<https://www.loc.gov/item/today-in-history/april-22/#:~:text=Earth%20Day%20was%20first%20observed,sites%20across%20the%20United%20States.>
)

This movement for environmental purity would backdrop the coming discussion about drilling for oil on **Alaska’s North Slope** and building a pipeline from Prudhoe Bay to Valdez.

Space



Apollo 11 backup crew members Fred Haise (left) and Jim Lovell prepare to enter the Lunar Module for an altitude test.

On July 16 the **Apollo 11** rocket with **Neil Armstrong**, **Buzz Aldrin**, and **Michael Collins** lifted off toward the first landing on the Moon where it did land on July 20. An estimated 500 million people worldwide watched in awe. A second **Apollo 12** spacecraft, November 19 with astronauts **Charles Conrad** and **Alan Bean** landed at ***Oceanus Procellarum*** (“Ocean of Storms”), becoming the third and fourth humans to walk on the Moon before returning safely and splashing down in the Pacific Ocean November 24.

We watched this event in real time while most other news reports had traditionally been delayed while newsreels were flown up from Seattle.

Culture



August 15–August 18, The **Woodstock Festival** was held in upstate New York, featuring some of the top rock musicians of the era. A two-tape VCR of this event was played in many homes around Alaska. On December 6 In contrast, the **Altamont Free Concert** was held at the **Altamont Speedway** in northern California. Hosted by **The Rolling Stones**, it was an attempt at a “Woodstock West” production and is best known for the uproar of violence that occurred. It is viewed by many as the “end of the sixties.”



Gravel (second from left) watches President [Richard Nixon](#) sign the [Trans-Alaska Pipeline Authorization Act](#) in 1973. Photo by Karl Schumacher – https://www.nixonlibrary.gov/sites/default/files/forresearchers/find/av/whpo_cs/37-whpo-e1806-cs.jpg, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=79999228>

In May of 1969 graduates of **East High School** heard U.S. Senator **Mike Gravel** give our commencement address. He had beat out **Ernest Gruening** in the 1968 election. Sen. Gravel tried to end the draft and famously put **The Pentagon Papers** into the public record in 1971. He played a crucial role in getting Congressional approval for the **Trans-Alaska Pipeline** in 1973. He was re-elected to the Senate in 1974, but gradually alienated most of his Alaskan constituencies and his bid for a third term was defeated in the 1980 primary election.



Anchorage Museum of History & Art. Library & Archives.

View of 23rd oil and gas lease sale for Alaska inside Sydney Laurence Auditorium in Anchorage, Alaska, with map of North Slope area in Alaska on sign in background. Alaska Governor Keith Miller holds microphone, while Alaska Department of Natural Resources Commissioner Tom Kelly stands at far right. Ward Wells Collection.

The most significant thing for Alaskans in 1969 was the September 10 Alaska **Department of Natural Resources Oil Lease Sale** for North Slope lands. **Gov. Wally Hickel** had moved on to serve as Nixon's **Secretary of the Interior** and **Lt. Gov. Keith Miller** was on hand at the same **Sydney Lawrence Auditorium** where I was to lead singing "We Shall Overcome" a month later, to open the bidding and turn the proceedings over to DNR Commissioner **Tom Kelly**. In his book **Prudhoe Bay Governor** Miller states: *By the end of the day the major oil companies, and some minor ones, bid just over 900 million dollars for the right to drill and produce on those lands owned by the State of Alaska.*

This was a harbinger of things to come. Alaska had been purchased from Russia for \$7.2 million, and that is the same value of the oil filling the first tanker out of Valdez. Thousands of tankers have since filled up and taken our bounty to market.

Again, from the song:

Like a true nature's child

We were born, born to be wild

We can climb so high

I never wanna die!

Category

1. Alaska Hope
2. Autobiography

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Author

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