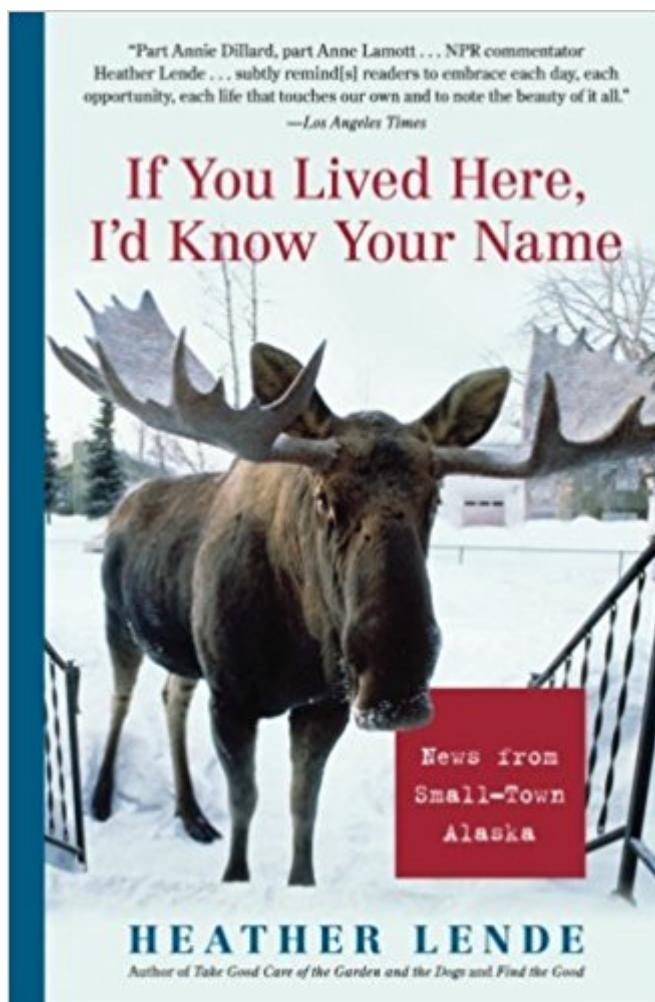


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# If You Lived Here, I'd Know Your Name: News From Small-Town Alaska



## Synopsis

Tiny Haines, Alaska, is ninety miles north of Juneau, accessible mainly by water or air--and only when the weather is good. There's no traffic light and no mail delivery; people can vanish without a trace and funerals are a community affair. Heather Lende posts both the obituaries and the social column for her local newspaper. If anyone knows the going-on in this close-knit town--from births to weddings to funerals--she does. Whether contemplating the mysterious death of eccentric Speedy Joe, who wore nothing but a red union suit and a hat he never took off, not even for a haircut; researching the details of a one-legged lady gold miner's adventurous life; worrying about her son's first goat-hunting expedition; observing the awe-inspiring Chilkat Bald Eagle Festival; or ice skating in the shadow of glacier-studded mountains, Lende's warmhearted style brings us inside her small-town life. We meet her husband, Chip, who owns the local lumber yard; their five children; and a colorful assortment of quirky friends and neighbors, including aging hippies, salty fishermen, native Tlingit Indians, and volunteer undertakers--as well as the moose, eagles, sea lions, and bears with whom they share this wild and perilous land. Like Bailey White's tales of Southern life or Garrison Keillor's reports from the Midwest, NPR commentator Heather Lende's take on her offbeat Alaskan hometown celebrates life in a dangerous and breathtakingly beautiful place.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Lende chronicles the various lives and deaths of the people of Haines, Alaska, an almost inaccessible hamlet 90 miles north of Juneau. In writing her social and obituary columns for Haines's Chilkat Valley News--some of which are included here--she blends

reportage and humor. Lende has lived in Haines all her adult life and is well-known in town. She deftly illuminates local color: the sewer plant manager who rides a motorcycle and sports a ZZ Top beard, the high school principal who moonlights as a Roy Orbison impersonator, and the one-legged female gold miner. Lende covers death in her community in all its forms—accidental, intentional and inevitable—and notes, "writing about the dead helps me celebrate the living." While comic, the book also has some sensitive, insightful anecdotes. For example, Lende, a contributor to NPR's Morning Edition, portrays the building of a coffin for a beloved mother by her youngest daughter; the sinking of a family boat with a tender farewell for a fearless fisherman; the mourning of a quirky, civic-minded "aging hippie

**Wife, mother, and obituary writer Lende lives in Haines, Alaska (pop. 2,500), a town without a stoplight, hospital, or home mail delivery. Haines has been called "the real Northern Exposure"** and the

I ordered this book because I have been to Alaska, twice and visited Haines. Haines is a tiny town. The ship I was on was smaller than usual and fit into the small harbor. My husband and I walked along the quiet streets in the morning upon embarking, looked around, then toured the unusual Hammer Museum which is interesting, fascinating and well worth visiting. We went into a small store with tourist articles. The shopowner said she was a native of this small town. In the afternoon, we rode a small bus to a long distance from Haines to the Bald Eagle viewing. We rode on a rubber tube type boat and wore long boots. We counted bald eagles living in tall trees. The tour guide was a man who spent winters in Bali and wrote articles for Audubon Magazine. Onto the book. I like Heather Lende's folksy way of writing and looking at life. Heather Lende writes her book seen through her own eyes, a personal account of life. She writes obituaries for the local newspaper which gives her a view into the lives of local citizens. She and her husband moved to small town Alaska after graduating from college. I don't feel there is too much about death. Death is part of life. Mrs Lende fell in love with the beauty of mountains, lakes, rivers and small town life. She is the mother of five kids, one adopted from Bulgaria, a gypsy girl. I enjoy reading Daily Noted which contains small articles about the goings-on and the citizens of Haines. The book contains 22 short chapters with an introduction 279 pages. One chapter deals with medical events. Her second child, daughter Sarah, was born during a snowstorm. All went well. Her son, Christian, had an appendix attack. The boy and parents had to drive to Whitehorse, Canada, during bad weather for the operation. The problems and fears of sickness of living in a tiny town without a hospital and of being

so far from large cities and with long hard winters. I enjoyed reading about Tlingit lives, the Eagles and the Ravens. Haines has a big Tlingit population. Heather and Chip decide to take a vacation and go to Vancouver, British Columbia. Heather compares Vancouver to Haines, all the amenities, theaters, restaurants, shops in Vancouver, all the people, the difference between the two, city and town. She decides Vancouver is great for a vacation but Haines is home. Mrs. Lende writes of her membership in the small Episcopal Church which she loves. She is active in her church plus many other organizations where she volunteers. She loves doing things in her home town. She and daughter, Eliza, go to Bulgaria to adopt her daughter. On the way to Bulgaria, the two visit England. She meets with some British nobility. She is not impressed. One chapter is about hunting, which I don't believe in, but is the way of life in Alaska. Heather's son goes on his first hunting trip. My feeling is leave the animals alone. Heather writes about going hunting with Chip and killing a billy goat. Her father didn't approve. Good for him. Readers meet friends and neighbors of Heather Lende. Heather fills her home with furniture from grand and great grandparents, ancestors. And has fun doing this. Plus she's religious, prays, church member and writer of life. The book is great. Nuf said. Read it.

My daughter just returned home after a 6-week surgery rotation at the Anchorage Native Medical Center. Because she knows her mom (me) has Trip to Inner Alaska as #1 on my Bucket List and she knows I write and read memoirs, she brought me Heather Lende's *If You Lived Here, I'd Know Your Name*. Heather writes obituaries and other articles for the Chilkat Valley News. Her detailed obituaries delve into the life of each person, sometimes taking up the entire front page, and touching on the mystery of both life and death. Heather describes Alaska through the people of this gorgeous yet rugged land giving Haines, Alaska, a flair of romance, intrigue and mystery. She has a way of tugging at heartstrings to evoke tears of joy and those of loss. I realize this book is the first of three; I look forward to reading her other two, *Find the Good* and *Take Good Care of the Garden and the Dogs*. I highly recommend *If You Lived Here, I'd Know Your Name* as a charming, yet thought-provoking read.

"If You Lived Here, I'd Know Your Name" is a wonderful book which I have just finished reading for the second time. Heather Lende is a writer who moved to Alaska in her early twenties with her husband and stayed, eventually raising five children and writing for the local newspaper and national media. This book is both personal memoir and reflection on life in small-town Alaska that is interesting and thought-provoking. The book is structured alternating between "Duly Noted"

chapters and single topic chapters. The "Duly Noted" portions are a collection of single paragraph news items about town and the single topic chapters are a more in-depth perspective on an event or personal reflection. The switch between styles helps keep the book interesting and fresh as you read along. Ms. Lende writes the obituary column for the local paper and that forms the basis for much of the book. She usually interviews friends and family of the deceased so that the obituary is a very personal reflection of their life, unlike the typical obituary I usually read that is a stark outline of funeral arrangements or (at the other extreme) a long, rambling narrative put together by the family which tends to focus on small details and are of little interest to the community at large. Ms. Lender's obituaries serve as a memorial to a life lived and also document small-town living as well. The single-topic chapters are prompted by thoughts or events that cause some reflection on the part of Ms. Lende and are wonderful snapshots into living (and dying) in general. As with any book, the perspective is that of the author and will not be shared by everyone reading the narrative. It's not a scientific analysis and (while seemingly balanced to this reader) it reflects the perspective of the writer. It's a memoir, not an academic analysis. One of my favorite books of all time, I now own a paper copy as well as an e-copy. Definitely one to savor, enjoy, and re-read.

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