

# Marie Smith Jones

**Marie Smith Jones** (*May 14, 1918 – January 21, 2008*) was the last surviving speaker of the Eyak language of Southcentral Alaska.<sup>[1]</sup> She was born in Cordova, Alaska, was an honorary chief of the Eyak Nation and the last remaining full-blooded Eyak.<sup>[2]</sup> In a 2005 interview, Smith Jones explained that her name in Eyak is udAch' k'uqAXA'a'ch which, she said, translates as “*a sound that calls people from afar*”.<sup>[3]</sup>

## 1 Biography

Jones married a fisherman, William F. Smith, on May 5, 1948. Although she had nine children with Smith, they did not learn to speak Eyak due to the social stigma associated with it at the time. She moved to Anchorage in the 1970s. So that a record of the Eyak language would survive, she worked with linguist Michael E. Krauss, who compiled a dictionary and grammar of it.<sup>[4]</sup> Her last older sibling died in the 1990s. Afterwards, Jones became politically active, and on two occasions she spoke at the United Nations on the issues of peace and indigenous languages. She was also active regarding environmental Indian issues, including clearcutting.<sup>[2][5]</sup> Jones suffered from alcoholism earlier in her life, but gave up drinking while in her early 50s;<sup>[2]</sup> she remained a heavy smoker until her death.<sup>[6]</sup> She died of natural causes on January 21, 2008 at age 89 at her home in Anchorage.<sup>[2]</sup>

## 2 See also

- Language death
- Linguistic rights

## 3 References

- [1] “Marie Smith”. *The Economist*. February 7, 2008. Retrieved 2008-10-25. Marie Smith, the last speaker of the Eyak language, died on January 21st, aged 89
- [2] “Last full-blooded Eyak and fluent speaker of native Alaskan language, dies”. *Associated Press*. January 5, 2008. Retrieved 2008-10-25.
- [3] Elizabeth Kolbert, “Last Words”, *The New Yorker*, June 6, 2005.
- [4] "How Do You Learn a Dead Language?", Christine Cyr, *Slate*, Jan. 28, 2008

[5] Obituary by *The Economist*, 7 February 2008

[6] “Last Alaska language speaker dies”, BBC News, January 24, 2008.

## 4 External links

- Marie Smith Jones on National Public Radio
- Obituary by *The Economist*, 7 February 2008
- Article on Marie Smith Jones from Anglicans Online

## 5 Text and image sources, contributors, and licenses

### 5.1 Text

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