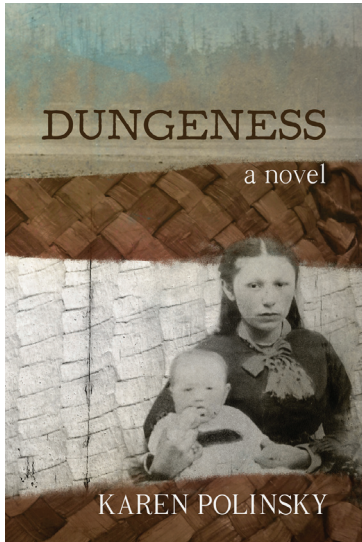




## Dungeness

by Karen Polinsky

ISBN 9781945805189



Spanning the latter half of the nineteenth century, this coming-of-age novel unfolds in the form of a historian's notebook. Protagonist and narrator Millie Langlie (daughter of a S'Klallam maiden and a Norwegian mariner) is an adventurous girl with a curious mind. Guided by the gift of a pair of silver fish earrings, she unearths an anomalous Indian-on-Indian massacre and confronts her mother's secret love affair. Journeying from the Strait of Juan de Fuca to Port Townsend and back again, Millie discovers how knowledge of the past can teach us to love, forgive, and forge a new path.

### From the author

Twenty years ago I packed up the Toyota with my three kids and traveled west from Boston to Seattle. While I waited to apply for teaching positions, I wrote for the *Kitsap Sun*, a local paper. This took me to the Little Boston S'Klallam reservation where I interviewed folks about significant job losses after the Port Gamble lumber mill shut down. Marie Hebert, who is still the cultural resources director for the Little Boston S'Klallam Tribe, handed me a book of S'Klallam primary source documents called *Shadows of Our Ancestors*, edited by Jerry Gorsline.

I immediately became curious about Mary Ann Lambert and her motive for writing down these unique folktales. Delving into this research, I created Millie Langlie (inspired by S'Klallam historian Mary Ann Lambert's example) as a guide to the past for modern readers at the high school level and above. Today, many of us cope with more than one ethnic identity. Many of us find ourselves trapped between contradictory worldviews. Things are never quite what they seem. Can we allow our curiosity to take us behind the misty green curtain?

### Discussion Questions

1. What's unusual about this book? What is the role of essays, primary documents and artifacts historic photos and contemporary art in the fictional coming-of-age quest of Millie Langlie? How do these elements enhance the story?
2. In the post 1855-Treaty period, what is the impact of whites on the S'Klallam villages in Dungeness? According to explorer and writer Judge James Swan, who has a more advanced idea of justice, the whites or the S'Klallam. Why?
3. Millie's young S'Klallam mother and her older Norwegian dad disagree how to raise her. What are her mother's values? How does she wish to bring her up, educate her? Her father Carl? How does Millie respond to these conflicting expectations?
4. What does Millie learn at the one-room schoolhouse from her teacher, the Utopian socialist Miss Delia Bright? What are the unintended lessons of her early education?



5. What is the significance of the silver fish earrings? How did Annie get them, and why does she give them to Millie? Are the earrings a curse, as her grandmother repeatedly declares, or are they a blessing? What makes you think so?
6. At the Dungeness Light Station, what does Millie promise George? What secret power does he derive from his encounter with the rotten herring, his tamanowas? Will Millie discover a spirit guardian? Why does she want to?
7. Is the Makah jack-of-all-trades Jake Cook trustworthy? Why or why not? What unanswered questions continue to rise to the surface about his past, and his role in the lives of Millie's family? What is he really after?
8. How does Millie's view of the world contrast to the variety of city-dwellers in Port Townsend? Contrast her ideas to those of the Mathiesons: about friendship, education, good and bad Indians, the role of woman, and love. How does life in Port Townsend change her?
9. Millie is attracted first to George, then to the actor Thomas Astor, and to the Haida artist Johnny Kit Elswa. What goes right; what goes wrong? Will she ever find romantic love?
10. What does Millie discover upon her return to Dungeness? Does she find what she is looking for?

### **About the author**

Karen Polinsky is a high school English teacher and writer from Bainbridge Island, Washington. Twenty years ago she drove to the Pacific Northwest from Boston with her three children in a beat-up Toyota station wagon. Not long after, she encountered the nineteenth century S'Klallam historian Mary Ann Lambert in a book of primary documents gifted to her by the director of the Port Gamble S'Klallam Cultural Resources. Her fascination with Lambert, a woman-of-vision, eventually turned into *Dungeness*, a revisionist-history coming-of-age novel inspired by her life. Also a playwright, she has had a half-dozen one-acts produced on Bainbridge Island and in Seattle, and has written scripts for two short films. Polinsky was recognized with the Patsy Collins Award for Environmental Educators in 2012.