

Best-selling travel writer, Peter Jenkins, to be AU artist-in-residence

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Thirty years ago, Peter Jenkins, a 1973 graduate of Alfred University with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree, set out from Alfred with his dog Cooper, on a walk across the country that he hoped would help him find the real America. "I set off searching for America, wondering about my country. I lived with and listened to people from every kind of life. I learned a great deal," Jenkins has said about his first walk across America. His journey ended in Florence, OR, in January 1979, and along the way, Jenkins collected the stories and the photos that would allow him to write two bestsellers, *Walk Across America* and *The Walk West*. Nearly 30 years after it was published, *Walk Across America* is still required reading in more than 1,000 high schools in the country. Since then, Jenkins has written several other books on his various travels, including *Across China*, *Close Friends*, *Along the Edge of America*, *The Untamed Coast* and his most recent, *Looking for Alaska*, published in 2001. Now Jenkins, who makes his home in Tennessee, will return to Alfred as the first step in preparation for another journey across a country he believes is equally as troubled as it was 30 years ago, at least on the surface. He will spend 10 days in Alfred, Nov. 1-10, talking with Alfred University students, teaching classes, and getting a sense of AU students today. "I sense that America is in another unsettled, conflicted period, just as it was in the early 1970s when I did my first walk," said Jenkins in a recent telephone interview. "I want to start in Alfred again, to see if students today find it the same sort of place and have the same sorts of feelings." My goal is to immerse myself in Alfred University culture so that I can get a handle on where young people are today," said Jenkins. He suspects that what he will find this time, in Alfred and across America, is a much more homogenized culture than it was three decades ago, thanks to the media. A spontaneous storyteller, Jenkins illustrates his point with an anecdote about three teen-age Eskimo boys he met while he was working on *Looking for Alaska*. "I was in this Eskimo village that only had one street in town and about 100 residents. It was completely isolated, about 70 or 80 miles from the nearest town, and yet these three young boys were walking down the street in the same baggy jeans, boxers showing, that you would see on a street anywhere in the US," said Jenkins. "The difference was that half-an-hour after I saw them walking down the street, they were out in a boat, harpooning a whale." Jenkins will share his tales in a public lecture - *Stories from an American Adventurer* - at 7:30 pm Monday, Nov. 8, in Holmes Auditorium, Harder Hall, on the AU campus. The event will be open to the public, free of charge. The Alfred University bookstore will have copies of his book for sale in the lobby immediately after the lecture, and Jenkins has agreed to do a book signing. He will also be signing books outside the bookstore in the Powell Campus Center immediately after the Nov. 4 Bergren Forum, which is from 12:10-1 p.m. Thursdays in Nevins Theater. In his first two books, Jenkins wrote about his experiences living with an African American family in rural North Carolina. He's kept in touch with the family for 30 years now, and intends to write about what's happening with them today. He's also planning to revisit a commune in lower central Tennessee - "the largest, long-haired hippie community outside of Haight-Ashbury" - in the early 1970s, and see what's happening there in 2005. Unlike his first journey, in which he, as a disenchanting urbanite, avoided cities, Jenkins this time plans to visit urban areas, including New York City and Los Angeles, where his son, a senior at the University of Southern California, will be his guide. "I was prejudiced against cities the first time," he admitted. Since his first book, Jenkins has written six more travelogues; all but one has been about his travels in America. Thanks to his best-sellers, Jenkins has appeared on numerous television shows, including *The Today Show*, *Merv Griffin Show*, *Dinah Shore Show*, and *Good Morning, America*. His essays and articles have appeared in *National Geographic*, *Reader's Digest*, and *People Magazine*. Of *Looking for Alaska*, Kirkus wrote, "On an Alaskan high, he is unmatched by Jack London or Robert W. Service, and the result is as persuasive as an avalanche." The book was named 'Top Ten Literary Travel Book of the Year' by Booklist, and named one of 'The Best Books of 2001' by Barnes and Noble and other major US newspapers. Jenkins' books are published in half a dozen foreign languages. He has won an EMMY for a TV news series he created, and his photos have won national photojournalism awards. He and his wife make their home in Spring Hill, TN. They operate a working cattle ranch, and when he's not traveling, writing or working the ranch, Jenkins is a frequent speaker at universities and conferences nationwide. In 1997, the Alfred University Alumni Association awarded him a Distinguished Alumni Career Award, and in May 2003, Jenkins received a Doctor of Humane Letters degree, honoris causa, when he delivered the commencement address at AU. Jenkins is profiled on Alfred University's web site: <http://www.alfred.edu/alu...> information is available at <http://www.peterjenkins.c...>