

## Blood — Auk

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### ILAIT AUK ALIKTAARAIT. – SOME PEOPLE ARE SCARED OF BLOOD.

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Photo: Three generations of the Knagin - Bishop family.

In English, the word blood has several meanings. It can refer to the liquid that circulates oxygen and nutrients through an animal's body, or it can denote a person's family background—their ancestry. In the United States, the federal government uses this second meaning to identify Native people for the purposes of implementing laws and providing benefits. In this context, Native identity is determined through blood quantum, a measurement of a person's percentage of Native ancestry. For example, if your father is a Native person and your mother is of European descent, the government considers you to have fifty percent Native blood.

This genetically focused method of determining who is Native does not take into account a person's culture, community of residence, upbringing, or self-concept of ancestry, factors that often contribute powerfully to individual identity. This issue surfaced in the development of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) of 1971, the federal law that returned land and resources to Alaska's indigenous people and continues to guide the use of those resources. Those who wished to participate in the settlement had to prove a Native blood quantum of at least twenty-five percent. However, because people did not always know their biological ancestry or considered themselves Native regardless of their genetic past, the settlement included those regarded as an Alaska Native by their community as well as the adopted children of Native parents.