

Gather Together — Katuq

KATURTUT. – THEY ARE GATHERED.



Photo: Patty Gugle's Birthday Party, Ouzinkie ca. 1960. Courtesy of Tim and Norman Smith.

Winter is the Alutiiq social season. Each year as the land freezes and darkness creeps across the sky, people set aside their subsistence gear to focus on household chores and socializing. In classical Alutiiq society, people gathered to sew parkas, mend tools, play games, and prepare for festivals inside houses warmed by blazing wood fires.

In addition to informal family gatherings, Alutiiq people hosted large winter celebrations. Guests were invited from neighboring communities to feast, dance, sing, and socialize. Preparations included creating gifts for each guest, preparing enormous amounts of food, and decorating the community men's house where the festivities were held. On the day of the festival, members of the host community would don their finest clothing and wait on the beach for guests to arrive. As the kayaks approached, they would sing greeting songs and then rush into the water to help the boats ashore. The festivities lasted several days. When all the food was gone and participants were exhausted, the host's gifts were distributed.

As you gather with your family and friends to celebrate the holidays, remember that you are participating in an ancient tradition. Winter feasting, worshipping, and fellowship are cross-cultural customs shared by people around the world.