

GUI ATQA SOPHIE. – MY NAME IS SOPHIE



Photo: Alutiiq Elder Sophie Shepherd.

In classical Alutiiq society, children were often named for a beloved and recently deceased relative. Before birth, a child's father would choose two such names, one for a boy and one for a girl. The child was not thought to resemble its namesake or to be the reincarnation of that person. The name simply paid homage to a dear family member. With the exception of certain ceremonial occasions, the names of deceased people were not spoken until their name had been given to a child. This tradition may reflect a belief that speaking the dead person's name might summon his or her spirit.

In addition to a person's given name, people often acquired nicknames during their lives. A person might be titled for a great deed or after an ancestor who had accomplished a similar feat. For example, a man with extraordinary hunting success might be named for a great hunter from his family's past, as long as that man's name had not been given to someone else. Other names came from friendships. Sometimes people exchanged names with their peers or created secret names to use only with their buddies.

Nicknames remain a common form of endearment in Alutiiq families, especially for children. Names may recall a favorite activity, a funny situation, or even a child's early attempts at speech. These names often follow a person into adulthood and are both a source of humor and a fond connection to the friends and family members of youth.