

Outsider, Stranger, Guest — Allanertaq

ALLANERTAKIINGA AKGUA'AQ. – AN OUTSIDER CAME TO SEE ME YESTERDAY.



Photo: A view of the Alaskan mainland from Karluk.

Traveling in prehistoric times, before letters and telephone calls could publicize your arrival, was dangerous. Alutiiq stories are filled with warnings about traveling through foreign lands, trespassing, and encountering strangers. A careful reading of these tales illustrates that strangers were unpredictable: they could help you or hurt you, and they were often deceptive. While it is still considered good manners to extend hospitality to a stranger, particularly one in need, one must also be wary. Some strangers are actually spirits in disguise and their kindness may conceal treachery. The meaning of the word *allanertaq* expresses this duality. Alutiiq people use the term as the word for both stranger and guest.

In one Alutiiq story, two inquisitive men travel to an island in the middle of the sea to meet a legendary cod fisherman. While they are enjoying a steam bath at the fisherman's home, he ties a line to their kayak. Each time the men try to paddle home, the crafty fisherman pulls them back to his island. Finally, the wind overturns their kayak, and the men are cast upon the shore where they become two rocky capes.

To protect against such treachery, Alutiiq families sewed highly recognizable designs into their clothing and wore distinctive styles of hats and jewelry. Thus, even if an individual was unknown, the cut of his parka, the line of his boat, or the tattoos on his face might indicate membership in a particular family or community and the individual would be treated accordingly.

Some Alutiiq people also have trading partnerships: lifelong friendships with unrelated people in distant communities. Across Alaska, trading partners provided important links to resources in different environments, allowing people to access distant food and raw materials and gain assistance in times of need. Trading partners also provided a means of safe travel outside one's home territory. A person traveling to meet his or her trading partner was socially connected and thus respected, not feared.