

Salvage — Pukuk

ALLRANI SUU'UT CAQAINNEK PUKUGTAARTUT. – SOMETIMES PEOPLE SALVAGE SOME STUFF.



Photo: Karluk boys on bicycles. Courtesy of the Rostad Collection.

Pukuk is an Alutiiq word that has made its way into English conversation in the Kodiak area, like the Yiddish word *schlep* or the French word *café*. There is no exact English translation. Generally speaking, this Alutiiq verb means to salvage, although its more nuanced meanings include borrowing something without any intention of returning it or obtaining something you need at no expense. For example, if you are building a *banya* and need an oil barrel for the stove, you might *pukuk* one you've seen sitting behind your auntie's house for a while. Being able to *pukuk* things is a positive quality, a sign of resourcefulness valued in Alutiiq communities.

A story from Akhiok tells of a young man who *pukuk*-ed a bicycle. The bike's original owner left it in a ditch. For months, the young man walked by the bike, watching the weeds grow around it and the rain pour down on it. Eventually, the tires deflated and the bike started to rust. The young man knew that there was a good bicycle under the sad exterior. So he finally pulled the bike out of the brush and cleaned it up. He even added new tires. While the young man was pedaling the bike around town, its original owner recognized his old ride and wanted it back. Too late: the bicycle had been legitimately *pukuk*-ed.