

Show Off, Smart Alec — Cip'ausngasqaq

AWAQUTAN CIP'AUSNGAUQ. – YOUR SON IS A SMART ALECK.



Photo: A raven on the rocky shore of Kodiak Island.

In the Alutiiq language, the word *cip'ausngasqaq* translates literally as a “know it all” or a “smart aleck,” and people use the term to refer to someone who thinks of himself as a big shot. Among Alutiiq people, behaving like a big shot can be dangerous. Boasting is not only bad manners, it can poison your luck. A boastful hunter may offend the animals his family depends on and cause them to avoid his arrows. In the case of a bear, boasting can cause the animal to become enraged. A braggart can bring starvation on his family or get himself killed.

Despite warnings about boastful behavior, Alutiiq stories feature the raucous, boastful Raven, an obnoxious bird that does great deeds. In these stories, Raven lives in Alutiiq communities and can speak in Alutiiq, but he is arrogant, dirty, and impolite to his Elders. Yet despite his poor behavior, Raven is smart and keeps his promises, and he ends up succeeding where others fail.

In one legend, Raven lives with his elderly grandmother at the edge of a large village. Here, he is so disliked that he must live off refuse from the beach. One harsh winter, when hunting was impossible, the villagers began to starve. Raven, who was always able to scavenge enough food for himself and his grandmother, asked the village chief what he would give him if he were able to bring the chief food. The chief offered Raven his oldest daughter in marriage. Pleased with the offer, Raven ordered his grandmother to clean their house and pecked her until she complied. Then he scavenged a bundle of dried fish and won the chief's daughter. But the Raven smelled so bad that the girl refused to stay with him and went home to her father. The next winter, famine struck the community again. Raven sent his grandmother to the home of another young woman and offered her food to marry him. She agreed, and despite the Raven's stench, she stayed in his home. Raven then captured a giant whale and brought it to the starving village to share with all those who had treated him poorly. They gorged themselves on blubber, eating so much that they soon died. Only Raven, his grandmother, and his faithful wife lived.