

Stingy — Alayugluni, Alatarluni

ILAIT ALATARTAARTUT. – SOME OF THEM ARE ALWAYS STINGY.



Photo: Children with Christmas packages at the Ouzinkie Mission. Smith Collection. Courtesy of Tim and Norman Smith.

Among the world's hunting and gathering societies, sharing is a highly esteemed behavior. People who are fortunate enough to obtain food and raw materials are expected to share their luck with others. This practice helps to redistribute resources among a group of interdependent people and insures that those with different abilities have the necessities of life. In such communities, stinginess and greed are unacceptable. A person who refuses to share, who steals from others, or who doesn't work hard is often ostracized.

The evils of stinginess are clearly expressed in the Alutiiq legends. Traditional tales frequently feature unfortunate, hungry people who are fed and cared for by others. In one story, two mean men capture and starve a young woman. A kindly old woman learns of her situation, feeds her secretly and then helps her to escape. The girl then marries a caring husband who generously gives her a set of new clothes. In another story, a lazy young man and his family are forced to rely on game caught by others. Cannibals then catch the young man and try to eat him. However, he escapes, and with a talisman taken from his journey, becomes a good provider. These stories remind listeners of the value of benevolence and hard work.

Generosity is also emphasized in contemporary stories. Alutiiq Elders speak fondly of simpler days when Alutiiq communities were like one big family, and everyone helped their friends and neighbors.