

Persevere, To Not Give Up — Qugaarkunani

TAUGNA SUK QUGAARTENILNGUQ. – THE PERSON DIDN'T GIVE UP.



Photo: Men hunting in the snow on Afognak Island.
Chadwick Collection, AM528:C5-10.

Perseverance is a necessary quality for anyone living a subsistence lifestyle. Long journeys, arduous tasks, and challenging weather require physical and mental strength. Alutiiq harvesters recall long days splitting thousands of fish, packing food across mountains, boat trips in heavy seas, and the daily slog of chopping wood and carrying water. The Alutiiq word for perseverance comes from the root *qugaarte*- meaning ‘to give up suddenly’ or ‘to get mad and leave’. Add -*kunani*, and it means the opposite, to persevere.

Perseverance is an admired quality in Alutiiq communities and Alutiiq legends teach the value of stick-to-itiveness. In many tales, hunters face enormous challenges to feed their families. They must travel far from home, vanquish magical beings with bravery and cunning, and protect their luck through careful living—fasting, cleanliness, and spiritual observances. In other legends, characters persevere through personal hardships.

One tale tells of a young woman who did not wish to marry. After rejecting many suitors in her village, she was abandoned by her family. They left her at home with no food or clothing. She became cold, hungry, and lonely, and almost died. After three days of suffering, the sun came to her and filled her home with food and furs. Then by harvesting drops of her blood, the sun created children for them. The woman’s sons became good hunters and one day harvested a large whale. The woman’s father and brothers, who were starving, returned to the village and were surprised to find her alive and well-fed. She shared whale meat with them. But after they had eaten, one of her sons killed them in revenge for their cruelty towards his mother.