

Brave (to be) — Agatuluni

AGATUTARTUQ. — SHE IS ALWAYS BRAVE.



Photo: Andrew Abyo illustrates the use of a war club and shield he created, AM702.

Alutiiq legends are filled with brave characters. People venture far from home to find food for their families. They confront terrible beasts to protect others. They escape the treachery of enemies through intelligence, cunning, and courage. Being brave is a cultural value and the Alutiiq word *agatuluni* means both to be brave and to have endurance and hardiness.

It is not hard to understand why bravery is valued. In the stormy environment of the Gulf of Alaska it took both skill and courage to paddle skin boats, chase whales, and pull fish out of windy waters. Traditional tales helped people remember the importance of bravery and illustrated that those with courage would prevail in difficult circumstances.

A legend about a woman who defeats an evil shaman demonstrates the value of bravery. A young couple fell in love, but their parents would not let them marry. The unhappy man went out hunting and never returned. A month later, the young woman decided to search for her lover. She prepared secretly and left at night when her village was asleep. She took her father's kayak and paddled far away. The boat began moving very fast and carried her over a roaring waterfall. She was not harmed, but an evil shaman captured her and took her to his sod house. The house was filled with severed human heads! The man was a cannibal and one of the heads belonged to the woman's lover. The woman said nothing but decided to seek revenge. Every day the shaman left to feed his sisters a human corpse. The woman watched where he went and then snuck out and killed the shaman's sisters. When the shaman discovered their deaths he suspected the woman, and rushed home to kill her. She was prepared! She cut his head off, took his boat, and returned to her village. From that day on, the waterfall became a peaceful river.