

Married couple — Tamallkuk

GUANGKUNUK TAMALLKUK. – WE ARE A MARRIED COUPLE.



Photo: Martin & Norrell Wedding, Karluk Church.
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Today, many people choose not to marry, or to marry later in life. In the last forty years, the average age at marriage in the United States has increased significantly due to changing gender roles, social norms, and economic factors. In classical Alutiiq society most adults married in their teens, after passing through puberty. Similarly, when a partner died, remarriage was common and expected. Marriage was the social norm and an essential economic partnership. Wife and husband had complimentary roles in caring for children, family, and community.

Marriage in classical Alutiiq society was also strategic. Alutiiq communities forged alliances by arranging marriages between their children. This process helped young people find mates beyond their small villages and created economic and social ties—avenues for trade and emergency support, and alliances in times of warfare. The Alutiiq term for a married couple reflects the cultural importance of a spouse. *Tamallkuk* comes from root *tamar-*, meaning all of something, everyone, or everything.

Alutiiq legends are filled with stories of marriage. These are often cautionary tales. They remind people to look beyond love, appearance, and status to pick a trustworthy partner and provider. In one tale, a woman refuses to marry a raven because he stinks. However, the raven is an excellent provider, and the village is short of food. When she finally acquiesces, her life and the life of her child are saved while others starve. In another legend, a ptarmigan befriends two men living alone—one old, the other young and handsome. The ptarmigan cooks, clean, and sews for the men while they hunt. One day, she removes her skin to reveal a beautiful woman. The young man shows little interest in the woman, so she marries the old man. Eventually, the young man grows jealous, kills the old man, and demanded the woman marry him. Instead, she put on her ptarmigan skin and flew away, leaving the young man alone and with no one to help him.