



The Alaskan Shepherd



Volume 47 Number 4

May 2009

Some give by going to the Missions

Some go by giving to the Missions

Without both there are no Missions

THE JESUIT VOLUNTEER CORPS: PT II SERVING IN THE ALASKAN MISSIONS SINCE 1956

Editor's Note: In the April issue of *The Alaskan Shepherd*, we featured blog entries by Krissy Peterson. Krissy posted these entries on triblocal.com during the time when she served as a Jesuit Volunteer in Bethel, Alaska. At the end of her term, in August of 2008, Krissy took a position in the public relations department at Dominican University in River Forest, Illinois. In this issue, you can read more of her experience. The new JV's have been in Bethel since August of 2008 and are now nearing the end of their one-year term. Krissy's replacement, Elyse Wagner, works with the youth at Immaculate Conception parish, and she continues to support the free meal program.

—Patty Walter

Food for thought 11/20/07 08:14 PM

With the ultimate food holiday approaching, I thought that I would write about some of the food peculiarities in Bethel, Alaska.

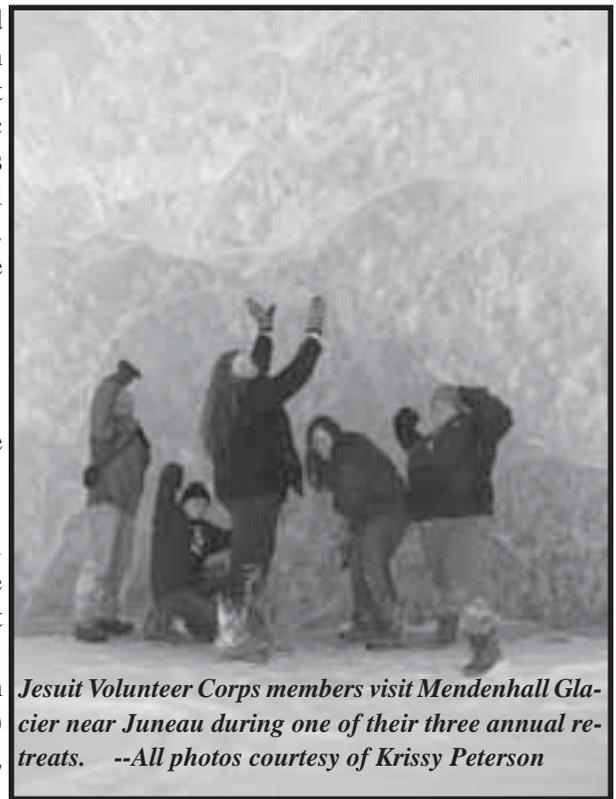
Abundance

We quickly learned to enjoy eating salmon when we moved here. Salmon is in so much abundance here that people are able to fish it out of the river with nets, and they usually share their catch with their neighbors. In most places in the Lower 48, salmon is a pretty expensive item on most restaurants' menus. Here, we have a freezer full of salmon. Other meat that is available in this area of Alaska is moose and caribou meat. Also, in abundance, (and free) are many different types of berries: blueberries, blackberries, red berries, cranberries and salmon berries.

Native dishes

Before I left for Alaska, many people jokingly asked if I would be eating blubber. (This was usually asked after they wanted to know if I would live in an igloo.) Most of the people in Bethel do not eat blubber, since it comes from whales and Bethel is not on the coast. People from coastal villages do eat blubber in addition to whale, seal, and walrus meat. One of the most common Yup'ik dishes, akutaq, is traditionally made with whale blubber. Most people in Bethel make akutaq, or Eskimo ice cream, with Crisco instead of blubber. This dish is a combination of Crisco, sugar and berries. Some people also add white fish to this. I have only had blackberry akutaq. If you don't think about the fact that you are eating fat and sugar it is really good.

What is a vegetarian?



Jesuit Volunteer Corps members visit Mendenhall Glacier near Juneau during one of their three annual retreats. --All photos courtesy of Krissy Peterson

Most Native dishes include some sort of meat: salmon, moose, caribou, ptarmigan, geese, etc. Since fruits and vegetables do not grow in this area, besides berries, most people don't eat a lot of fresh fruits and vegetables in their diets. It would be pretty difficult for someone to be a vegetarian in this town because fresh produce is not that available. Vegetarianism is almost alien to the Native culture. One of my roommates works at an alternative high school and she was telling the students one day about how she used to be a vegetarian. The students did not even know what a vegetarian was.

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Just add water

I never thought that I would drink Kool-Aid past 5th grade, but in Bethel items like Kool-Aid, Tang, Crystal Light, powdered milk, etc. are perfect drinks because all you have to do is add water. The price for drinks in liquid form is incredibly expensive. Pop is usually \$10 (or \$7 on sale) for a 12-pack, milk is \$8 a gallon, and a carton of orange juice is a whopping \$10. The powdered mixes aren't much cheaper but they last longer.

International fare

Usually, a restaurant that offers more than one type of food, i.e. Mexican, Chinese, and American, is probably not that great of a restaurant. How can one restaurant make so many types of food? In Bethel, this rule does not seem to apply. Almost every restaurant offers more than one type of cuisine. *Sho-Gun* has American, Chinese, Japanese and Mexican; *V.I.P.* has Korean, Japanese and American; *Dimitri's* has American, Italian and Greek. And most all of these places also have pizza.

Weather update: The past few days have been cold with temperatures getting down to 0 degrees. Today the temperature was around 10 degrees. It has been snowing all day with a lot of wind and drifting. The sunrise was at 10:05 a.m. and the sunset at 5 p.m.

Native Culture 01/02/08 08:20 PM

After the Christmas holiday, I had a few opportunities to participate in and to learn more about the Native culture in this part of Alaska. The Yup'ik Eskimos are the people that live in Southwestern Alaska. They are a friendly people with a great spirit of hospitality and a wonderful sense of humor. They are always willing to share more about their culture and welcome kassaqs (the Yup'ik word for white people, pronounced "gus-ick") to different events.

A taste of the culture

This past weekend my roommates and I were invited to attend a feast at the home of a woman who works with one of my roommates. The woman was having a birthday feast for her young son. She has a birthday feast every year for all of her four children. She is also expected to cook all of the food.

We arrived a little late for the feast and most people were already eating when we got there, so we just got in line to get food. There was a choice of either bird soup or seal soup. The bird soup is not like chicken noodle soup; a whole bird or two is cooked in the soup—beak and all. I chose the seal soup, which was tasty. The meat is like red meat but the broth has a fish taste.

Some of the other food offered included macaroni and potato salads, fish, fry bread, birthday cake, Jell-O, and two types of akutaq. The infamous akutaq (pronounced "a-goo-duk") or "Eskimo ice cream" is usually made by combining Crisco (or animal fat), sugar and some kind of berries. Other ingredients can also be added. At this feast there was salmonberry and black berry combination akutaq, in addition to a blueberry akutaq that was made with fish eggs and seal oil. I always try akutaq at potlucks because it is different depending on who makes it. It might sound like a weird combination of ingredients but it is usually really delicious.

After we got our food, we tried to find a spot to sit and eat in the crowded living room of the house. We ended up on the floor. But the room emptied out pretty quickly. I found out that at a feast people usually just come in, get their food, eat, and then leave. People don't really hang around. Another thing that is different than the European-American culture is that during meals the Yup'ik people rarely talk. Even though the room was full of people, eating it was really quiet.

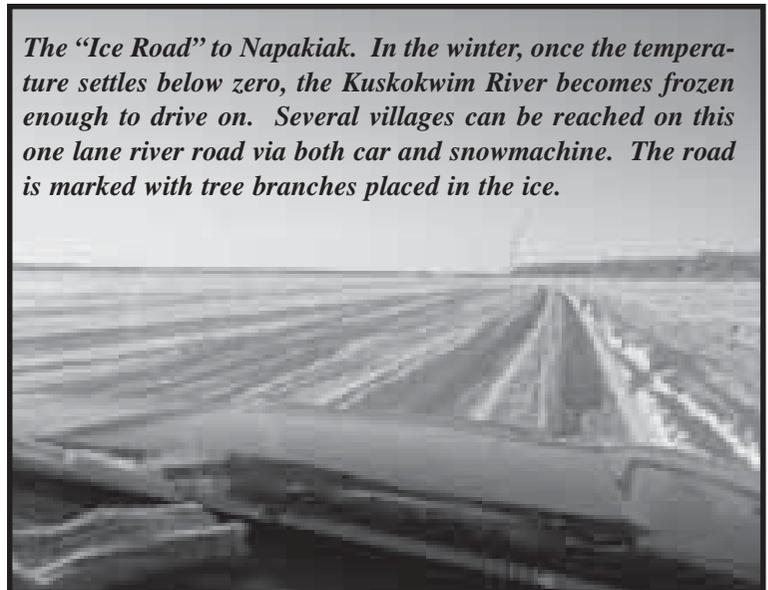
After we had finished eating, I went into the kitchen to find some water or juice to drink. I found a plastic juice container and began to pour the contents into a cup. Right away, I noticed that there was something different about this juice; it was the color of juice but was incredibly thick. A lady came up next to me and said, "You really like your seal oil!" Embarrassed, I quickly poured the seal oil back into the container. "Were you going to drink that?" the lady asked. It's a good thing that I hadn't gotten so far as to drink the seal oil. I have heard that it is very potent. I learned my lesson.

Just down the (ice) road

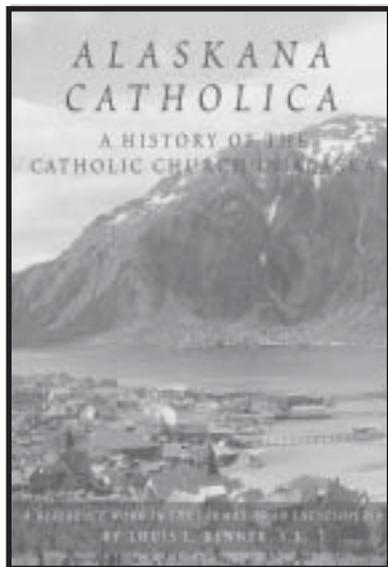
On New Year's Day, my roommates and I and the priest at the church where I work went to one of the villages for a special New Year's celebration. How did we get to Napakiak, a village about 15 miles away from Bethel, when there are no roads that go out of Bethel? Now that the temperatures have been below freezing (and usually below zero) for a few months, the mighty Kuskokwim River has frozen solid enough for cars to travel on the river between Bethel and villages. Several villages are located along the river and can be reached by the ice road. Cars travel in one lane along the river and snow machines (or snowmobiles) travel next to the cars. The road is marked with tree branches placed in the ice.

It took us about 25 minutes driving on the river to get to Napakiak, a village of about 400 people. Like most villages in this area, Napakiak consists of houses, a school, a few churches, a store, and a post office. We went to the school gym where the New Year's Day games were going on. When we got there, many people were sitting on chairs and bleachers and watching kids compete in different races. After the kids

The "Ice Road" to Napakiak. In the winter, once the temperature settles below zero, the Kuskokwim River becomes frozen enough to drive on. Several villages can be reached on this one lane river road via both car and snowmachine. The road is marked with tree branches placed in the ice.



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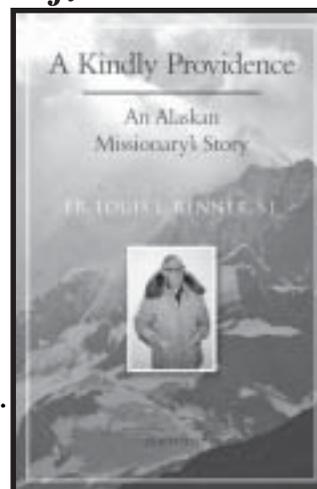
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THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS



To the friends and benefactors of the Missionary Diocese of Fairbanks: On each of the eight days preceding the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and on the feast day itself, June 19 (2009), a novena will be offered in honor of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and for our benefactors and their intentions. You are invited to submit petitions to be remembered during the novena. No offering is necessary. Any received will be used to support our ministries here in Northern Alaska.

You are also invited to join us on the novena days (June 11-19th) inclusive by praying the following prayer:

O Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, you said: “Ask, and you shall receive; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you.” With confidence in your loving, compassionate Heart I come to you as the fountain of every blessing. I ask you to make my heart humble and holy like yours. Grant me to live a holy life and to die a happy death. During this novena I humbly ask also for certain spiritual and temporal favors: _____.

Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, have mercy on me!

Please remember the following petitions during the Novena in honor of the Sacred Heart of Jesus:

Four horizontal lines provided for writing petitions.

participated, the adults were able to compete. My friends and I played a few of the games, including one where you have to put a circle of rope over your body and then pass the rope on to the next person. We also did the relay where you pass an orange under your chin to the next person. This got a little awkward when they switched the teams so that men had to pass the orange to women.

Watching and participating in the games was hilarious. The people in Napakiak were so friendly and welcoming. We were obviously visitors and we were some of the few white people at the event. The people of the village seemed to like that we participated in the games. Napakiak also does a similar event for the Fourth of July. We will have to come back, but that time we will have to take a boat.

300 Miles on the Kuskokwim 01/23/08 01:49 PM

One of the biggest events in Bethel, Alaska, is the Kuskokwim 300 dog sled race, or the K300 for short. The 300-mile race begins in Bethel and then travels up the Kuskokwim River, stopping at different villages for checkpoints. The race turns around just north of the village of Aniak, and then the mushers head back to Bethel. The race begins on Friday evening and the first musher usually crosses the finish line by Sunday evening.

Traditionally, the Jesuit Volunteers (of which I am one of six) have worked the checkpoint at Tuluksak. This is such a tradition that when popular author Jodi Picoult decided to use Bethel as one of the settings for her book "The Tenth Circle" she mentions that the Jesuit Volunteers are working the Tuluksak checkpoint for the K300. This year we were split up into three checkpoints. I went with another JV to Kalskag, two volunteers went to Tuluksak and the other two went to Aniak. In order to get to the checkpoints we were flown in on small four or six-seater airplanes.

Jesuit Volunteers, on the Kuskokwim River. The JVs traditionally have worked the checkpoint at Tuluksak, during the Kuskokwim 300 race. A 300-mile dog sled race held in Bethel each January.



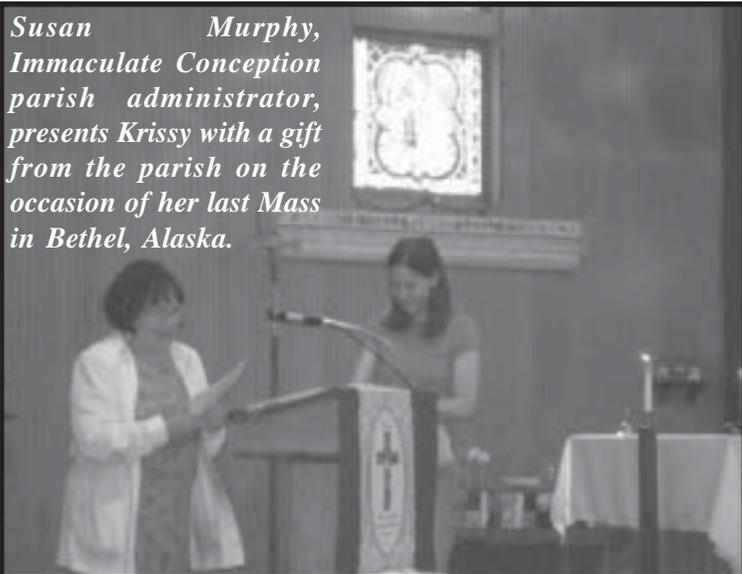
Most of the checkpoints were located in schools or public buildings in the villages. In Kalskag we stayed in a preschool. The mushers can stop at the checkpoints; get food and water for their dogs and for themselves. The mushers are also required to take one six-hour layover in either Kalskag or Aniak. Most of the mushers did their layover at our checkpoint in Kalskag. This layover was about the only time throughout the weekend when the mushers were able to get any sleep.

Our job was to serve as checkers. We had to wait outside for the mushers to come. When a dog team would arrive, we would mark down the time that they came in at and the number of dogs that they had. The mushers were able to drop dogs at checkpoints if the dogs were injured or tired.

A lot can be learned from the mushers and the way that they take care of their dogs. Mushers would be nothing without their dogs. They often put the needs of the dogs above their own needs. The minute the mushers arrived at the checkpoint they would park their dogs, get straw for the dogs to lie on, and get fresh food and water for the dogs. The mushers would also look over each dog to check for injuries. I even saw some of the mushers massaging the dogs' paws.

Another unique thing about the sport of dog sled racing is that it is a sport that attracts people from different backgrounds. For example, in this K300 race, there was a 75-year old veteran musher along with two 17-year old rookies and several mushers in their 20s. It is also a sport that doesn't discriminate against women. Three women competed in this year's race, and several women have won the Iditarod before.

This year's K300 was incredibly difficult because the weather warmed up so much that the river was melting. The temperatures were close to 40 degrees. It was also very windy and rainy at some points. Several of the 22 mushers had to scratch out of the race. In the end, Mitch Seavey, a past Iditarod champion, won the K300 race.



Susan Murphy, Immaculate Conception parish administrator, presents Krissy with a gift from the parish on the occasion of her last Mass in Bethel, Alaska.

We want to thank in a special way those of you who have included the Catholic Bishop of Northern Alaska (our legal title) in your bequests and wills, and those of you who, at the time of the deaths of dear ones, have suggested that in their memory contributions be made to the Missions of Northern Alaska or to the Alaskan Shepherd Endowment Fund. A suggested wording: "I give, devise and bequeath to the Catholic Bishop of Northern Alaska, 1312 Peger Road, Fairbanks, Alaska..."

For more information about the K300 and pictures from the race, go to <http://k300.org>.

Weather update: The weather has been all over the place. For several weeks, the temperatures were below freezing. Then it warmed up to almost 40 degrees this weekend. Now the temperatures have fallen into the teens and single digits. The days are definitely getting longer. Sunrise today was at 10:28 a.m. and the sunset was at 5:29 p.m. The sun actually sets later here than in Chicago, where it will set today at 4:52 p.m.

The Language of Dance 04/02/08 03:58 PM

Two annual events attract visitors from the outside to come to Bethel, Alaska. The first of these events is the Kuskokwim 300 dog sled race, which I wrote about in a previous entry. The other event was just held this past weekend: the Camai (pronounced Cha-my or Ja-my) Dance Festival. This three-day event features performances from Native Alaskan, Native American and international dance groups. Several different cultures are represented but the universal language of dance and music connects all of the groups.

Camai is a Yup'ik word that means "a warm, genuine hello," and the focus of the Camai festival is on welcoming people from different places and cultures. The event was held at the high school in Bethel and people traveled in from many of the local villages to attend. Besides the dance performances, a craft fair was held throughout the weekend. A big feast was held on Saturday, which featured Native dishes.

The majority of the dance groups at Camai are from southwestern Alaska, and these groups perform mostly Yup'ik Eskimo dancing. In Yup'ik dancing, the men usually kneel in front, the women stand in back, and male drummers sit behind the women. Everyone wears a Qaspeq (pronounced "Cuss-buck"), which is a traditional shirt, and most dancers hold feather or fur dance fans. The drummers in the back will lead the dance by singing and beating the drums. The dance begins quietly and slowly. As the chorus is repeated, several times the tempo of the song picks up and the beat of the drum gets louder. The dancer's feet stay in one place but they perform specific movements with their arms. Many of the songs depict daily activities like fishing, hunting, berry picking, or taking a steam bath. The dancers do certain hand movements that look like they are cleaning a fish, shooting a gun, or reeling in a fish.

The Yup'ik people have a great sense of humor and many of their traditional dances will involve humor. One dance is called the "kissing dance," and at one point in the dance, the drummer will start to make kissing noises and the dancers will pretend to kiss an invisible person. One of my favorite dances is about berry picking. During this dance, the dancers are gathering lots of berries. Then they throw a berry in the air; after a few seconds, the dancers tilt their head back and catch the invisible berry in their mouths.

One great thing about Yup'ik dancing is that most people in the culture know the dances. During the dances this weekend, I would see young people in the audience doing the hand movements along with the dancers on the stage. A few of the performers even invited the kids who were sitting in front to come up on stage and dance with them. It was great to see young kids take such pride in something that is part of their culture. Even though the Yup'ik culture is not what it once was before white people came, this area of Alaska is one of the few places in the U.S. where the Native culture is celebrated and appreciated.

The Camai dance festival featured other dance groups besides the traditional Yup'ik dancing. Pamyua is a group that has a more modern approach to Yup'ik dancing. Two of the members are brothers who are of Yup'ik and African-American descent. Both of these cultures influence their dance style.

Another unique dance group was Te Wanaga Moari, whose dancers are from New Zealand and Hawaii. Besides singing and dancing, the group also juggled wooden

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--Bishop Donald J. Kettler

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sticks and twirled poi balls. Another performer was a Sioux hoop dancer. He danced with these small flexible hoops and then would interlock the hoops together to form different objects out of them.

The Camai dance festival was a great community event for Bethel. Everyone came together to watch the different dance performances. It was nice to see an event that celebrates the traditions of the Yup'ik culture. For more information about Camai and for more pictures of the dance groups, visit www.bethelarts.com

Weather Update: The weather has been much warmer. The temperatures have been in the 20s and 30s. It has gotten above freezing, and the snow has started to melt. The roads are now full of puddles and slushy snow. The sunrise today was at 8:07 a.m. and the sun will set at 9:33 p.m.

Always Getting Ready 06/26/08 03:01 PM

What would happen if all of the grocery stores and restaurants in America were to close? Where would people get their food? Would most Americans be able to survive? These are interesting questions to think about, especially as the food costs in the U.S. continue to increase. Very few Americans grow or raise their own food sources, besides small vegetable gardens. Where I live now, in southwestern Alaska, is one of the few places in the U.S. where people still live off the land.

The Yup'ik people have lived on this land for thousands of years. Traditionally, the Yup'ik people were nomadic. They traveled to different camps, depending on the season and where the food was. In the summer, they would set up a fish camp along the river. In the winter, they would set up a more permanent house where they could go hunting. In the spring, they may move closer to the coast to hunt seal, or they may travel around to hunt birds or collect wild eggs.

Now, the Yup'ik people have settled in towns and villages but many still continue to go to fish camps during the summer months. Just in the past few weeks, the first king salmon started running on the Kuskokwim River, and many of the Bethel residents headed out fishing.

My parents were just in Bethel for a visit. While they were here, a family from church offered to take us out fishing and to see their fish camp. Because people here fish for subsistence food and not just for sport, they are able to use long gill nets to catch fish. Most people fish by "drifting," which involves putting out a 100-300 foot gill net. The boat and the net drift down river as the salmon are swimming up river and hopefully into the net. The salmon get their gills stuck in the net. You can usually tell when you have a fish because the bobbers on the net will move up and down. After waiting several minutes, the net can be pulled in and the fish collected. On our fishing trip, the net was put out just once and we caught nine king salmon and two chum salmon. Some of the salmon that we caught were over two feet long and over 30 pounds.

Next, we brought the fish back to the fish camp to clean them. Fish camps are set up along the rivers and sloughs. Some fish camps are more elaborate than others but the basic elements of a fish camp include racks for drying the fish, a smoke house

for smoking the fish, a steam house for cleaning up after fishing, an outhouse and a small cabin. Fish camps don't have running water or electricity. People collect rainwater for cooking, cleaning and drinking, and electricity isn't really needed since it doesn't get very dark in the summer.

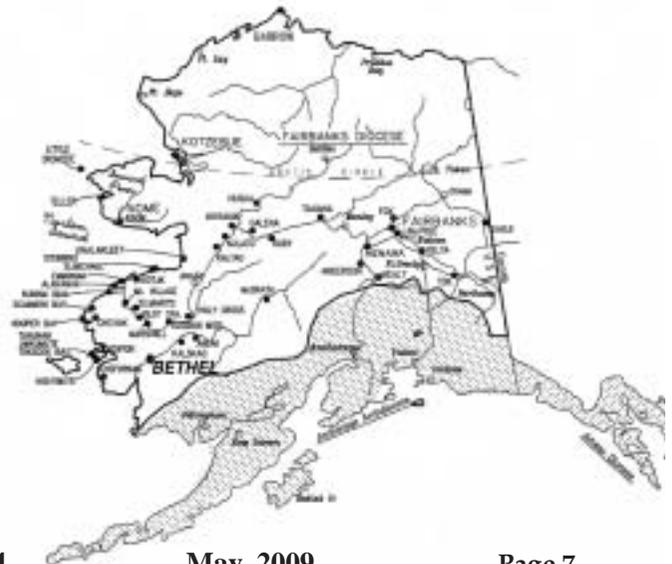
Once we got to the fish camp, the two teenage girls who were with us were put in charge of "heading" and "gutting" the fish. It was interesting to see two teenage girls getting so excited about gutting a fish. Most teenage girls would be grossed out to be covered in fish guts, but for these girls, who grew up going to fish camp and cleaning fish; this was just a part of their life.

After the fish are cleaned out, then they will be filleted, cut into thin strips, and hung on racks to dry. Once the fish strips are dry, then they will be smoked. The smoked fish are either canned or frozen and then are eaten throughout the year. A ton of work goes into this whole process. Most families will dry and smoke anywhere from 50-100 king salmon each season, and this doesn't include the other salmon that are filleted and then frozen or canned.

Another thing to remember is that the salmon season is just one of several hunting/gathering seasons during the year. In the late summer, the berries come out and people will go out to pick them. Then in the winter, people go out hunting and ice fishing. In the spring time people on the coast will go out seal hunting.

People here are almost always busy. There is a Yup'ik word, *upterrlainarluta*, which means, "always getting ready." This is a great way to describe the lifestyle here. There is always something to do to make sure that there will be enough food. I have a great appreciation and respect for the huge amount of work that people do. They spend so much time gathering and processing subsistence foods. In addition to all of this work, most people also work full-time jobs. The Yup'ik people are working very hard to maintain the lifestyle that has been lived for thousands of years.

Weather update: It is finally summer! The weather has been nice and sunny most days with temperatures from 50-70 degrees. The sunrise today was at 5:15 a.m. and the sunset will be at 12:24 a.m. tomorrow.



Communication Error 07/16/08 07:41 PM

One of the best ways to learn more about your culture is by spending time living in another culture. But culture is so much more than just food, family traditions, and celebrations. Culture is about how we think and how we respond to the world. Anyone who has traveled to another country knows that one of the biggest challenges is communication. Even when people speak the same language, there are still miscommunications. While living in Bethel, Alaska, I have noticed how differently people communicate here. This has created some challenges, but as I learn more about the culture here, I have begun to understand why people communicate the way that they do.

At their own pace.

One of the first things that people notice about the speech of the Yup'ik people, whether in English or Yup'ik, is that they speak at a slower pace. This is not indicative of intelligence; rather I think the pace of their speech goes along with the pace of their lives. Life travels at a slower pace here. There is no reason to rush. Another thing that always trips up newcomers, including myself, is that the Yup'ik people have a longer pause time before they answer a question. Some people who don't know about the longer pause time will ask a Yup'ik person a question and then not give them a chance to answer.

Shhhh

Besides having a long pause time, Yup'ik people are usually more comfortable with longer periods of silence than other Americans. Yup'ik people don't usually talk while they are eating. They also don't feel the need to fill every moment of quiet with endless chatter. Their speech is generally quieter than other Americans. One explanation for this is that when people are hunting they can't be loud or else they will scare away the animals.

Yes and no

All languages have forms of non-verbal communication. In the Yup'ik culture, it is very common, especially among children and young adults, to raise your eyebrows to mean "yes." I am not sure the origin of this habit, but this is something that my roommates and I enjoy doing to communicate with each other. It's so much more fun than a boring old head nod. There isn't a fun non-verbal action to mean "no", but when a Yup'ik person does not agree with something, they often won't voice their opposition. They may just stay quiet, even if they disagree.

Tell me the truth

Honesty is highly valued in Yup'ik culture, and I have personally found the people to be very blunt in their opinions. There is an older Yup'ik lady from our church who has become a friend and mentor to me this year. Whenever I speak with her on the phone, I ask her how she is doing. She always tells me exactly how she is doing: cold because it is raining outside, tired because she just finished cutting fish, sore because she fell on the ice and hurt her shoulder. She never just says, "I'm good," instead, she lets me know exactly how she is feeling. This bluntness can sometimes be alarming, especially when someone is critical of something you did. But for the most part, I really respect that people are so blunt. People don't disguise their emotions and you really get to know what a person is feeling.

Story time

The Yup'ik culture has a tradition of storytelling, and the people are great at telling stories. Usually people will tell a long story, and just when you are starting to lose focus then the main point of the story will come. People usually tell stories with lots of hand movements and motions. The long stories can create miscommunication problems. For example, in court cases, some lawyers usually have to be trained to understand that witnesses may tell long stories that may seem irrelevant. Usually, these stories will lead into the important parts of their testimony.

You never said anything

I think that one of the biggest causes of miscommunication between Yup'ik and other people is the Yup'ik tradition of not using direct speech. Let me explain with an example. When a Yup'ik person is going to go out hunting for moose, they most likely won't tell people that they are going hunting. Instead, they might just say that they are "going out." They won't say what they are doing because first of all, it is arrogant to assume that they will even get a moose. Secondly, the people believe that all living things have ears and can hear. If they were to say out loud that they were going hunting, the moose would hear and would stay away from them. I have often been confused by this indirect speech. As part of my job as youth minister, I regularly visit with the residents at the juvenile jail. One week the boys were telling me that they were having a party after our meeting. I thought that they were trying to invite me, but no one ever said that. I just left after our meeting was done, but the next week the boys all asked, "Why did you leave last week?" I didn't realize that they had invited me. Now I am better at understanding the indirect speech. The Yup'ik mentor that I mentioned before once called me at work. All she said on the phone was: "I'm having fish today at noon." I quickly responded, "I'll be over!"

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