

# TRADITIONS OF RESPECT

TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE  
FROM KAWERAK'S  
ICE SEAL AND WALRUS PROJECT





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KAWERAK, INC.

Social Science Program  
Natural Resources Division  
Kawerak, Inc.

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Kids learn by doing. *Top:* Learning to cut a seal in Gambell. (Photo: Kawerak Eskimo Heritage Program). *Bottom:* Hunting with the adults. (Photo: Brandon Ahmasuk).

# PREFACE

The cultures of the indigenous peoples of the Bering Strait are rooted in respect. The people have lived in harmony with nature for millennia, taught by their ancestors that all living things are to be respected.

By avoiding loss of his catch, a hunter shows respectful acknowledgement that the animal's life was a meaningful one and would not be wasted.

Traditions of respect have been passed down family trees for hundreds of years. These traditions have been abided by and are beliefs



**Working together helps prevent loss of catch.** (Photo: Diomedes IRA, Menadelook collection)

firmly held by the indigenous people of our region. Traditions include showing gratitude and respectful treatment of harvested animals.

Hunters understand that marine mammals are living beings; they have families of their own. These beings are left alone during mating and while they are raising offspring. Families only harvest what they need, in order to prevent overharvest.

Sharing is a major component in the traditional lifestyle. It is second nature for the people to share their bounty. Sharing is a given in the indigenous community.

Over the centuries, making use of a hunter's catch has brought to light the ingenious abilities of the Bering Strait people. The elders

have stated time and again that nothing is wasted. Examination of hunting implements and garments as well as qayaqs used in the old days reveals beautiful craftwork and meticulous stitching. For food preparation, women developed a wide array of tried-and-true recipes, and perfected preservation techniques.

A hunter is accustomed to his own schedule. As the seasons change, he knows when and where to carry out his subsistence



**Bearded seal meat drying in Shishmaref.**  
(Photo: Kawerak Eskimo Heritage Program)

practices. He is fully aware of how much he must catch to provide for his household. Local management has been practiced through hunters' perceptions of common sense and elders' instructions.

Teaching young people the traditional ways was a primary wish of the hunters and elders interviewed for Kawerak's Ice Seal and Walrus Project. Cultures in the

region have witnessed a decline of customary practices and, in some communities, the possibility of the disappearance of a Native dialect. Though one cannot halt the drastic transformation brought about by modern lifestyles, one can preserve the cultural identity of a people. Practicing the customs of our ancestors and truly understanding the beliefs that make these customs meaningful are ways that this can be done.

***Freida Moon-Kimoktoak, Research Assistant  
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# CONTENTS

Introduction . . . . .	page 1
Avoiding Loss . . . . .	page 3
Reciprocity . . . . .	page 9
Harvest Level . . . . .	page 13
Sharing . . . . .	page 15
Use . . . . .	page 19
Local Management . . . . .	page 31
Teaching Young People . . . . .	page 35
Final Thoughts . . . . .	page 43



**Bringing home seals to Diomedede.** (Photo: Kawerak Eskimo Heritage Program)



Equipment, tools and clothing change. Traditions of respect endure. *Top:* Butchering a bearded seal using traditional equipment and outerwear. (Photo: Kawerak Eskimo Heritage Program). *Bottom:* Butchering a bearded seal today. (Photo: Lily Gadamus).

# INTRODUCTION

*You just cannot kill just for the sake of killing; they say wasteful hunter will pay later in life. You don't hunt out of anger, you don't [hunt] out of greed, you don't [hunt] out of curiosity. No, you hunt out of necessity because we need the food.—**Vincent Pikonganna, King Island***

*I don't want my future generations just taking pictures and saying there used to be a seal here. I want them to see it and live it. I teach my son so he can teach his boys. There are girl hunters, too. How to provide, how to be respectful, do not waste, put it away as soon as possible; I learned from my mom.—**Nicholas Lupsin, Saint Michael***

In 2010, Kawerak Social Science staff met with tribal governments and community members to determine topics of interest for our Community-Based Documentation of Ice Seals and Walrus Project (ISWP). Elders suggested we document traditional forms of marine mammal management, which are based on a personal ethic of deep respect for animals.

Traditionally, marine mammals were considered sentient beings who would only allow respectful hunters to harvest them. Waste or mistreatment of a marine mammal was considered culturally offensive, would offend marine mammals, and would cause a hunter to lose his or her luck and have difficulty harvesting additional animals in the future.



**Lily Gadamus of Kawerak meets with hunters in Elim to gather information for the Community-Based Documentation of Ice Seals and Walrus Project.** (Photo: Paul Nagaruk)

Today, many people hold variations on these traditional beliefs and recognize their importance. As such, tribes supported the ISWP's efforts to document this knowledge, and participants expressed the desire that this information be shared with young hunters.

The information in this book was gathered in 2010-2012 as part of Kawerak Social Science's Community-Based Documentation of Ice Seals and Walrus Project. Nine tribes and eighty-two hunters and elders, listed in the Acknowledgments section, participated in this project. Interviews and focus groups were conducted with elders and hunters across the region, and included questions on respect. Hunters were asked how they avoid loss and waste, how marine



Hunters and elders from nine communities contributed their knowledge for inclusion in this book.

mammals should be treated, and what local and traditional management looks like. Interviews were recorded and later transcribed.

The information that was gathered on the topic of respect was summarized from

the transcripts and is presented here in this book. Direct quotes are attributed to individuals throughout the text; the introduction to each section is summarized from information shared with the ISWP by many people.

Hunters and elders participating in this project have shared older traditions and taboos relating to marine mammal respect, such as giving a bearded seal a last drink of water, as well as modern strategies for avoiding loss, setting harvest level, sharing, using all parts of the marine mammal, and teaching young people.

# AVOIDING LOSS

Marine mammal hunting requires skill and focus, as hunters retrieve animals that weigh hundreds or even thousands of pounds from water and floating ice. Successfully retrieving harvested animals means food for the table, but is also important because wasting an animal's life is culturally offensive. For generations, hunters have shared techniques for avoiding loss of catch.

To avoid wounding animals, hunters use large-caliber guns, sight guns properly, and have good aim. Retrieval gear such as seal hooks and harpoons were designed through experience; hunters understand that their catch is going to sink. Good hunters bring enough crew to retrieve their intended prey, stay alert and focused, and have their gear ready at all times.

When boating, hunters choose their prey carefully. They recognize the dark facial markings of rutting “gassy” seals, know when it will be impossible to reach

an animal due to ice conditions, and understand how the wind and current will move a harvested animal or the surrounding ice. Certain environmental conditions are better for hunting, as it is easier to find seals and walrus on the ice when the water is calm, and onshore winds will blow a harvested seal to land.

Walrus harvested on stable ice are much easier to retrieve than those in the water or on unstable ice. Knowledgeable hunters shoot



**Bringing home their catch of seals.** (Photo:Kawerak Eskimo Heritage Program, Richter collection)

walruses that are in the middle of the pack, as walruses protect their dead and will push those on the edge of the ice into the water. Large walrus herds are often avoided because they can be aggressive and can make retrieval difficult.

Successful hunting often requires a quiet approach, without unnecessary noise or movement, as shots fired too early may wound without killing or scare animals away. Experienced hunters stay downwind of their prey and only shoot when they can hit a walrus or bearded seal in the base of the neck, which will prevent the animals from escaping wounded. A seal exhales when it surfaces and will sink quickly if shot immediately, but when a hunter waits for the seal to inhale before shooting, the animal will float longer. A large bearded seal will sink 30 to 40 seconds after being shot, so hunters must harpoon them quickly. As weather, ocean, and ice conditions change rapidly, hunters butcher quickly in order to salvage their catch and bring it home safely.

## GEAR AND PREPARATION

*During the fall, we go out hunting from the beach during northwest wind. The wind will float your seal towards the beach and you can cast your seal hook and pull it in. The seal hook is made of driftwood with hard metal prongs. It floats.*

*Long ago they were made with driftwood and reindeer antler prongs. You pull the catch in real slow—don't yank it.—Nicholas*

**Lupsin, Saint Michael**

*I have a lot of feeling for these animals. It hurts when I see young people shoot a seal and they can't get it. What a waste. It's better for them to be*



**Seal hook. Having the right gear is important when retrieving a seal.**  
(Photo: Edwina Krier)

*prepared with the proper equipment and I'll feel good about it then.*

—**Nicholas Lupsin, Saint Michael**

*The best way to catch a seal so you don't lose it is in a net. My father taught me how to set nets for whales, seals and maklaks.*

—**James Niksik Sr., Saint Michael**

*Sight in your guns and practice. On the surface of the water your target will be about the size of a football.*

*Distance varies from hunter to hunter. Fifty yards has worked well for me when I sight my gun in.*—**Roy Ashenfelter, Nome**

*"If you have few, skeleton crew, you lose quite a bit of walrus."*—**John Pullock, King Island**



**Approaching walrus on ice.** (Photo: Kawerak Eskimo Heritage Program)

## **AVOID SHOOTING WALRUS THAT WILL BE DIFFICULT TO RETRIEVE**

*What I do is, I don't look for swimmers. I look for ones that are on the ice already. I don't want to catch the ones in front of the ice at the ice edge, just the one on the back side because if I get the one in front of the ice close to the water, the walrus on the back side are going to drag it down in the water, I might lose it. So I have to get the walrus that are on the back side so I won't lose it.*—**Leonard L. Raymond Sr., Stebbins**

*Don't target large groups of animals, because that's a sure way of endangering yourself, your crew, and losing animals into the water. After walrus are shot and animals are dead on the ice, the group will*

tend to linger in the area for up to several minutes before they escape somewhere else. And in that time that they're lingering, they can pull animals into the water. So you want to avoid large groups of walrus. Generally, we try to seek out groups of walrus that are no more than about four or five animals. Lower is very good, but it depends on what kind of ice you're on.—**Austin Ahmasuk, Nome**

Don't shoot walrus in the water. Nine out of ten times that's an instant loss—they will sink right away.—**Daniel Angusuc, Nome**

## APPROACH

When approaching a herd of walrus, do not stand up, do not put your *ipun* [paddle] in the air. The herd will see this and start moving around.—**Vincent Pikonganna, King Island**

Sneaking on the ice to hunt seal they used a piece of polar bear skin and crawled on it—it didn't make any noise. You watch the seal and move when it puts its head down and stop when it lifts its head back up. You stop in the same position or it will notice the difference and escape.—**Roger Nassuk Sr., Koyuk**

I'm proud of the young guys that walk the grounds I used to walk on to go hunting. Some of these guys are serious about hunting; they don't want to scare the animals off, so they walk.—**Victor Joe, Saint Michael**

## SHOT PLACEMENT FOR WALRUS

One shot, one kill. There's nothing worse than shooting a big animal with a small gun. You are wounding it. I tell my crew to shoot walrus on the lower neck area with the biggest gun possible.—**Frank Johnson II, Nome**

## SHOT PLACEMENT AND TIMING FOR SEALS AND BEARDED SEAL

*If you catch a seal or ugruk in the water, wait for them to take a deep breath before you pull the trigger. If they have air in their lungs, they will float. If you make the mistake of pulling your trigger as soon as they pop up, it is exhaling and will sink right away.*—**Jimmy Carlisle, King Island**

*My uncle learned from his dad how to hunt seal and ugruk without losing it and he taught me. You shoot it in the back but don't hit the spine. The bullet goes in and the saltwater stings the wound. The mammal will get up onto the ice out of the water. I tried, it worked.*—**Nicholas Lupsin, Saint Michael**

*I taught my boys not to shoot ugruk anywhere but on the base of the neck. It paralyzes it. They're strong animals, you watch what caliber you're using. Don't just wound it.*—**Morris L. Nashoanak Sr., Stebbins**



**Bearded seal on ice. Before shooting a bearded seal, seal, or walrus, make sure that the ice conditions will not prevent you from retrieving it. This ice is solid and it would be easy to retrieve the bearded seal.** (Photo: Michael Cameron, Alaska Fisheries Science Center, NOAA Fisheries)

## AVOIDING HARM TO OTHER WALRUSES

*Uguuvuks, the younger walrus—they stay on the ice if you've just killed their mother or father. Don't kill it, there's no sense in that—you already have your catch. If it won't get off the ice and you need to get to your catch, what you do is circle the ice. If it still won't get down you go up to it and poke it in the whiskers with your oar. Get it off the ice without hurting it—that's what I was taught.*—**Bivers Gologergen, Nome**

## TECHNIQUE

*Harpooning a walrus that is in water, you harpoon it in the neck area so you can pull it up and cut a hole in the whiskers and loop around the tusk. You can pull it out of the water like that.—Bivers Gologergen, Nome*

*Ubluq naituruaruq—the day is short. The day is not waiting for us; you butcher swiftly but safely. We were told this all the time.—Vincent Pikonganna, King Island*



Arthur Ahkinga (Photo: Edwina Krier)

*When I was young we went in this area for spotted seal during the fall. If your seal sunk, the northwest wind would wash it in.—Arthur Ahkinga, Diomedede*

## SALVAGE

*My friend and I came upon two ugruchiaq in the river that had been sunken by hunters. They were still good. We dragged them home and butchered them on the beach. That blubber sat for a couple days and it was the best seal oil I ever had.*

*We had oil that winter. I thank the hunters—I don't know who they were.—Ruby Nassuk, Koyuk*



Ruby Nassuk (Photo: Edwina Krier)

## WASTE OFFENDS TRADITIONAL VALUES

*Once we went out and saw a bunch of headless walrus floating. That was a sad sight; I hope to never see anything like that again. They were wasted. That shouldn't happen. Communities should talk about not letting anything go to waste.—Sophie Milligrock, Koyuk*

# RECIPROCITY

According to traditional beliefs, hunts were successful because animals gave themselves to hunters. Marine mammals were aware of people's thoughts and speech, and hunters avoided boasting or disrespectful speech and did not think about game too much when hunting.

Marine mammals were aware of their treatment after death, and hunters treated them with respect to avoid offending them and so that they would return and give themselves to the hunter again in the future.

Traditionally, bearded seals were thought to give themselves to hunters because they were thirsty and hunters would give the bearded seals a last drink of water after they were killed. The eyes were cut so the bearded seal couldn't see the hunters. Hunters were taught not to play with the animals and not to move them with their feet or to step on them.

Other traditions documented during the Ice Seal and Walrus Project included eating the eyes from a seal, throwing a little of the catch back into the water, and putting a hunting mitten over a harvested seal's head to cover its mouth. One elder reported that traditionally, when a seal was brought into the house, the head was faced towards the door. Another tradition was to put any remains of a water



**Respectful hunting means caring properly for a harvested seal.** (Photo: Julie Raymond-Yakoubian)

animal back in the water, and a land animal back on land. These traditions varied by family and by community.

Today, some traditions of respect are less common, but others, such as giving a bearded seal its last drink, are still widely practiced. A deep respect for animals remains, with elders following more traditional beliefs and many younger people finding their own ways of respecting animals and avoiding waste.

## SPEECH AND THOUGHTS

*Don't wish, don't hope. For example, do not think, "I hope they get a baby walrus." My husband taught me, whatever they bring home, they bring home. If you want more, that is more of a greed than a need; you tend to not get it.—Frances Ozenna, Diomede*

*The tradition that has survived throughout the years of acculturation is not having a large ego and not being boastful about your harvest. Don't talk bad about the animals. My grandparents taught me this when I was younger and I believe it is in honor of the spirits of the animals you've taken.—Austin Ahmasuk,*

**Nome**



**Vince Pikonganna** (Photo: Amy Russell-Jamgochian)

*All you have to do is be patient. If you think about the game too much, they will sense you. They won't come around.—John Ahkvaluk,*

**Diomede**

*Man has ears, Mother Nature has ears. You watch what you say when you're hunting, when you're working on a boat outside. Animals have ears to hear. It may sound silly to you. That is what we were taught, that's who I am. It's the way I was raised and I believe it.—Vincent Pikonganna, King Island*

*All I know is that they [mammals] seem to understand. Us hunters, when we're hunting, we cannot mistreat them. You cannot mistreat them in any way, shape or form.*—**Vincent Pikonganna, King Island**

## HANDLING CATCH WITH RESPECT

*I thank the animals that give themselves. I teach this to my boys. After you salvage what you need you put the rest back in the water or if it's a land animal, on the land for other animals to feed on; it's not wasteful.*—**Bivers Gologergen, Nome**



**Bivers Gologergen, Nome**  
(Photo: Freida Moon-Kimoktoak)

*You show respect to the animals because they feed you, they clothe you, they keep you alive. Even after you kill it you show respect. You don't step on it, you don't mistreat it in any way. It will tell its fellow walrus or seal, this person mistreated me. It's forbidden. You don't hunt with pride, that's wrong.*—**Vincent Pikonganna, King Island**

*It's better to respect your catch. I wouldn't be posing with my catch like a trophy. The hunters in catalogs and magazines showing off their catch, what's the use? If I were an animal I wouldn't want to be laying there and being posed with. They have spirits, they have feelings; that is what I believe in.*—**Nicholas Lupsin, Saint Michael**

*I was told by the elders that you never roll an ugruk or any animal with your feet. You always use your hands, no matter how big it is.*  
—**Morris L. Nashoanak Sr., Stebbins**

*What I learned was that when I catch a big ugruk, I cut the head off, open its mouth and put snow in it. Let the snow melt in its mouth then close and throw it in the water, give it back as food in the water. I say I'll see you next spring, thank you. I learned this from my dad.*  
—**Allen M. Atchak Sr., Stebbins**



Some hunters were taught that it is disrespectful to move a harvested seal with their feet. Instead, they should use their hands. (Photo: Lily Gadamus)

*We only pop the ugruk eyes after the kill. We eat the seal eyes; they are stickier than a gummy bear.*—**Ronald Ozenna Jr., Diomedede**

*I've heard of elders taking a piece of meat off the catch and throwing in back in the water so they can get a bigger one next time.*

—**Damien A. Tom, Saint Michael**

*I was taught by my relative's husband to not disrespect the catch on the floor. Don't push the catch with your feet. Don't play with the catch. It's important to have this food; they have experience with having none.*—**Victor Joe, Saint Michael**

*There is certain things we do when we butcher.... Tradition for us: we open the mouth and spit fresh water in the mouth. We also slit the eyes. We take the head and put it back in the sea water saying, "Come back." The purpose of slitting the eyes is so that they won't see you. And the reason they gave themselves to you is because they're looking for water....*—**Roy Ashenfelter, Nome**

# HARVEST LEVEL

Hunters and elders explained that it is important to harvest only what is needed to feed family, crew, and community. Hunters that share can easily give away hundreds of pounds of meat, but once community and family needs are met, a respectful hunter will stop hunting. Hunting just for walrus tusks and not salvaging meat is offensive to many people in the region. Traditionally, elders kept track of how much food was needed and would stop hunters when they had harvested enough. Even if animals are abundant and accessible, if people already have enough food, hunters should leave them alone. Some hunters also noted that they would avoid harvesting seals with young, while other hunters noted that young seals or walruses were a delicacy.



**Diomedé women splitting walrus hides.**  
(Photo: Diomedé IRA)

*Animals are not here to be slaughtered for the heck of it. If you don't need them, let them*

*pass through. If there are too many and you're all alone, leave them alone. They respect you when you respect them; for some reason they have feelings for you.—Leonard L. Raymond Sr., Stebbins*

*The only time I hunt seal is when we need seal oil for winter. Otherwise I don't hunt them. I hunt for subsistence.—Merlin Henry, Koyuk*

*The best ones are the young ones; they taste better and are easier to load. Long ago and even today we limit ourselves, we don't want to overdo it. Take enough to feed the family, pass it around so everyone gets a share. Everyone is happy. The more you give, the more you get—that's what they always say.—Leonard L. Raymond Sr., Stebbins*

*A good-sized family needs three to four ugruk to last them a year but not often does that happen. You take into consideration that the catch is going to be divided amongst the crew.—Frances Ozenna, Diomede*

*Just because they are abundant, do not go around shooting everything you see. Hunters know this.—Roy Ashenfelter, Nome*

*My grandpa used to tell me not to bother the birds, seals, any animal when they got young ones.... All the babies have their mamas. My grandpa used to ask me how I would I feel if somebody take your mama away and left you all by yourself....—Wallace Amaktoolik, Elim*

*One, do not waste. Two, share. I would bring home hundreds of pounds of meat and my mom would say, "Who first?" [to give it away to]. By the time she was done sharing, she would have twenty pounds of meat for herself.—Jimmy Carlisle, King Island*

*We don't try to deplete anything we eat. We conserve as much as possible. We have had trip limits for a lot of years. One trip is four walrus and that's it.... To the best of my knowledge, that's the way it has been.—Kenneth Kingeekuk, Savoonga*

*There is an artistic analogy pertaining to the belief of not harvesting more than you need. It's represented in the holes in the hands of masks. Where there are holes, those symbolize what has been let go. That analogy comes from our culture. It's to honor the natural rhythm going on around you, so that you do not waste.—Austin Ahmasuk, Nome*

*In our culture, when the shadow of the moon is tipped, that means the cup is pouring out and it's good to harvest animals at that time. When the moons shadow tips back away, then the cup is not pouring out anymore.—Austin Ahmasuk, Nome*

# SHARING

A hunter's success is a joyous event for the community. The people are happy that fresh food has been brought to the table and that there will be food to put away. The hunter will share his catch so that others may eat well. More importantly, it is believed that the more you give, the more you receive.

A young man's first kill is never kept; it is customarily given to an elder, and this ensures the young man a bountiful hunting career.

Traditionally, different communities had rules about how catch should be shared. There were specific ways, for example, of dividing a bearded seal into shares, with rules about which shares go to the



**Traditionally, there were rules about how catch should be divided up between those who helped harvest it.** (Photo: Kawerak Eskimo Heritage Program)

hunter and to those who helped him. Today, division of catch varies and depends on the boat captain. He may still practice the traditional methods of measurement, he may split

shares evenly, or he may simply allow his crew to take what they wish and leave a share for him. The sharing does not stop with the crew; it is then distributed to loved ones, to elders, to families without hunters such as single mothers and widows, to crews that did not have success, or simply to anyone that asks.

*It's amazing. It is true in the Bible, it is more blessed to give than to receive. It really multiplies when you share.*

—**Georgianne Anasogak, Koyuk**



**Georgianne Anasogak**

(Photo: Julie Raymond-Yakoubian)

*...When a young man catches his first seal, that seal has to be given away to one of the elders....—Patrick Omiak Sr., Diomede*

*Let me tell you a story about a young man.... When he became a young man he went hunting by himself. He caught a seal, his first*

*seal, and he was supposed to give it away but he was stingy with that seal. He didn't want to give it away, he wanted to keep it for himself. He was stingy from his heart.... Try it as he might after that, he never caught another seal again, never... The seals never came to him anymore. That's what I was told many years ago. We cannot be stingy with what we catch.—Vincent Pikonganna, King Island*

*If someone caught an ugruk, whoever was close by would come and touch the ugruk right away to get a second share. My dad said whoever caught the ugruk would take all of the meat because he was the one that caught it. Whoever helped him got the second share, which was only the skin and blubber. So a lot of times, from the stories I heard from my dad, the second person had to skin the ugruk with the blubber on the skin and he would try to leave as much of the blubber as he could on the skin....—Paul Nagaruk, Elim*

*Hunters give food to people out of respect. I will give food to anyone that asks me.—Frank Johnson II, Nome*



**Sewn bearded seal ready for transport.** (Photo: Brandon Ahmasuk)

*When I was growing up we had hard times. People shared what they got. My two grandpas had qayaqs and they would go seal hunt when there was no wind. They go with dog team and caught ugruk. When someone caught ugruk all the women went to that person and got a share....—**Kenneth Dewey, Koyuk***

*A hunter shoots an ugruk and the guy in the next boat wants a share, he goes up and spears it. That's how it works. It's called niqiq.*

**—Merlin Henry, Koyuk**

*I was taught to cut and share the catch evenly. If you go out with me, you will get a share.—**Merlin Henry, Koyuk***

*The captain and crew get a share. I ask my crew what parts they want and divide it out on the ice. That way there is no confusion as to who gets what.—**Frank Johnson II, Nome***

*My father would always tell me I have to give away my first catch of the year.*

—**Frank Johnson II, Nome**

*Before, when we first caught walruses, the first boat used to share with the whole village.—**Ronald Ozenna Jr., Diomede***



**Patrick Omiak, Diomede**  
(Photo: Edwina Krier)

*But the person that gets the walrus, he gets the head and I know he gets the heart, gets one side kidney. He might split the chest with you, if he gets the whole chest. He could take, I would say, more like half of the walrus. And the other half gets distributed among the other people.—**Edward Soolook, Diomede***

*If I catch seal out there I will bring some meat to my relatives so they could have fresh meat, too.—**Patrick Omiak Sr., Diomede***



**Greeting a boat crew, St. Lawrence Island.** (Photo: Kawerak Eskimo Heritage Program, Mary Carter Collection)

# USE

Hunters and elders explained that knowing how to use and preserve the many different parts of seals and walrus is an important way to prevent waste. Traditionally, seals and walrus provided food, clothing, shelter, and hunting tools. Although some uses are no longer common today, most hunters try to salvage and use as much of their catch as possible. Preparing subsistence foods brings families together and is a great way to teach cultural values to children.

Food preparation for storage was traditionally a lengthy process.

The foods needed to be put away to sustain the family until the next

season, and they needed to be put away correctly. The women in the family developed many tasty methods to do so. Many of these delicacies are still popular today, and people learn traditional



**Stretching a hide in Gambell.**

(Photo: Kawerak Eskimo Heritage Program)

methods from family members and other elders. Native foods are filling and keep people warm in winter.

In the past, skins needed to be processed for use in garments, storage implements, and



**Philip Campbell of Gambell with a walrus hide boat and a seal float.** (Photo: Kawerak Eskimo Heritage Program, Mary Carter Collection)

transportation material. A seal poke made out of seal skin effectively preserved an assortment of foods. After being emptied of food the seal poke was used to sew waterproof boots. Walrus and



**Sealskin mitten.** (Photo: Julie Raymond-Yakoubian)

bearded seal skins were made into qayaqs. Rawhide rope was also fashioned out of skins. Today, people have other clothing options, but seal skin hats, mukluks, and mittens remain popular.

Seal oil is the condiment of choice in most households. Seal oil is a preservative, used to store meats, greens and fish. In traditional times, seal oil also provided light during long northwest Alaska winters.

## USE OF SEA MAMMAL MATERIALS

*When you become a hunter your mother will make you the best parky, best mukluks. Your dad will make you the best spear. You will have the best of everything.*—**Vincent Pikonganna, King Island**



**Francine Menadelook splitting walrus hide with daughters observing** (Photo: Francine Menadelook, Frances Ozenna collection)

*... April is cold. In those days we got good clothing. Mukluks, seal skin socks and used grass for the insole.... Seal skin pants, reindeer parka, Eskimo raincoat and your calico over, seal skin mitten. And there's what we call qaliguraq, waterproof mitten. You know how they waterproof something like that? They*

*don't just throw away seal blood, they save that. It's used for waterproofing.—Patrick Omiak Sr., Diomedede*

*My grandfather never wasted, never take more than you can. Most of the time we did not have ammunition. We mended things with sinew. We netted birds from the tundra with fish nets and rabbit snares. Later there came metal traps and snare, that made life a lot easier. The women braided snares for seal.—Martin Andrews, Saint Michael*



**Sealskin pants and mukluks.** (Photo: Julie Raymond-Yakoubian)

*My mom never used to let us waste anything. She wants everything when we go out, she used to be real happy. Even when we get seal, we share with people. But she always take the skin so she can sew with that, making seal pants, seal parky. I used to have a seal parky myself but now nobody makes those things around here.... She made me slippers, seal skin mittens.—Kenneth Katongan, Elim*

## BEARDED SEAL

*Making mukluk soles or qayaq covering out of ugruk, you aged the skin until the hair fell off, then you stretched it over a frame. There would be lots of kids gathered around when the last bits of seal blubber were scraped off the skin. Real good. You would have lots of seal-oily kids running around. It was preserved much like we preserve the flippers, except it's a hide. They scrape all the oil off, then dry it.—Georgianne Anasogak, Koyuk*

## SEAL

*The ice was flat back in the day. People used nets to catch seals and these nets were made out of seal. Seals caught in nets are not shot and knives are not used on them. The meat of the seal caught in a seal net is real rich. The tradition is that whoever sets the*



**Bearded seal intestine being prepared for transport.** (Photo: Lily Gadamus)

*net stays awake until the net is pulled. The woman in the household cannot brush her hair while the net is set otherwise there will be hair in the net and nothing will be caught. The floor cannot be washed, *Uqsuniq qubraq*, your wash water gets dirty and again, nothing will be caught.—**Patrick Omiak Sr., Diomedede***

*[We used to use] seal skin pants, mukluks, reindeer parka, Eskimo*

*raincoats made of bearded seal intestine. Seal skin hunting bag with a throwing line, hunting harpoon line and harness made out of rawhide.—**Patrick Omiak Sr., Diomedede***

*My dad says that his dad would have him hold that real strong, aged seal while he cut rope out of it.—**Paul***

**Nagaruk, Elim**



**Bearded seal drying.** (Photo: Kawerak Subsistence Program)

Used seal pokes that had food stored in them and were emptied out were then used to make waterproof mukluks. I remember my papa had a pair, they came up to here like hip boots. It makes sense—the oil makes it waterproof. They were called *mumiiluks*.—**Georgianne Anasogak, Koyuk**

Rawhide was made out of seal and could be used for sled making. Today bolts, twine and whatever else the western culture brought in has replaced the seal rawhide.—**Georgianne Anasogak, Koyuk**

I soak the skin in salt water, rinse it about three times until there's no more blood coming off of it then soak it for two days, stretch it and let it dry for about a week. Scrape it in order to make booties and mittens. I learned from my dad.... He taught me how to make mukluks and slippers, he even taught me how to sew.—**Sophie Milligrock, Koyuk**

Baby seal skin were used to make bags for hunting implements. I haven't seen one of these bags for twenty years.—**Ruby Nassuk, Koyuk**

Every home we went in had a seal oil lamp. It was kind of stink but we had no choice. When the oil was a little brown, it would be stink; when the oil is light, it was alright. Then came kerosene and on to gasoline with two mantles. Lastly, electricity. It's too easy now; you just press a button and you have light. I got too many lights.  
—**Kenneth Dewey Sr., Koyuk**



**Seal oil lamp from Gambell.** (Photo: Ward Wells, Ward Wells Collection; Anchorage Museum, B1983.091.S4010.1)

## WALRUS

*Just about everything we use is from walrus except for clothing. We use it for boating and hunting equipment, bow and arrow, spears and lances, rawhide rope, all types of things. It's our main resource. Like a cow is to you.—Kenneth Kingeekuk, Savoonga*

## FOOD USE

*It's a lot of fun hunting when you're young and strong. The coffee tastes different out there. The air tastes different. You're just in a good mood all the time because you're hunting with your fellow hunters, people you grew up with. You're doing something positive, you're trying to catch a meal to bring home for your mom and dad or wife, whomever. So they can cut it up and give it away, cook it the next day. They don't cook it right away, they say to let the meat relax for a few days at most if it's a walrus or ugruk.... It takes a while for the meat to relax so it won't be so hard.—Vincent Pikonganna, King Island*



**Bearded seal flippers.** (Photo: Lily Gadamus)

*Fifty years ago everyone's fish racks were filled with fish, seal and ugruk meat, reindeer meat. Skins were stretched out in a seal stretcher nailed to the sides of houses. Every piece of food was stored for winter in wooden barrels and seal pokes. No one was allowed to waste. We gathered mouse food; the mice put roots away from the tundra. Those are the best; we throw them in a pot of soup.—Martin Andrews, Saint Michael*

*Our language and customs were just about killed off. We held onto the best of our customs and that is our subsistence foods.—Sheldon Nagaruk, Elim*



**Phyllis and Queenie Milligrock of Diomedes wring a seal or walrus hide.** (Photo: Diomedes IRA)

*Making stink flipper, I put the flipper with a piece of skin still attached to it inside of a bucket and leave it there for about a week until it gets smelly and the fur comes off.*—**Hannah Takak, Shaktoolik**

*Walrus and seal are a tremendous resource. They are animals that are utilized to a fairly significant extent. They are consumed quickly and by the time winter comes around we have reason to hunt more marine mammals such as small seals. They are an excellent resource. They are a cornerstone of the cultural frameworks that we rely upon to live and to teach our children, understand the world and go about our daily business.*—**Austin Ahmasuk, Nome**

## SEAL

*When my kids bring home a seal my husband has them eat the eyeballs raw.*—**Frances Ozenna, Diomedes**

*I love Native food. There is nothing like fresh seal and fresh blubber. My grandpa used to slice the blubber thinly and make bacon. If my grandma didn't have shortening to bake her bread she used seal oil. Talk about good food.*—**Martin Andrews, Saint Michael**

*It takes about a week for seal meat to dry.—Sophie Milligrock, Koyuk*

*I would usually cook the seal ribs and store them in seal oil but lately I've been just drying them and putting them away. The lazy way.*

**—Sophie Milligrock, Koyuk**

*Basically everything on seal is put away. The seal skin. Eat all the meat, intestines, kidney. I don't know if anyone eats the heart, I never did. They say nothing is wasted on seals.—Johnny Anasogak, Koyuk*



**Bearded seal hide stretched and drying.** (Photo: Gay Sheffield)

*I've had seals brought to me to be used for dog feed because the seal was a bull in rut. The female seals and younger seals are not in rut—these are what we try to teach them to hunt.*

**—Paul Nagaruk, Elim**

*I make seal oil out of seal fat. I cut the blubber into two-by-four strips and cut blocks into it, then put it into a bucket to render in a cool place. I put mine in the shed. It takes three days to two*

*weeks; it depends on how strong you want your seal oil to be.*

**—Sophie Milligrock, Koyuk**

*My grandpa raised me up. No chain saw—he got wood with snow shoes. Every morning before he went out, he had a tablespoon of seal oil. He said it keeps the body warm. He would stay out all day and chop wood. He ate once a day, supper.—Kenneth Dewey Sr.,*

**Koyuk**

*The elders would take the liver out of their seal and mix it with blubber and ice. I've never seen it but I've heard the elders talk about it. Makes my mouth water when they describe how the food was put away a long time ago.—***Ruby Nassuk, Koyuk**

*We roast, fry, boil and barbeque our seal meat.—***Hannah Takak, Shaktoolik**

*Freshly-caught seal liver is nice and warm, very good. It's full of iron. I usually drink about a half cup of seal blood, which is good.*

—**Nicholas Lupsin, Saint Michael**

## RIBBON SEAL

*Ribbon seal are deep-sea divers, you can tell when you cut them open. Their meat is dark and the lungs are different than other seal we work with. You can boil ribbon seal and eat it, but it's not as good as other seals. We prefer to hang and half-dry the ribbon seal in the sun and age it a bit. Add it to the barrel.—***Frances Ozenna, Diomede**

## SPOTTED SEAL

*The boys hunt spotted seal in the boat.... We love them. That's our grocery store in front of us out there.—***Patrick Omiak Sr., Diomede**

## BEARDED SEAL

*Some people like to eat the ugruk meat rare.—***Hannah Takak, Shaktoolik**

*I make dry meat out of ugruk and seal oil out of smaller seals. Ugruk fat seems a lot stronger than fat from a smaller seal. People have different tastes. Sometimes we have to make seal oil with what we have.—***Axel Jackson, Shaktoolik**

## WALRUS

*Walrus food products entail a wide spectrum of the various kinds of foods: fresh, aged, stored in oil, frozen.—Austin Ahmasuk, Nome*

*The main thing I look for is a female with calves, that's a delicacy on the Island [Saint Lawrence Island]. Fermented female or baby walrus, we use that for special occasions such as birthdays. The mother of the calf, we open her up and you got her breast milk, it's really good ... you take the flippers and eat it with the breast milk, it's really good.*

—**Bivers Gologergen, Nome**



**Clams from a walrus stomach.** (Photo: Gay Sheffield)



**Fermented female or baby walrus is a delicacy in some Bering Strait communities.** (Photo: Kawerak Subsistence)

*...Walrus is the main food on our table almost on an everyday basis...*

—**Kenneth Kingeekuk, Savoonga**

*Walrus being the main dish here in Savoonga, it can last up to a year. Put it in the meat cache for the winter and it ages in storage. We eat it during the winter, frozen or cooked. I prefer mine frozen, nice and tasty and also keeps me warm.—Kenneth Kingeekuk, Savoonga*

*Walrus here is breakfast, lunch and dinner. In the morning we drink the broth which was in the shed overnight and has gotten a little iced over. You're good for the rest of the day. It's healthy—it gets you*

going. Put a little bit of chopped onion in it, heat it in the microwave, stir it up with some salt. You ought to try it.—**Kenneth Kingeekuk, Savoonga**

What we do when we catch walrus is make a meatball-sized piece and tie it up for later use. There's a meat cache where people store food in the ground and it's put in there. It keeps for a long time.—**Arnold Gologergen, Savoonga**



Preparing tuktuk. The walrus hide is stuffed with walrus blubber or walrus kidney and meat parts, then sewn together, placed in a meat hole, and fermented. (Photo: Eskimo Heritage Program)

## STORAGE

I watched my grandma and mom putting seal meat away. I would ask them questions and help them out. Earliest spring is the best, they said, because it's cold and windy. There are no flies. It's a good time. Even it's cold and freezing, the meat will still dry—all the moisture comes out of the meat.—**Nicholas Lupsin, Saint Michael**

Ice forms inside the cave [on King Island] and it stays like that for almost a year. But not right now, it melted down. Even some of the Island's rocks caved away. Long ago they never stopped [hunting] until the game was gone. They would catch as much as they could and store it; they learned and knew how to put away food. Like drying them and putting them in storage.



Diomedes men drumming and dancing with walrus stomach drums. (Photo: Kawerak Eskimo Heritage Program, Diomedes IRA)

*Each family had their own storage and they would prepare it to make that food last a long time. In the '60s they had seal skin pokes and they put meat and food in there; they lasted a long time with the seal oil.*

*Today they don't do that. There are too many freezers. Every time they go out hunting, they come back*

*and put it [game] in the freezer... That's why some of the people eat bad food, not like long ago. Each village learned how to put their food away, the proper way.—**John Pullock, King Island***



**Seal pokes.** (Photo: P360-758. Alaska State Library. Edward L. Keithahn Photograph Collection.)

*You have to try not to make a cut in the skin of the poke while preparing it. If there were a gunshot hole in the skin it was sewn with leak-proof stitches. All the blubber was taken off the skin including the feet and arms, then washed, hung to dry a bit and then inflated*

*by blowing in it. It was turned inside out to dry and that's how they made skin pokes.*

—**Esther Kimoktoak, Koyuk**

*I don't see seal pokes any more, we don't know how to make them. I should have learned. Food stored in a seal poke was real tasty. My mom put everything in a seal poke—dry fish, fish soaked in oil. They never got freezer burnt or anything; real good.*

—**Hannah Takak, Shaktoolik**



**Processing a walrus stomach to be used to cover traditional drums.** (Photo: Gay Sheffield)

# LOCAL MANAGEMENT

The abundant resources of the Bering Strait have sustained the indigenous people for centuries. Under the ground we walk on lie artifacts such as hunting arrows and spears—the very implements that were utilized by our ancestors to put food on the table.

Traditions of respect—such as avoiding loss, sharing, and self-regulating harvest level—are all forms of local management.

Hunters also noted that it is important to respect other hunters and not to interfere with someone who has gotten a seal. Many hunters stay away from other communities,



**Repairing a skin boat.** (Photo: Gay Sheffield)

to respect that community's hunting grounds. Hunters keep their equipment clean, and may follow traditions such as avoiding hunting on Sundays or before a burial. Some hunters felt that in modern times it would be good for communities to design hunting regulations to prevent anyone from wasting. Others felt that hunting should be self-regulated through a personal ethic.

## RESPECT TOWARDS OTHERS

*You can't go out and tease girls. Keep your equipment clean, your nets, everything.*—**Martin Andrews, Saint Michael**

*One thing about walrus hunting is, there's how many hunting crews in Nome, maybe thirty? We all pretty much know who each other is, we all wish each other well. We all try to work together as much as possible. And unlike other hunting, there's absolutely no competition amongst hunters. Each person, each crew, is more than willing to share in work, share in experiences, and share in as much gear as possible. Help each other out, develop camaraderie when we're out on the water and we meet each other. It's an opportunity to share in different experiences. So that's one thing that's very enjoyable about hunting walruses, we all know that it's an activity that can be dangerous....—Austin Ahmasuk, Nome*

*... If you went after a seal or ugruk, the other hunters respected that and didn't interfere. If you saw it first, you went after it and nobody interfered.—Georgianne Anasogak, Koyuk*

*I do not hunt in the Wooley Lagoon area because I am not from King Island. I do that out of respect. It's not my land.—Frank Johnson II, Nome*

*If someone from the village dies, the hunters do not go out until the deceased has been buried. No birding, no picking, no eggging,*

*nothing. Nothing happens until that person is brought to rest.—Frances Ozenna, Diomede*

## WHEN TO HUNT

*Get up early before sunrise and head out, come back before sunset. That's thirteen to fifteen hours of daylight until it starts getting dark out.*



**Kawerak Seal and Walrus Hunter Workshop.**  
(Photo: Kawerak Social Science)

*Not like up in Barrow... they start hunting before sunrise and they cease fire at 5pm. I learned that while hunting up there.—Edward Soolook, Diomedede*

*The old people hunted until all the ice was gone. Then they rested.—Patrick Omiak Sr., Diomedede*

*I would like to see rules that our folks made years ago. Our folks worked six days a week and rested on Sunday, they respected that. They used to tell us only if you got absolutely nothing to eat you can go get something for lunch, dinner [on a Sunday]... I hope we can get together as a community and have this rule and regulation so our game will not run away from us.—Roger Nassuk Sr., Koyuk*

## ON LOCAL MANAGEMENT

*They don't have any kind of law, they never write any law in the books. All they do it by is word of mouth. Our ancestors since time immemorial passed it along,—our grandpas used to say that. Just passing the tradition, all the way down. That's the only way you could survive in the high arctic, that's what they always say.—Charlie Saccheus, Elim*

*You take all the walrus catch that you can load up in your boat. Even if it means leaving the tusk.—Arnold Gologergen, Savoonga*

*Local management might be a good idea. With today's economy in crisis, try and start protecting them. I don't know, twenty years from now there might be nothing. By limiting catch or making sure you don't shoot the game and leave it.—Johnny Anasogak, Koyuk*

*That's our refrigerator out there, when I look out at the whole [Norton] Sound. When we get hungry we go out there, get our crabs, tomcod, fish.—Charlie Saccheus Sr., Elim*

*The community knows how much to hunt—we know our limit. I tell my crew, my higher power wants me to hunt this much this year. Then we go home.—***Wilfred Anowlic, Nome**

*Local management is important. [Waste] is unacceptable. For the future of our kids I think something needs to be enforced so that they can learn the ways we live and have the amount of game that our grandparents and parents have seen. I think the numbers are going way down.—***Kellen Katcheak, Stebbins**

*Several communities are starting to post private property—my corporation is doing that. We're not allowing licensed guides to hunt and fish in these areas unless permission is granted.—***Frank Johnson II, Nome**

*I think it's important to get some conversation going, not only with walrus and seal but with moose and birds, too. When I was little watching the elders, it was pretty strict—the way people hunted, what they brought home and who they gave it to.—***Kellen Katcheak, Stebbins**

*I would love to see a Hunters Association, I really would. My friend and I have talked about it, and that might be something that we can work on. Having some sort of a Hunters Association, so we could teach people, because, it does need to happen in my opinion. If it doesn't happen in the family level, and some people don't have the boat or the resources to do it, and that is completely understandable, not everybody has a boat. It is expensive to be a captain. And if you're not asked to be on a crew, you'll never be on a crew. So sometimes yes, that knowledge is not passed on unless it's within the family. But I would like to see a Hunters Association developed for our area. And then if we have a good working group in our area than we could work to have other groups around so we could all talk about what's going on.—***Frank Johnson II, Nome**

# TEACHING YOUNG PEOPLE

If traditions of respect are to continue, communities must teach their youth. Hunters and elders noted that young people learn best through direct experience, preferably with their own families. Family members who take children out hunting can teach them to respect marine mammals and to avoid waste. Schools, camps, and community organizations can also teach traditional values and skills to youngsters. Elders are a valuable source of wisdom, and it is important to bring youth and elders together. Several people noted that it was easier in the past, when there were community meeting places such as *qagris* and steam-baths. Projects that document hunter and elder knowledge are another good way to promote traditional knowledge and values.

*There are hundreds of seals out there. Later on down the line they may not want to come around here anymore. If we taught our younger ones how to be respectful while they're out there, that would be really good.—Kimberly Kavairlook,*

**Koyuk**



Learning to butcher. (Photo: Brandon Ahmasuk)

*If you teach the young people how to take care of our hunting traditions they will maintain it. You don't know what's going to happen. There are some kids right now who are not going out nor being taught how to do it.—Merlin Henry, Koyuk*

*For the young people, encouragement is a good thing.—Roy Ashenfelter, Nome*

## TIME WITH ELDERS

*We need to stress to the young people to learn the traditional ways that our parents taught us. The thing is, there are not many older people left. Tell the young people these stories.—Roger Nassuk Sr., Koyuk*

*We need to get our direction from elders. Not only by telling but by doing. Elder knowledge—we have so few elders left—if we don't do something soon, it's going to go away. The elders knew how to manage the resources they had. Local traditional knowledge works the best.—Ruby Nassuk, Koyuk*

*I try everything in my power to teach the younger generation about anything they may need to know when they're out hunting in a boat. I try to teach everything I know, that I was taught, because I don't want the young people to have an accident out there. I don't want them to not know what to do when they're in some kind of jam.—Vincent Pikonganna, King Island*



Seal and walrus experts share their knowledge with youth at the 2013 Kawerak Regional Conference. (Photo: Julie Raymond-Yakoubian)

*We have an elders committee that could talk to our youth. If our elders became more involved with our youth, that would be awesome. If we had a hunting committee and could tie it up with the other committees, they could teach our younger ones how to respect the land and how to hunt.*

**—Kimberly Kavairlook, Koyuk**



**Entrance to a traditional qagri, where people would gather at Diomedé.** (Photo: Lily Gadamus)

*Some people do not practice hunting and drying and all of that. I would suggest a community awareness, with three to five men, on educating the younger ones on how to do things. It's good to rely on the elders that are knowledgeable of doing these things.*—**Morris L. Nashoanak Sr., Stebbins**

*If a person is good enough to watch or listen to an elder, hear what they say, then they can learn a lot. I'm a quiet person; I ask a question every now and then of the elders on how to prepare food.*  
—**Joe Akaran, Saint Michael**

## **GATHERING PLACES**

*In the old days they had a qagri for people to get together. There were two, Niqlvaat and Sitaragmiut... We don't get together like the old people did. If we had a place to sit with the young people it would be real nice. In my young days, if I needed to know something, I asked a question. This is the most important thing, ask your elders.*  
—**Patrick Omiak Sr., Diomedé**

*The elders and younger guys would take a big sauna and talk about hunting. They swapped ideas about traps. They would talk about long ago.—Nicholas Lupsin, Saint Michael*

## TAKE YOUNG OUT HUNTING

*You hear hunting words when you're hunting that are never spoken on land. You hear about the weather—you feel it, you smell it, you sense it—everything about hunting when you're hunting with them. That, you will never forget. When you're home and you hear about stories about long ago, you don't smell them, you don't feel them. But when you're hunting with them you feel them. You feel everything.—Vincent Pikonganna, King Island*

*You definitely want to go out hunting with an experienced hunter. Your ice conditions, weather, all that is changing and you need experience.—Roy Ashenfelter, Nome*



**Take children out hunting so that they can learn traditions of respect and safety.** (Photo: Brandon Ahmasuk)

*My three year old, I'll take him out next year when he's four. He's about ready to learn. It's better to learn earlier than later; if you learn when you're older, it's a lot harder to remember stuff.—Daniel Angusuc, Nome*

*I was taught by my father how to be prepared for anything. My personal belief is that the parents are the first educational teachers of our children. Education begins at home. It's up to the father to teach his son the rights and wrongs. It starts at the family level. When they go out they can learn by watching and listening to the elders.—Albert A. Washington, Saint Michael*

When I was eleven or twelve years old and my dad said, “we’re going seal hunting.” And I thought that he was going to do all the shooting, but he gave me a twenty-two. He took me to Rocky Point. I was on this rock. He said, “Scratch the rock, they’ll come to you.” He gave me piece of driftwood, and I started scratching the rock with the wood, watching these seals coming up—I noticed they’re coming up closer. There was a big spotted seal. I looked in the water—I saw green eyes. I got a little bit scared, but I scratched again. The seal came up and it turned around, facing out toward to the ocean. So my first instinct was to just shoot it. I didn’t know where to shoot it. I shot it on the back. I paralyzed it and a big swell pushed the seal on the rocks. I ran to it and grabbed it and I tried to pull it. My dad said, “Oh wow, it’s bigger than you.” He said he didn’t expect me to catch a big spotted seal. And then he said, “You know, son, it’s your first seal and you have to give it to the elders.” I said, “No, I don’t want to,” and he said, “You have to, that’s the way it goes. If you give your first catch to an elder you will catch more later.” He caught me playing with the seal’s whiskers, and told me not to play with my catch. And then he started talking to the seal, and he told me to thank the seal. Then he said, “Good,” and then we start butchering it, and he was telling me as he was showing me. When he got done with half the seal, he told me, “Remember what you saw; now you do the other half.” I started cutting and he was talking me through it. I did it and I was very happy. That was my first time eating seal liver, freshly caught. After that, I started hunting seals and I learned to dry them, and put them away for winter. I learned that fall time and early spring are good times to hang meat outside to dry, to avoid the flies.—**Nicholas Lupsin, Saint Michael**



**Nicholas Lupsin, Saint Michael** (Photo: Julie Raymond-Yakoubian)

*I had no choice but to go to school; my husband on the other hand was taken out of school in the eighth grade. He was relied upon heavily by his father, who took him out in the country and taught him the traditional way of life.*—**Georgianne Anasogak, Koyuk**

## SCHOOL

*Teaching young hunters when they're ten, twelve years old—they seem to grasp it more. Why? Because when they're in their twenties*



Peter Martin and Sheldon Nagaruk share traditional knowledge with students at NACTEC (Northwestern Alaska Career and Technical Center). (Photo: Julie Raymond-Yakoubian)

*they go, oh I already know that. Teach them young, stamp it into their heads. That's the main thing. Teach them in school.*—**Bivers Gologergen, Nome**

*It doesn't have to be at home. It could be the school district or somebody could involve themselves teaching them. We had our parents teach us*

*but some do not have that opportunity. They were not brought up the same way we were. Maybe put it into education. Before it's too late.*—**Hermes Dan, Stebbins**

## SELF

*My father died when I was six. There was nobody to take me out hunting. I learned by myself, starting off with ptarmigan, then later on geese and ducks, then on to seals.*—**Victor Joe, Saint Michael**

*I think it's the younger person's responsibility to go to an elder or somebody who has been hunting for awhile to learn what they need to learn. It's up to that individual who needs to get out there and*

wants to learn how it's done. Go to an elder; ask them to show them how it's done and what they need to look for.—**Stan Piscoya, Nome**

## COMMUNITY

*I think we should start a traditional day or week, come together as a community and try to start bringing our traditions back. It would help a lot.—Ruby Nassuk, Koyuk*

## DOCUMENTATION

*You're gathering knowledge from people like my husband that know the traditional way. What you are doing is great.—Georgianne Anasogak, Koyuk*

*I wish for the young people to listen to the elders. The elders have a lot of knowledge to pass on. Today if I were to talk to a young person they may think me to be boring, and they may hear what I say, but it won't stick. You can put it on paper; it's the same knowledge, I'm glad you're doing this. Preserve what we are*



**Bearded seal meat hanging.** (Photo: Sandy Tahbone)

*trying to tell our young people who do not seem to want to learn right now. There will come a time when they are ready to learn. Thank you.—Georgianne Anasogak, Koyuk*

## CAMP

*Aiyatiyaq, at this camp they teach them [young people] everything. Different things: egg gathering, learning how to cut seal, beluga, how to divide, they take them out to the ocean and hunt beluga. They teach them at a young age and some of them are pretty good now... gun safety, boat safety, everything. They are required to wear life jackets. They learn everything on subsistence.—Edgar M. Jackson Sr., Shaktoolik*

*... Every summer I go to my camp at Naunakak and take eight young people there and show them how to subsist—how to cut fish, know what is edible out there on the tundra, the greens, and try to teach the young kids what is out there—there's food out there. It's*



**Marjorie Tahbone working on a bearded seal hide.** (Photo: Kawerak Subsistence Program)

*just a matter of knowing where and what it is.... They want to learn. Their parents have no boat and motor—some can't afford them and a lot of families have no camp to go to. My dad was a hunter all his life and he has campsites where I can go....—Allen M. Atchak Sr., Stebbins*

# FINAL THOUGHTS

The traditional experts who shared their knowledge made it clear that respect is based on a personal ethic. This ethic may differ by generation, community, family, and individual.

In our region, we have three major cultures with unique languages and traditions, and many tribes, clans, and families within each culture. Although the specific traditions regarding marine mammals may vary, all participants shared a sense of respect for seals and walrus and felt that wasting catch was deeply offensive.

While new technologies, religions, and education have changed some of the traditional beliefs, personal ethics of respect remain strong in our

region and have adapted as needed. For example, many hunters use modern gear to reduce the odds of losing a harvested animal, and others articulate how



**A marine mammal hunting crew from Shishmaref.**  
(Photo: Kawerak Eskimo Heritage Program)

respecting catch is compatible with teachings from western religions or with modern resource management practices.

The knowledge and values that form this ethic are an important resource for our region and should be included in environmental policy-making that may affect marine mammal hunters.



Respectful hunters harvest only what they can put away and use. *Top:* Seal meat drying. (Photo: Julie Raymond-Yakoubian). *Bottom:* Stretching a bearded seal hide, Shishmaref. (Photo: Kawerak Eskimo Heritage Program).

**FRONT COVER PHOTO CREDIT: Kawerak Eskimo Heritage Program (see page viii)**

**BACK COVER PHOTO CREDITS, FROM TOP: Kawerak Eskimo Heritage Program (see page 29); Kawerak Eskimo Heritage Program (see page 3); Brandon Ahmasuk (see page 35); Julie Raymond-Yakoubian (see page 44); Gay Sheffield (see page 31)**



# TRADITIONS OF RESPECT

Elders and hunters from nine communities of the Bering Strait region share their knowledge of respectful hunting traditions in this book!

*The cultures of the indigenous peoples of the Bering Strait are rooted in respect. The people have lived in harmony with nature for millennia, taught by their ancestors that all living things are to be respected. By avoiding loss of his catch, a hunter shows respectful acknowledgement that the animal's life was a meaningful one and would not be wasted. —from the Preface*

*You just cannot kill just for the sake of killing; they say wasteful hunter will pay later in life. You don't hunt out of anger, you don't [hunt] out of greed, you don't [hunt] out of curiosity. No, you hunt out of necessity because we need the food. —Vincent Pikonganna, King Island*

*I don't want my future generations just taking pictures and saying there used to be a seal here. I want them to see it and live it. I teach my son so he can teach his boys. There are girl hunters, too. How to provide, how to be respectful, do not waste .... —Nicholas Lupsin, Saint Michael*



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