

Atret – NAMES



Cestun atren?—What’s your name? There is a lot of information in a name. In many societies, a person’s name reveals their gender, identifies their family, and suggests cultural and historical connections. Names in Sugt’stun, the language of the Alutiiq/Sugpiaq people, often reference personal characteristics or an event tied to the person. For example, an historic account tells of a girl named *Pelw*—Ash, because she was found in the ashes of a burning home. Some people receive names that reflect their personality, like *Ugausqaq*—Nice One, a habit or interest like *Mayurta*—Climber, their appearance, like *Ingartuliq*—Big Eyes, or their similarity to something. A talkative person might be called *Qallqaayaq*—Magpie, after the chatty bird. In Alutiiq society, people often accumulate names or nicknames over their lifetimes, accepting a new title to commemorate a deed, growing aptitude, new characteristic, or even a funny situation.



*Mrs. Pestrijkoff and her baby, Onz̄inkie, ca. 1940.
Courtesy of Tim & Norman Smith.*

Historically, some Alutiiq babies had an *aalukaq*—namesake. When an Elder died, the next infant born in the community might be given the Elder’s name. People viewed the baby as a reincarnation of the Elder, and the infant was treated as family by the Elder’s relatives. Namesake relationships created ties between families, kept a beloved Elder close, and encouraged youth to live up to the legacy of their ancestors.

Like many Alutiiq traditions, the dramatic impacts of Western conquest changed naming practices. Alutiiq people began receiving Russian names in the early 19th century as they adopted the Russian Orthodox faith. Names like Iakov, Anastasia, Pavel, and Pariscovia often came from a baptismal sponsor. For some Native people, an Alutiiq name became their last name—like Aga, Ashouwak, or Shugak. Others adopted Russian surnames—like Boskofsky, Katelnikoff, or Panamarioff. In the 20th century, English and Scandinavian names became common in the Alutiiq community.

Today, the use of Sugt’stun names and nicknames is growing. People often receive an Alutiiq name from a relative or loved one—parents, grandparents, or a close friend. A language teacher or mentor may also give a name. If you are interested in having an Alutiiq name, consider reaching out to an Elder, Sugt’stun speaker, or teacher.

LEARN MORE:

What’s in a Name? Alutiiq Naming Traditions, 2018, by Alisha Agsiaq Drabek, *Kodiak Daily Mirror*, May 9.