



# PAGLAN

## GREETINGS

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## King Island Dance Group

### Dance Group

Those of you who have attended the annual birthday party or the Salmon Bake have been treated to the unusual but wonderfully appropriate entertainment of a group of Inupiat dancers. Many of you probably don't know the story behind the dances or this group. The following article is excerpted from information provided by Alex Muktoyuk, the founder of the group.

Around the turn of the 20th century, gold was discovered in the Nome Alaska vicinity and Nome became a boom-town of gold prospectors. Along with this sudden population growth came a myriad of Christian missionaries. Many missionaries traveled out of Nome to all the Eskimo villages. Before the on-rush of these clergy people, all the villagers along the coast of Seward Peninsula, those farther inland, and on the islands – St. Lawrence, Sledge, King, Big, and Little Diomede – all had their native dances, ceremonial, welcome, and hunting success were all celebrated by the respective villages.

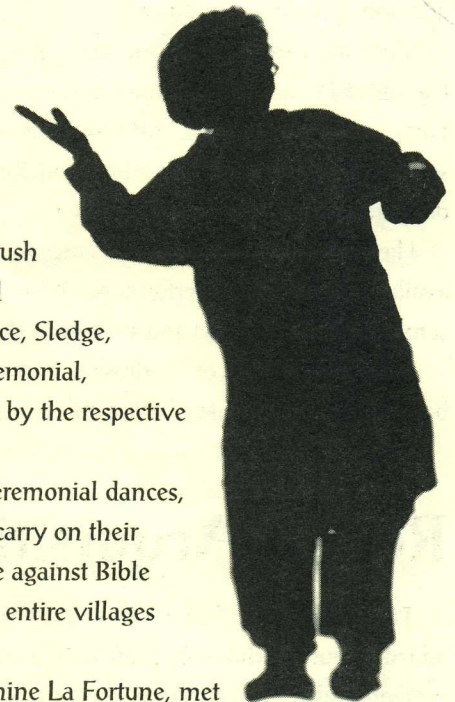
Upon seeing the natives' welcome and ceremonial dances, most missionaries forbade the villagers to carry on their centuries-old customs, claiming they were against Bible teaching. Almost overnight, it seemed, entire villages discontinued their dances.

A Jesuit missionary, Father Bellamine La Fortune, met the Ukiuvokmiut (Ukiuvok is the native name for what the explorer, Capt. James Cook, called King Island). Fr. La Fortune received permission from his superiors to move to King Island to convert the Ukiuvokmiut to Catholicism. Being bilingual in English and Inupiaq, Fr. La Fortune got his wish to move to the island, which many early explorers called uninhabitable for its extremity in steepness, rockiness, and isolation. As he converted the inhabitants, Attaatazuraq (the natives' name for "Big Little Father") observed the dances held in the *kagrit*, the community houses. There were three *kagrit* on King Island: Aguleet, Kalluwillit, and Nutaat. Attaatazuraq saw how physically difficult life on the island was and how the Ukiuvokmiut

(cont. page 3)

### Inside this issue

- pg. 1....King Island Dance Group
- pg. 2....Exhibits Galore
- pg. 2....Welcome New Members
- pg. 3....Recent Acquisitions
- pg. 3....Membership Drives
- pg. 3....New and Renewing Members
- pg. 4....Dates to Remember
- pg. 4....Shopping at and for the Museum



really enjoyed their dances. Except for a couple of the spiritual dances, he saw nothing wrong with the majority of them and even encouraged them. He was said to have reported to his superiors that in doing their dances, they did their physical exercises and had great times doing them. So the King Islanders happily retained their dances. Most other villages were not so fortunate; their dances disappeared.

In 1991, a distant relative of mine who lived in Tacoma wanted to learn Inupiaq dancing but all the other Inupiat she knew in the Tacoma/Seattle area knew nothing, as their villages had discontinued the practice. Learning that I had experience in singing and dancing, she asked that I teach her and others. Eventually the group numbered 28 people as I drove from Portland to Tacoma to teach every Saturday for a year.

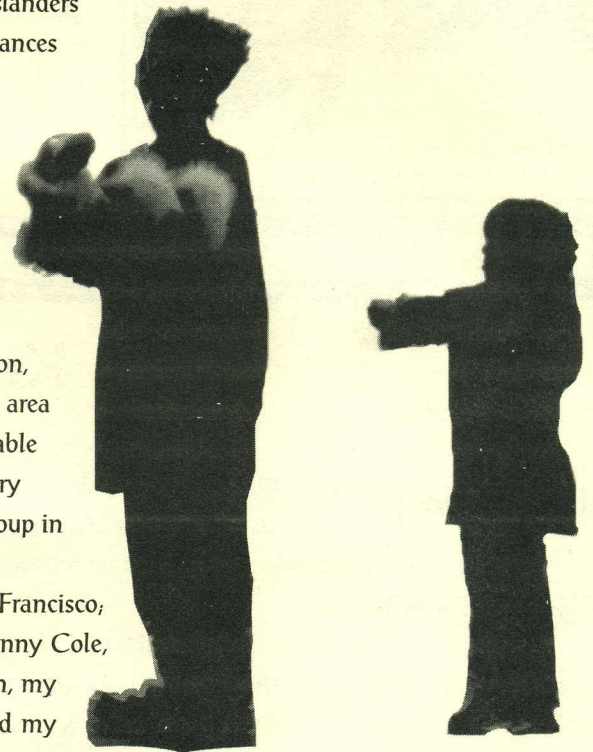
In 1992, I started another group of family members. My sister, Olga Kingston, lives in Corvallis. I invited Larry Ahvakana, who was with the original Seattle area group as he could help me sing. Larry eventually started dancing. He is a valuable member of our group as he is a fast learner of songs and dances. He is also a very talented sculptor and has donated two walrus masks and a raven mask to the group in addition to making our drums.

Since the early days when Larry and I traveled to shows in Santa Fe, San Francisco, Canton, NY; and Mashantucket, Conn., our group has grown. Bryan and Penny Cole, Larry's wife Donna Huff, Art Oomittuk, and his two children, Emma and Ethen, my son, Mark, my sister Olga's husband Rex and children Deanna and Scott, and my daughter Tasha have all begun to dance.

I kept encouraging my wife, Nancy to dance with us, but being a non-native she felt uncomfortable. When only Art, Emma and I were available to dance at a performance Nancy shocked me by saying "I'm going to have to dance, aren't I!" She and I had a crash course with some of the movements and she's been dancing ever since. Eventually Art's wife Terri also started practicing and dancing with us.

This second group of Northwest Inupiaq Dancers is a family group made up of five families, all of us good friends. This will hopefully bode well for the future of the group.

*Alex Muktoyuk*



## Recent Acquisitions

The last few months have provided a number of wonderful additions to the collections. Here are some of the highlights. Barbara Hunt added to our mukluk collection with a pair of children's and her own contemporary, rubber soled pair. Harold and Florence Cameron presented us a marvelous oil painting of the aurora borealis painted by former Alaska senator Don Bennett, as well as mukluks and snowshoes. John and Ethel Fleshman, who lived in Adak for several years, gave us a wide variety of mementos of their life there, including a commemorative Jim Beam bottle. Shirley and Dave Key filled a blank in our collection with a spirit mask. They also added to our doll and model examples. Lily Ward provided a very special example of the type of high style clothing made from fur seal pelts. Jo Mihajlich donated a walrus oosik plaque, with its accompanying story. Al and Margie Carlson brought a pair of Athabaskan Indian mukluks when they came down from Washington for the Salmon Bake. Ruth Grover added her collection of archaeological objects. Our parka collection received an unusual addition in the shape of a US Army/Air Force shearling example. The most recent additions have been some lovely ivory carvings and beads as well as Russian trade beads from Harley and Betsey Branigar.

We have also accepted a loan of clothing from Julia and Bud Siebert. We are currently displaying Bud's wolf skin parka with a polar bear ruff. We will also be displaying a leopard seal skin vest and Julia's contemporary mouton parka.

We would like to thank all of these people for their contributions to our collections. Our exhibits and research projects benefit from your generosity.

