

Nurataq was full of good humor, vitality, zest for life

Nurataq (Andrew Noatak), the eldest resident of Mekoryuk, died Nov. 5.

The parents of Nurataq told him that he was born earlier in the same year in which a winter shipwreck occurred along the extreme northwest coast of Nunivak Island. Based on information provided to him about recorded shipwrecks in that area, Nurataq believed the year of his birth was 1889.

He was born in the Cape Mendenhall area and lived on Nunivak his entire life.

His kindness, generosity and moral standards earned Nurataq the high respect of the entire community of Mekoryuk and many people from outside Nunivak Island.

He is remembered as a religious man who was always a very good provider for his family. He was also an outstanding role model for the young people of Nunivak — he lived a life of proper conduct and never became involved with drugs or alcohol.

Additionally, Nurataq was a talented artist whose specialty was the carving of traditional-style masks (such as the irciq mask shown in the accompanying photograph).

An active subsistence hunter and fisherman, as a young man Nurataq was particularly skilled in the activity of "cliff-hanging," necessary for hunting birds and gathering eggs.

His great skill as a cliff-hanger allowed him to train others to become accomplished at this difficult and very dangerous activity. Life was often difficult in those days, but he recalled them with obvious fondness and

remarkable clarity.

Nurataq was also an extremely knowledgeable cultural resource person and an engaging storyteller. Speaking exclusively in Cup-ig, his Native Nunivak language, he provided rich linguistic, place-name and cultural information about his homeland.

Nurataq spoke with deep affection and admiration for the ancestors and their way of life and was a willing and capable teacher to anyone who expressed interest in sharing the long lifetime of knowledge he possessed.

Even in an advanced age, Nurataq was full of vitality, good humor and a zest for life. These characteristics were apparent even to people who came to know him only through tape recordings.

His family and all of the people of Nunivak should be proud of their district ties to this very impressive and dignified man. Although his death is a great loss, Nurataq lives on in the land he lived and in the hearts of those of us whose lives he touched.



Nurataq displays one of his irciq masks in this November 1987 photo.