



As the crowd of 80,000 cheers at the Welcoming Ceremonies of the 1990 Goodwill Games in Seattle, a group of Aleut dancers (right, in white and black dress) join other Native Americans before a worldwide TV audience of over one billion. These dancers have a mission that goes beyond dancing.

A surprise entrant in the Goodwill Games:

The Kodiak Alutiiq Dancers rejoin the family of nations

The U.S. and Soviet skydivers, with parachutes decorated as their respective national flags, had already landed in the center of the field at Husky Stadium in Seattle. The two F-16s flying in formation with a Soviet MIG had buzzed the crowd of 80,000. The crowd was captured by the spirit of international cooperation at the Welcoming Ceremonies of the 1990 Goodwill Games when Native American dancers from across the nation took center stage.

The costumes of Apache and Navajo dancers were familiar to many, but who was that group in the handsome black and white dress with brilliantly colored trading bead headdresses and wide, flat hats on the young men?

It was a group that has been rarely seen among the gatherings of Native Americans, and not at all since before World War II. The Aleuts of Kodiak had come back to the family of nations.

It's been a long time coming, for many years, the Aleut elders had dreamed of resurrecting the culture that was decimated by the Japanese invasion of the Aleutian islands and the U.S. government's relocation of the Aleut peoples in camps in Southeast Alaska.

"My grandmother was taken from her home on Unalaska with her five children," recalls Kim Kashevarof Jukenman, property manager at the C Street Plaza in Anchorage. "She was only permitted to take one suitcase with her — for all of them. All my father had was one pair of short pants.

After the war, the family returned home to find their house trashed; the windows and dishes broken. The antique family violin had been destroyed.

But it was more than material things



Margaret Roberts (right), president of the Kodiak Tribal Council, is the project director for the Alutiiq Dancers. Connie Chya (center) is the dance director. Others shown waiting to perform at the Goodwill Games are Trisha Abston (left) and Trisha Cox.

that had vanished. The experience was so traumatic that the families and the people as a whole became fragmented. Much of the richness of the Aleut culture was nearly lost forever.

A year ago, the tide began to change through the initiative of the Kodiak Tribal Council. With the help of a CDC Bush Development Grant and several other sponsors, Council president Margaret Roberts, with the assistance of several elders and other younger Kodiak residents, founded the Kodiak Alutiiq Dancers. And the research began.

In the Smithsonian's famous "Crossroads of the Continents" exhibit, they discovered the "snow falling dresses" and the ceremonial headdresses which they re-

created and wore at the Goodwill Games.

At first they feared that there were no Aleut songs, as none of the young dancers spoke Aleut. But elders Nina Olsen and Larry Matfay, who speak Aleut, helped them learn the songs remembered locally.

Now the group has a growing repertoire. Four of their songs were presented to them at a ceremony at Celebration 90 in Juneau this year. The Gajaa Heen Tlingit Dancers had retained these songs from the war days when the Aleuts lived among them. It was a moving moment.

And the search goes on. Margaret has learned that the Russians who built Ft. Ross in California took Aleuts there to hunt sea otters. Aleut elders who live in that area are said to still sing the

kayaking song. She hopes to make contact soon.

Back home in Kodiak, the dancers are performing for visiting groups and (on good weather days) before the local pageant *The Cry of the Wild Ram*. When time and finances allow, they are in great demand for performances in other parts of the state.

There is a deep sense of satisfaction in all of the members of the Alutiiq Dancers. They are having fun. They have even found a way to generate a small amount of income. But most important they have found a vehicle through which to preserve and pass on their heritage.