



Fedosia Sacaloff holds cow parsnip stalk and roots, used for food and medicine.

Mrs. Sacaloff had detailed knowledge of her language

by James Kari and Priscilla Russell
for the Tundra Times

On March 20 Fedosia Sacaloff died at her home in Kenai. She was 68 years old.

Her father was Nick Kalifornsky of Kenai, and her brother Peter Kalifornsky, 77, is the last fluent speaker of the Kenai dialect of the Dena'ina language.

Mrs. Sacaloff was also a speaker of Alaskan Russian and a lifelong member of the Orthodox Church in Kenai. She sang the Old Church Slavonic hymns in the choir in a beautiful soprano voice.

Mrs. Sacaloff was married to the late Nick Sacaloff Sr. of Seldovia and Kenai who died in 1965. She was preceded in death by sons Bill, Leon and Paul.

She is survived by Bertha (Girlye) Sanders of Anchorage, Alex Sacaloff of Anchorage, Nick Sacaloff of Kenai, Mike Sacaloff of Kenai, Billy Sacaloff of Kenai and Cora Sacaloff of Kenai, and by eight grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren.

Over the past 15 years Mrs. Sacaloff made extensive contributions to the language and culture of the Dena'ina. The first time she spoke in public was at the Conference on Kenai Area History in November 1974.

She also spoke at meetings of the Kenai Historical Society and taught her language in a night class at Wildwood in the mid-'70s. She had a unique, highly informed perspective on the major phases in the history of the Dena'ina: aboriginal, Russian, early American and modern.

She had a remarkable sense for the intricate grammatical patterns of the Dena'ina verb and detailed knowledge of aboriginal and post-contact vocabulary.

Mrs. Sacaloff also had a vast knowledge of the Dena'ina and Russian families of Cook Inlet, and of kinship and genealogy as well.

She was one of the last experts on Dena'ina plant uses, and she continued to use many herbal medicines, berry

patches and her favorite chew (*lch'ix*), which she obtained from the ashes of a birch fungus, all her life.

Fedosia was blind since she was a young adult, and she faced poverty and many hardships in her life. To her relatives and many friends she will be missed for her insightful advice and encouragement, her calm in times of adversity, her subtle sense of humor and her adherence to traditional Dena'ina values of humility, generosity and respect for the natural world.

After the funeral, her brother Peter said in his language, "*Undaden shch'a'il'ets.*" (The last person has left me.)