

# Karluk chief prefers home, village

by Mike Rostad

Allen Panamaroff, tribal leader in the village of Karluk, Kodiak, is bothered by a question that surfaces when he is faced with the challenge of pitting the necessities against the frills.

"Do we really need some of the things we're told we can't live without," he wonders. "What are true riches anyway?"

The Panamaroff's living room is not carpeted. There's no running water. Some would say that Allen and his family are deprived not to have amenities many Americans regard as necessities.

But the Panamaroff house - six children - is warm, there's plenty to eat, and certainly poverty does not reign here.

Would the Panamaroffs qualify as being "rich"? Probably not. But what does it mean to be rich anyway like the tribal leader says.

A value system alien to a Western world shaped by Madison Avenue standards helps Allen how to define "rich."

Growing up in a village where "keeping up with the Joneses" was not a priority, Allen learned that a person's wealth is determined by freedom to gather the fruits and hunt the animals of the land which provide his sustenance, and by the pride he feels toward his heritage and culture.

"People didn't lack," says Allen. "They always had something to trade. People in the village gave to those in need." It was traditional, and it still is to some extent, for the person shooting the first deer of the season to give a piece to everyone in the village.

"But all of a sudden we were told that we were poor. We didn't know we were poor." That revelation was brought to his people by government officials and others who felt compelled to impose their materialistic standards on others, he says. "If they shove something down your throat that has nothing of value long enough, you're going to start accepting it."

"There's nothing I can do with the changes that greatly affect us," admits Allen. "But there's something I'd like to do. If changes come, we want to make sure they don't happen so fast."

The wave of change has swept over the remote village of Karluk; yet it has not washed away traces of the past which remind villagers of the richness of their heritage.

Not far from Allen's home, situated near the Shelikof Strait, are artifacts that tell an intriguing story of a hearty people who sought out a living in the wilderness, enjoying, not the comforts of a fancy home complete with thick carpeting, colored television and gadgets which made life easier, but something deeper; something one can't attach a price tag to; a profound sense of identity with the land and a fascination with dance and art.

Stone lamps, baskets, masks and various tools and weapons have been unearthed at Karluk. Archaeologist Dick Jordon calls the area a "gold mine." He and an archaeological team spent two summers discovering traces of a people who inhabited the land for hundreds of years.

The people whose every day tools and crafts are now under the

scrutiny of experts in the field of archaeology, are more than ancient personages to the villagers of Karluk, notes Allen. They're ancestors who were perhaps different in the way they dressed and spoke, yet very similar to present day residents in their affinity with the land and their struggle to deal with influences from outside.

"We are the people that were," says Allen. "We can't lose our identity as Native people. We don't want to lose sight of where we are."

Allen and his family live next door to Allen's parent, Alex and Olga Panamaroff. The families are the only residents of Main Karluk, located across the lagoon from Old Karluk and down river from the new housing area where a majority of Karluk residents live. People migrated upriver several years ago after a fierce storm tore into the Karluk spit.

Allen, was born and raised in Karluk, got to see the "Outside" when he enlisted in the Navy during the early 60's. He was stationed at Hawaii and Norfolk, Virginia. He had a chance to work for the Federal Aviation Administration, but he chose to return to the village. Some wondered why Allen would turn down a "golden opportunity." But the "gold" as far as Allen was concerned, was lodged in Karluk.

No elaborate mansion to settle down in. No flashy automobile to cruise around in. No fancy office to work in, from nine to five.

But near Allen's house runs the Karluk River, famous for its abundant supply of red salmon.

Deer roam the hills. A treasury of artifacts is buried near the village. Just a few yards from Allen's house is the mighty Shelikof Strait with the spectacular mountainous Alaska

Peninsula in the distance.

There's probably at least one millionaire out there who would gladly give up his Rolls Royce just to spend a day in Allen's back yard.



Tribal leader Allen Panamaroff at home in Karluk, Kodiak.

Photo by Mike Rostad