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Reflections of a Parent of a Future Alutiiq Speaker

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If I'm being honest, when reflecting on what it is like to be a parent of a future Alutiiq Language speaker, the feeling I get first is guilt...

I hold a great deal of guilt in the thought that I did not do more to help facilitate my children's introduction into the language movement sooner. I hold guilt in the fact that as a learner in the beginning stages of my journey, I did not jump in with both feet when I got my first taste of the language several years ago. Had I been more involved then, I would be more equipped to help them today.

In 2012, I started my language journey by taking Alutiiq language classes through the Kodiak College; I did this with the hopes that it would help prepare me to be a better Alutiiq dancer. Naively



Hanna Sholl with her children: Ezra, Louie, Aurora, and Zody.

I thought that learning the language would fit nicely into an already packed schedule of work, running a business, and being a newlywed in the early stages of blending two families into one. I grossly miscalculated my abilities and as soon as the class was complete the Alutiiq language took a back burner to other aspects of my daily life.

Fast forward five years and here we are today. I would like to think we are on firmer ground, and while that may have some notes of truth, once again if I'm being honest

our schedules are still quite full. Now it is multiple businesses and more babies that fill our days. But with this added load has also come an added desire to do something of worth as a family, for our culture. Something that will not only impact the present but has the potential to impact generations to come. It has become blatantly apparent to me that our family has the ability to help keep alive the language of my mother's ancestors... the language of my ancestors. With this realization came the

understanding that learning the Alutiiq language was no longer an elective activity in the life of our family.

Language is to be on the front burner for us as a family unit.

With all that being said, it has been quite enjoyable to learn alongside my children since enrolling the younger two of our four children in the Alutiiq Language Nest.

They have continued to surprise and inspire me with their genuine ability to learn with ease. It is absolutely amazing watching tiny versions of my husband and myself begin to grasp at concepts I personally struggle with. They are natural little sponges with clear minds ready to be filled with all the Alutiiq language movement has to offer them. What a privilege it is to be able to ease them into these opportunities under my care.

The time and effort that has been put in by the Alutiiq learners and speakers since the Alutiiq language revitalization movement began, has produced an array of supportive materials. This has been immeasurably helpful to allow us as a family to continue learning along side our children.

Though watching our children grow in the language has been a pleasant experience, it has also been a heavy task to take on. We all live busy lives and it's hard to dedicate oneself to something that can feel so intimidating. Fortunately this heavy load

does not fall on us alone as parents. We have a network of learners, teachers and speakers, who in addition to developing materials also provide resources and support to the best of their abilities.

When we first considered learning as a family, we hesitated in becoming more active in the movement as parents aside from being what we felt was too busy. One uncertainty we felt was wondering if the language movement was willing to take on our family as a whole small pack of learners. And if they were willing to take us all on, were they equipped to do so? Now, here we are a year into our family's journey and we are encouraged.

Though the active part of our journey has just began, we are absolutely grateful to now be learning along side our babies. We are excited by the new opportunities that are available for families to learn Alutiiq together. And we are hopeful to be able to contribute to this growing movement as our fluencies develop.

Some days are more exhilarating than others, but we welcome the challenges and are excited by the successes.

We do all this knowing that ultimately it will be our children's choice if they will continue on their language journeys or not. There will come a day when they may choose not to embrace their

culture in daily life or stay involved with their language. And while whatever they choose is entirely up to them, in the meantime I will be preparing myself to best support their decisions. Ultimately it is my job to give them the best fighting chance to be successful in their language journey, and that is exactly what I intend to do.

Lastly to all the parents out there who have contemplated involving their children in Alutiiq language learning opportunities, or who have felt the twinge of guilt for not starting on their own language journey sooner—please be encouraged. I'm going to leave you with a quote I believe is relevant coming from my dad, Steve Frets, "The best time to plant a fruit tree is 20 years ago...the second best time to plant a fruit tree is right now."

While it would be ideal to have laid one's Alutiiq language groundwork 20 years ago, the best anyone can do is start now. It doesn't have to be a lot, it doesn't have to be complicated or overwhelming. Even learning or teaching just one Alutiiq word a day, or week can make a huge difference in what the Alutiiq language community will look like for our future learners.

If you would like to help "planting your fruit trees," please visit www.alutiiqlanguage.org.