

REFLECTIONS ON LIFE IN ATKA

Not many people live here. I estimate around 100 people live in Atka year around. ... In Atka we live with the wildlife. The reindeer come down to the village. Sea lions go by here. People in Atka still eat seal and sea lions. We have halibut and codfish come close to shore.

—Nick Golodoff

*I*N ATTU AND ATKA the temperature never goes below zero but the wind chill does go below zero here in the Aleutian Islands. They both have deep water harbors. The Atka harbor doesn't ever freeze. Ever since I can remember the water line has been creeping up. The temperature gets warmer every year. There are only four trees on all of Atka Island. They were planted after the war.

In Atka our houses never had insulation. They were just made out of wood and all open underneath, not a single piece of insulation in the house. During the winter, it got cold inside, but my family and I are used to it. Sometimes in the morning when I got up if there was water in a cup, it would be frozen. We would have to get up early in the morning to light the wood stove. The wood stove did not take long to heat the house. We never had a refrigerator or freezer so during the winter after we would go hunting, the food would last longer than in the summer. In the summer, we would have to eat it up right away or throw it away before it spoiled. Aleuts do not waste anything. We use everything that we hunt. For example, during the summer, we would use fish traps in the creek and after we get all the fish we want, we would let the rest go so they can spawn. February and March used to be a tough time for us Aleuts since we did not have a freezer to put away food only salted salmon and dried and smoked fish.

Atka has two active volcanoes on the north end. One is called Korovin and the other one is Atka volcano. In Atka there are lots of



Photo 47. Nick in Atka. (Source: Brenda Maly)

harbors, creeks, and lakes. At every creek, there used to be a mud house where the fish come up. People were scattered all around Atka and Amlia. On Amlia there used to be a village at the first harbor, right across the pass. I know this because I was trapping there one time and from up above I saw two or three big mud houses that used to be there, plus around it there were little ones. There must have been quite a few people that lived there. Way before the war people buried their dead in the caves. There are two caves in Atka that have skulls in them and some by the camp where there are buried people.

I do not know when the people moved their village but they used to have a village on Korovin side that is now called Old Harbor. There never was a Russian settlement on Atka. In the 1880 census, the village

was called Nazan. The population was 236. Atka had its own post office in 1938, and in 1957 had the post office in the store.

I lived about six years in Attu and a little over three years in Japan and the rest of my life in Atka. I do not want to disappoint anybody by saying something about the Aleutians that I don't know too much about. I have not been all over Atka. I have discovered most of it but not all. I am sure people have lived here on Atka before the Russians did. What I do not like is that we Alaskans owned and lived on this land and Russia came around and sold it to the United States and now we have to buy it back from the United States. The Fish and Wildlife Service owns Atka except for the private lands.

Growing up and going to school:

In Attu there were no children my age. Most of the kids were older. So when the war started I used to walk between the Japanese military men and they treated me nice. On the way back from Japan, I did the same thing with the United States soldiers. When I got to Atka I found some kids my age so we played together; we walked around together and did everything together.

When I was a kid, on my birthdays I never had a cake or presents. The only thing I remember on my birthdays was that I went to Russian Orthodox church on December 19 every year. The only other thing I remember on my birthday is that I felt good, I don't know why. I never had a cake till I got about 35 years old. That's when my wife Vasha started making me homemade cake.

While in Attu and Japan, I never went to school. All I knew was the Aleut language, and a little Japanese. When I got to Atka I started school. I was 10 years old and was in kindergarten. I was uneducated and I did not know the alphabet or numbers. I did not mind it much but when I started I did not like to color. Later, I started coloring better. Soon I started reading, but the pronunciation was hard for me. For example,

when “island” came up I would say “is-land” instead of the proper way and all the other kids started laughing. The teacher told them to stop since they did the same thing with other words. I felt better after that.

When I was a kid going to school, one of the teachers took us out to the first creek on the right side of the village and had us dig right above the creek. We dug and found some spears and few other items, but I do not know what happened to them and cannot recall the teacher’s name. If you don’t see a person or do things that you used to do, you forget. I used to be able to speak, sing, and count in Japanese but can’t anymore since I don’t use it often.

I don’t have a high school degree. When I turned 18 the school didn’t want me anymore. I tried to go back three times but they kicked me out because of my age. On the third time, they got my mom and the chief of the village and told them that I should not go back to school anymore so I did not. I taught myself after that. I read everything I could. I mostly learned from the elders. Some of the elders never went to school and I felt they were the smartest. Their education was learning from life.

Some of the seniors still write in Aleut but most kids today do not speak our language anymore. They have to be taught in school. I teach Aleut in school to the kids. Attu and Atka have different dialects. They have the same words but slightly different meaning.

Left behind by the military:

When the military left Atka they left a lot of rifle and machine gun ammunition, but we could not see them because they were halfway buried or inside bunkers. When some kids and I found them, we would play with them. We used to take the tip off the shell and pour the powder into a beer can and light it and watch it fly around. The military left a whole bunch of dynamite caps that we used to play with, using a 12-volt battery to make them pop. Some of them make a small pop and it takes

a while before they kick off. The first time I picked up one after it did not pop, it popped suddenly and I got part of it in my leg and ear.

In Attu the Japanese also left ammo, especially in caves, and there were a lot of caves on Attu. Later in the years, I went back to Attu to work for a salvage company from Tacoma. We salvaged lots of military stuff that they left behind from Adak, Kiska and Attu. When I was in Attu salvaging military stuff, I did not go to the village side because I was working long hours and did not have time. I used to work from morning until evening. I did not even go to where we used to have summer camp but I could see it from the road.

After we got back from the war here in Atka, the only transportation was by military plane or military barge that brought supplies. The only way to fly out of Atka was to fly to Adak. Later on, Reeve started flying in, but the military airport that was made out of metal matting rotted away and sand started piling on the airport. Reeve quit flying here. Since then, the only transportation we had was a military tug from Adak that brought mail once a month.

On May 31, 2004, Memorial Day, I was watching the news and they were talking about veterans. I was wondering if I'm a veteran or not because I was shot at when I was six years old, even though I never joined the military. I had to register for the draft but there was no Post Office in Atka that time to register with. I did not know how to register, so I did not. After I got married, they just put a post office in the village and I registered. They asked why I did not register when I was 18 and I told them why. They gave me some kind of card. The reason I gave for not registering is that I was a prisoner of war for more than three years.

Working life:

Before and after the War we used to saw and chop wood all the time. I used to do that almost everyday and it was hard work but it

kept me healthy. Right now I am still working. After the War, I started working in the Pribilofs. I must have worked at least 13 summers there. That is where I learned my trade as a plumber, electrician, and carpenter helper, and later, on my own, I learned mechanical work. Right now, I am working at the school as school maintenance. I am doing all right now. I have done all kinds of work. I never found anything that I could not do. I used to apply for any jobs that I could find to make some money for a living.

When I got old enough to work, I got my first job in the Pribilofs, St. Paul Island, working on fur seals. I was 15 in 1950 when I started working in St. Paul. I didn't take my birth certificate to Japan and I didn't have it. They made me apply for a social security card when I worked on St. Paul. It took a month to get one, even though all the paperwork was done in St. Paul. I worked for the sealing operation in the summer for 13-15 years. I worked for the government and was paid \$1.25 per hour. I did different jobs while working there. A lot of times my job was blubbering seals—taking the blubber off the skins. The meat was either ground or cooked into fertilizer. They fed it to mink in mink farms.

I got a better job working for the Tacoma Salvage Company. I cleaned debris left from World War II on Adak, Attu, and Amchitka. Other workers cleaned in Shemya. I cleaned copper, iron, lead, batteries, and drones. They salvaged whatever they could. I learned how to operate a Cat. A metal barge took everything that was salvaged to Seattle or Tacoma. On Adak, some Japanese ships took car engines.

After that, I took any job I could find. I used to work as a carpenter and I fished. Sometimes we got hired from outside so I went out and worked on fish processors and then fished in Kodiak and now I am fishing halibut here in Atka. This is how I ended up with a 22-foot aluminum boat and 18-foot aluminum boat and still have them.

I fished in Kodiak 25-26 years ago. I only fished in the summer, for pink, red, and silver salmon. I crewed on boats that were captained by people from Atka who ran the boats for Seattle companies. The captains knew me from Atka. I got paid a crew share—the pay depended on how many pounds of fish we caught. There was a two or three man crew, mostly three, including the captain and two deckhands. The fishing boat was 32 feet. I was in charge of the power skiff. Using the skiff, I would create a 200-250 yard circle with the net. We used to fish all around Kodiak. The company had tenders to take the fish from the boats to the cannery. Port Williams was the base for the boats in the winter.

I worked on a crab processor. I don't think crab was a traditional Aleut food. When I was young I never saw a crab because they lived in too deep of water. Now crabs come into shallower waters. One time I caught crab by accident on a halibut hook when the crab grabbed the bait and wouldn't let go.

Right now, I have been working for the school district and the airport. I have a little contract with the airport to remove snow on the airstrip and I work as a janitor and do maintenance at the school for 21 years now. I am still working but not making too much money, just enough to live comfortably.

When I was growing up, I was poor and hungry. After the War when I got here, I did not have no socks, no heavy jacket, no boots, I could not afford it. My shoes had holes in them, but even then I still packed wood in the snow with my feet freezing. But right now, I feel that I have too much. I have a freezer, I'm working, the only reason that I have money is that I want to retire and pay for bills like credit card bills. In addition, I need to pay for my phone bill, light bill, and monthly payment on my house.

Earlier in life, I had a couple of friends with the Democratic and Republican parties and they both say that the Republicans help the rich

and the Democrats help the poor. I don't know if that is true or not but when President Bush cut taxes I thought I was going to get some tax cut but since I don't make much money I didn't get much of a tax break. This is why I believe there is some truth to that saying.

Hunting, fishing and wildlife:

Out here in the Aleutians, everything is expensive. Almost everything is tripled in price from Anchorage or Seattle. Therefore, we had to survive like the old timers. They know how to survive. When we were young, a friend and I were in a creek trying to catch some silver salmon. One of the silvers went under the bank. We had a hook on a stick trying to hook them out and we never made it. An elder came around and asked us if there was fish under the bank and we said, "Yes, but we can't catch it." He went and put his hook upwards. We had our hook downwards, and that is why we could not catch any.

The tide here in the Aleutians doesn't go low as the tide in the mainland. I used to fish in Kodiak and I know the tide there goes sometimes 12 feet lower than normal and here in Atka it goes six or seven feet only. In Kodiak sometimes you see a boat on top of the rock about 12 feet up in the air and when we go under the bridge people up there looked down at us and smile.

Anyway, I'm a good shot for hunting seals and ducks and sea lions, things like that. I got good because we did not have enough ammo. The older people used to give me one or two shells and told me to get something to eat and couldn't afford to miss, so I really got to be a good shot.

You cannot go out anytime you want on a skiff because of the weather. The weather out here in the Aleutians is nasty. It is usually very windy, sometimes foggy and wet. The winters do not get freezing cold, but the summers do not get very hot either. Even in bad weather, people like to hunt. I enjoy hunting whenever I can. I do not do much

hunting anymore because my aiming eye is not good anymore and I cannot see that well.

I want to say something about wildlife. They say that wildlife is disappearing. When I used to fish for halibut I saw dead birds floating around and these birds are from out in the ocean. They are not land birds or at least not birds from Atka anyway. I think the reason that these birds were dying is from oil. People do not respect wildlife as much as they did in the past. I see people throw trash in the ocean. People should worry about what the future will lead to if this keeps happening. Wildlife get beached up here on the island and end up dying—whales, seal lions, birds, and sea otters. There is a lot of fishing here in Atka like king crab, black cod, grey cod, king salmon, pink salmon, halibut and many more. Sometimes during the summer, the halibut is so close to the beach you can catch them. Almost year round there fishermen stop by from other parts of Alaska while fishing.

I know a few people that are afraid of killer whales. Killer whales do not bother anybody. Sometimes they would follow you around and get close to your boat but they do not do anything. One time an old timer said that when he had a seal on top of his kayak the killer whale would take it but would not bother him.

One time I was on an island near Atka where seagulls nest. After the eggs hatched, I saw some eagles killing small seagulls and I figured there would be lot of small ones left but there was only a few. I never get tired of watching wildlife. When I go out, I see eagles, crows, seagulls, ptarmigans, horned puffins, fish, etc. When I was a kid I raised an eaglet but I couldn't keep it as a pet because it was too mean. There are some birds in Atka that we have never seen before. When I was a kid there used to be a few birds but now there is a whole lot around.

For the past five years now, the reindeer, during the winter, would come down the hills to the village. The reindeer would stay around the

village for almost the whole winter because there is more food around near the village than there is in the hills. I was told that six or twelve reindeer were put on Atka before the war. Now there are thousands. During the war the reindeer population grew and now there are maybe about two or three thousand reindeer here on the island of Atka.

One thing about Atka is that Atka has all kinds of decorated, different colored rocks. In certain areas there are different kinds of rocks. Atka is beautiful when you're up in the hills. I used to walk eight, ten, 12 hours a day hunting for reindeer before the ATV 4-wheelers came around. The reindeer were introduced before the war and now there are thousands of them. It is beautiful up there in the hills during the winter or summer, especially during the summer when it is all green. There are hills, lots of lakes, valleys, creeks, and rivers. Mostly there are big hills, and when you walk you practically you have to climb up them. Looking for reindeer, I would go up on the highest hills and look around. When I spotted them I would walk toward them and when they're too far I used to herd them closer to the village when I was alone. When you're by yourself animals are not scared of you, even sea lions, ducks, and seals. When you are alone in the boat, they come close to you, but when there are two of you they don't do that. I do not understand that. When there are two of you, the reindeer get kind of spooky but when you're alone it's easier to herd them. When they are so far from the village, they do not want to be herded anymore and try to go back. I used to shoot one there, pack it, and drag it home.

There is a lot of driftwood around the island. After the war, the driftwood has been used for firewood. I use cottonwood driftwood to smoke fish. The village areas have been picked clean. I have found unopened beer cans, flares, sometimes you find packaged food. I used to find a lot of Japanese [glass] balls after World War II, washed up on the shore.

Atka is far away from anywhere else:

The state of Alaska built an airport in Atka 22 years ago. PenAir has a mail contract with the state to fly mail to Atka three times a week from Dutch Harbor. The plane can also carry 7-9 people, or cargo. The plane used to take seafood out but now it's too expensive. Now we have Coastal Transportation, a boat that comes three times a summer to pick up halibut and black cod. It leaves with 200,000 pounds of frozen fish.

I still live here in Atka. I never owned a house. I still don't own one but I'm buying one from Aleutian Housing Authority right now and hope to own it in a few years. You are supposed to live in the house for 25 years to own it. It was a prebuilt house. They brought the two halves in and put them together in Atka.

Not many people live here. I estimate around 100 people live in Atka year around. More come in the summer so they can fish. In Atka we live with the wildlife. The reindeer come down to the village. Sea lions go by here. People in Atka still eat seal and sea lions. We have halibut and codfish come close to shore. Before sea otters came around, we use to have crab on the beaches. In summer time, all the creeks around the island are full of salmon and we do not get any tourists out here. It is hard to get out here when the weather is bad. The only transportation out here is by PenAir from Dutch Harbor to Atka. The plane is supposed to arrive to Atka twice a week, but sometimes we do not get any planes for two weeks or more because of the weather.

After the war when we got to Atka I used to watch people build skiffs and then I built me one. After my first year in St. Paul I had a little bit of money and all that I needed to buy was a hammer and a hand saw. The rest of the stuff came from the old military buildings like nails, paint, and plywood. I had to buy some cork in cotton. I built me a 14-foot boat. I had to buy oars since I did not have a motor. Once that was built, I started going out on my own. The first time I

went out in my boat I hand lined for halibut and that time there were many halibut around.

In my time, I sank with my skiff three times. It was always near shore and always due to rough seas. The first time it was nice out and I had a skiff full of driftwood for my stove. I tried to fit into a northwest wind blowing about 40 and a couple of waves just sank me. My motor quit since it was under water, so I had to paddle back to a calmer place and pulled my boat and walked home in a wet snow that night and got home about 3 in the morning. The second time, a friend and I were out halibut fishing, hand lining, and the wind started blowing southeast about 40 and on the way back we sank again. When we sank everything we had, even the halibut, was floating in the water so we headed for the beach, but just before we got to the beach the motor quit so we jumped in the water and pulled our boat in and saved what we could save and we walked home. The third time I was out getting driftwood for my stove and it was blowing northwest about 35 to 40. We were just outside the village. I had too much wood in my boat, so I started sinking and headed toward the beach but this time the motor didn't quit. Nowadays I use GPS in my boat for fishing.

Atka is a beautiful place to live but it is very expensive. I pay over \$600 a month for fuel, \$300 a month for electricity, and pay for rent on our home every month, phone bills, grocery, oil, etc. If we did not live off the land, I do not think we could have been able to make it. The reason why it is so expensive here is that we live so far west of the mainland. It costs a lot to have everything either flown in or brought in by boat.

There are not many jobs on Atka. There is fishing during the summer. The school district, the store, and the post office all hire some people. There is a health aide at the clinic. Some people have jobs working for Aleutian Housing or the telephone company. The guy who works as

the diesel operator doesn't make any money. The city of Atka owns and operates the gas storage tanks. In 2007 a gallon of gas was over \$5.

The Atka airport has 3,000 feet of paved runway and is 100 feet wide. The city wants a longer runway, but it's too expensive to lengthen it. PenAir comes in with a twin engine prop on a regular flight from Dutch Harbor. There are charters to Atka. One time Northern Air Cargo DC6 landed, a four engine cargo plane. It was flying in bait for the processors. It was completely empty when it left.

Our small dock for cargo, a newly built road from the village to the dock, and the main dock are all on the other side of the bay. When I wrote this on June 14, 2004, we were finally starting to see king salmon in Atka. Some people from the village were commercially fishing halibut right then.

When you decide to come to Atka, make sure you schedule longer than you expect because of the weather. What I am trying to say is that when people come to Atka, and they are ready to head back out the plane is often either delayed and does not arrive until a day or two later.

Learning from the elders:

I learned many things from the old timers. They taught me how to survive and taught me how to be good, told me what is good and bad. Now days the younger kids do not seem like they're interested in that stuff anymore. Since they have everything, they think it is going to be like that all the time, so they don't care. Later on when they get older and their parents cannot support them anymore, they are going to have a hard time. I hope they read my book and learn from it.

Old timers used to tell me that "What you do on your birthday you get good at," and I never believed it until now. If you work or do something on your birthday you do get real good at it. It happened to me. Most things that old timers told me I did not believe, but most of them

came true. When I was young I used to camp and trap with old timers during the summer and winter and they used to tell me stories. I do not know how to say this, but the elders predicted the future and there are many things that I was told were going to happen or happened already. Few of those old timers knew how to read or write, but they knew what was going on and knew what they were talking about.

The old-timers used to tell me that the Russians were tough, mean, and they killed a lot of people. The old-timers that told me many stories are all gone. I have learned a lot from them. The reason why I was with the old-timers all the time is because I was kicked out of school when I was 18 so I spent my time with them since there was nothing much to do. The old-timers did not talk much about how they got here. I am thinking maybe they did not know or that they were here from the beginning. One other thing that an old-timer told me is that, if you live in a warm, sunny, calm environment that you will pay for it later. What I mean by this is it will get rough like hurricanes, floods, etc. If you have too perfect of a place to live too disastrous of a thing will happen. If you live in a place like the Aleutians, the weather is usually bad and stays the same but there are times when it is very nice. Like I said, the summers here are not too hot and the winters are not too cold. Usually it is just windy, foggy, and damp.

When I was young, I hardly ever wanted to be inside. I am usually always outside. Whenever the elders go camping or go out in a boat I used to volunteer to go with them to help them out. They tell many stories about the past, and sometimes they tell a story about what will happen. Some stories that they told were that the world was going to change. I do not know how they would know about that. They said that the ocean is going to come up every year and now I see it happening. In addition, they said there would be more wind and not as many earthquakes and now that I am older, it is happening. They used to tell me when it was

nice all the time and no wind, there are a lot of little earthquakes. One time I was walking and I did not feel the earthquake but I saw the land wavy like. Later on when I reached the village, the elders told me there was an earthquake. They told me that the world would end sometime and not too far away.

They also mentioned that the children would start going against their parents. The kids would not listen and now I am seeing it happening. The parents cannot control their children because the government made a law saying we cannot spank our children and if we did we either would end up in jail or be separated from our families. Long time ago if one kid did something wrong everybody was spanked. That is how we controlled our kids. For hunting and fishing, the elders told me not to kill or take anything that I do not need. They asked me to control the wildlife. They never wasted anything that is edible. For example, when they would shoot the geese they pluck the whole head and eat it, but I never tried it because there was no meat on the head.

What I was told when I was younger is that if you have an easy life you pay for it later. They told me to be satisfied for what I have and what I get and not complain. If you ask for things you do not need or take more than you need and complain, you will be sorry later. I learned that when you fix something in a hurry you end up doing it again but if you take your time, you're finished on that first try.

When I was young I was told to respect elders, teachers, doctors, priests. We had a chief in the village and when the chief said anything the vice chief went around the houses and told the people what was going to happen or what we needed to do. For example, if we needed to clean the village, everyone helped and if the kids did anything wrong we were spanked, even if we did not do anything. Even after the war, I was told to help others and not ask for help so I used to help others, even when I was a kid and even when I did not have food or anything. The elders

did not have much to give me in return so they said that I will do better later in years, and that I am right now. Another thing old timers told me was that when you walk don't drink water, and that's how I used to be. I used to walk all day, sometimes eight to 12 hours without water and never get tired. Once I got home, I would drink water and get tired out, so I believe what they told me.

Everybody in Attu and Atka goes to church, or used to. I hardly go to church anymore because an elder told me, "If you go to church just to think or for just amusement, you might as well not go at all and just stay home and pray where there is no distractions." This is why I don't bother. I also believe God is everywhere and he can hear you pray no matter where you are.



Photo 48. Atka church and houses. (Source: City of Atka, ca. 2001)

When I said I saw Jesus just before the morning the Japanese landed, an old timer told me that kids see what adults can't see. I believed him because I saw Jesus come down. He did not touch the

ground, but He blessed me and then when I turned around to see if anyone was watching, Jesus was gone. I also said I saw a ghost one evening. It was the shape of a person and I could see right through it. That next morning someone died.

Relatives from Attu:

I came back from Japan with my two uncles, Innokenty Golodoff and Willy Golodoff. My uncles told me some stories about Attu afterwards. When I was growing up I used to ask my mom about Japan but she never wanted to talk about it. I think my brother wants to forget about Japan also. I was always interested about what happened throughout my childhood but no one really wanted to talk about it. I am always interested. I think Japan was a nice place to live when I was staying there.

I had cousins, uncles and aunts on Attu but I don't know a lot about them. My mother died from diabetes at Alaska Native Medical Center in Anchorage while I was 30 or 40 and living in Atka, and her body was sent back to Atka. The only Attuans left are my younger brother Greg, my younger sister Elizabeth, and me. My older brother John died last year. Greg Golodoff lives in Atka and Elizabeth Kudrin lives in Anchorage. My brother and sister don't like to talk about Japan. That is all I know from Attu. Children of Attu people are still around, but most of them are not living in Atka. I do not even know how many there are. I know one living here in Atka is about all.

I don't know if my older brother and sister were in school when we were taken to Japan, but I think they must have been. My older brother lived in Atka. He died in August 2009. John didn't like to talk about what happened because he didn't keep track of what was going on. He was six to eight years older than me. I didn't know him very well and



Photo 49. Elizabeth and Gregory Golodoff in Atka in 1946-1947 (Source: UW Press, Ethel Ross Oliver)

after the war he didn't come back to Atka with us. John went to school at Mt. Edgecombe. He came back to the Aleutians and started to work on the North Star. One day the North Star came to Atka and John got off and stayed for a while. He left to go find a job on a fishing boat. He came back to live on Atka six years ago.

My brother Greg joined the Army. Then he lived in Anchorage and worked there. I took Greg to work on a processor. After that Greg moved to Atka, where he still lives.

I was married to my wife for over 50 years and I have eight kids with her, four boys and four girls. One of the girls passed away not too long ago but she left a beautiful little granddaughter Niki. All my kids are grown up and do not live with us anymore. My son Raymond lives in Anchorage and is a school bus driver. He moved to Anchorage three years ago to find work.

Family

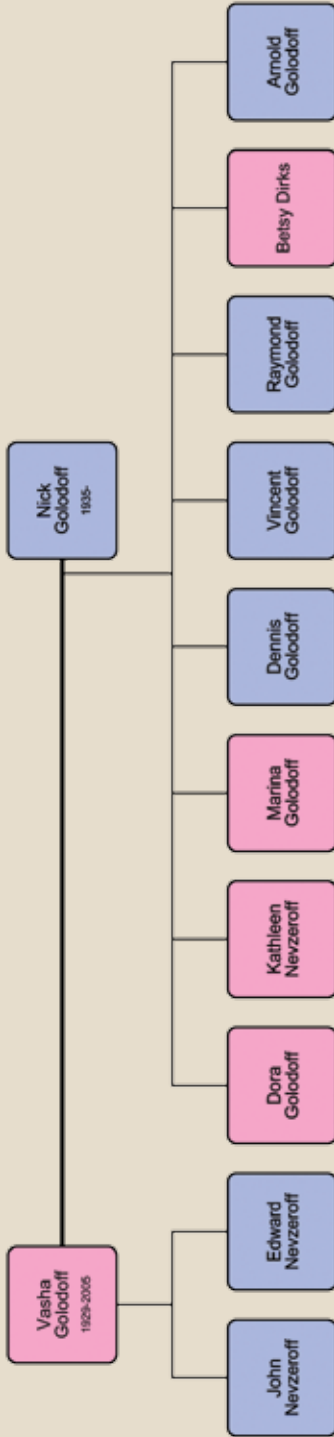


Fig. 6. Nick's Children (Kinship Chart)
Created using Family Echo—<http://www.familyecho.com/>

The reason I'm writing this book is to tell you about how Aleuts were back then, how my life back then got me to where I am now, how I learned, and what happened during the war. There is little info about Attu and Atka out there. Hardly anyone knows about the islands or Aleuts. The Aleuts today all turned modern.