

# Epilogue

## Remembering and Revisiting the Lost Villages

By Rachel Mason



### *The Beginning of the Project*

The Lost Villages of the Aleutians project tells the story of four Alaskan Unangañ villages left behind in the evacuations and relocations of World War II, and never permanently resettled. It started in 2003, when historian Linda Cook was working to establish the Aleutian World War II National Historic Area, part of the Affiliated Areas of the National Park Service, Alaska Region. She heard of funding opportunities for oral history projects about the Japanese internment camps of World War II, and thought of documenting the evacuation and relocation of Unangañ to Southeast Alaska in the same era. As a result, the NPS investigated the Unangañ evacuation sites to determine their eligibility for National Register of Historic Places designation. The initial proposal focused on the “Lost Villages,” communities the U.S. government decided were too small and remote to repopulate after the war, and whose residents were resettled in other villages upon return to the Aleutians.

Linda asked historian and teacher Ray Hudson to conduct oral history interviews with people from the Lost Villages who had been evacuated to Southeast Alaska, and in early 2004, he began work on the project. Ray interviewed five Unangañ elders living in Unalaska: Nicholai S. Lekanoff, Nicholai Galaktionoff, Eva Tcheripanoff, Irene Makarin, and Moses Gordieff. The elders were former residents of Makushin, Kashega, and Biorka, three small villages in the Unalaska Island area, and in the interviews they talked about their lives in those villages and their experiences during World War II, when Unangañ in the Aleutian Islands were taken by boat to relocation camps in Southeast Alaska, ostensibly for their own protection. Ten years later, of the original group of elders, only Nick Lekanoff, Sr. and Eva Tcheripanoff are still living.

The interviews resulted in the 2004 volume *The Beginning of Memory*, which included oral histories recorded with each of the five elders, in addition

to a past interview with Sophie Pletnikoff, Eva Tcheripanoff's mother. Ray also wrote a detailed introduction to the oral histories, drawing upon many archival government and church records as well as past interviews with Unalaska residents that were conducted by Ray Hudson and his students for the Unalaska City School District's Cuttlefish volumes.

The Lost Villages project has stimulated enormous interest, both to Unanga and others. Every time I have made a presentation about the project, whether in Unalaska, Anchorage, Southeast Alaska, or even Seattle, someone has come forward to identify a photo, correct a mistake, or tell about a relative's experiences. Recording the history of four tiny, remote villages, each originally with fewer than 50 people, and with only a handful of surviving residents today, has generated a large network of people whose lives were connected to those places.

The project evolved over a decade. After *The Beginning of Memory* was completed, NPS historian Annaliese Jacobs Bateman was assigned to prepare a publication on the Lost Villages of the Aleutians, using the interviews for the Eastern Aleutians and secondary sources about Attu, the fourth village included in the project. Anna had an ambitious plan to link the Lost Villages to the colonial history of Russian America, and she assembled an enormous amount of information from church records, U.S. Coast Guard reports, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service documents, and a wide array of other sources. When Anna left Alaska and the NPS to attend graduate school, she took the project with her, intending to complete it from afar. Eventually, as her educational pursuits intervened and research interests shifted, she transferred the project to me. With the huge advantage of being able to use all the information Ray and Anna had already collected, I set out to complete the Lost Villages project. My initial plan was to make modest changes to *The Beginning of Memory*, perhaps adding more background material from Anna's research, photographs, or more oral history interviews to the work Ray had already done. Instead, as an expanding group of Unanga connected to the Lost Villages shared ideas and enthusiasm, the project took on a life of its own. It became much more public and participatory as it became centered upon boat trips to revisit the Lost Villages with former residents and their descendants.

In 2006, I discussed the project with Okalina Patricia (Patty) Lekanoff-Gregory, daughter of Lost Villages elder Nick Lekanoff, Sr. Remembering trips her father had made to Kashega and Makushin, and how meaningful they had been to the entire family, Patty convinced me that the Lost Villages project would be considerably enhanced by former residents' visits to the village. Nick had most recently visited Makushin in 2005 with archaeologist Chris Wooley to document damage from the *Selandang Ayu* shipwreck and oil spill. Emphasizing the centrality of the church in each village, Patty said the elders would want to plant a large cross at the sites where the churches had stood in the villages.

### *Spreading the Word*

Posting a notice for the project on the Aleut-L list service led to wider contacts with descendants of the Lost Villages. One of them was Josephine Borenin-Shangin, granddaughter of Nick Borenin from Makushin. She helped me meet her great-aunt Mattie Abloogalook, who as Matrona Borenin at age three was the youngest evacuee from Makushin. Although she came back to the Aleutians after the war to be resettled in Akutan, she was soon taken back to Southeast Alaska to a tuberculosis hospital in Sitka. She stayed in Sitka to attend high school at Mount Edgecombe, where she met her husband, an Iñupiaq from Nome.

Josephine (Josy) had grown up in Akutan and remembered her grandfather Nick, who was resettled in Akutan after the war and married Marie Mensoff from that village. Later, in Unalaska, I learned from Nick Galaktionoff that once Makushin had three boys named Nick: Nick Borenin, Nick Galaktionoff, and Nick Lekanoff. Nick Borenin died in 2000.

Also through Aleut-L, I corresponded by e-mail with Mary Diakanoff, originally from Kashega, now living in Juneau. AB Rankin and her daughter Denise Rankin led me to contact their relative George Gordaoff, formerly a Kashega resident but now living in Anchorage, after they saw him at the 2008 annual meeting of The Aleut Corporation.

Over several visits to his home, George told of his experiences as a young boy in Kashega before World War II and in Southeast Alaska during the war. Both his parents died while he was young and he had to find his own way in life. He stayed with different relatives in Kashega, as a young teenager in the early 1940s, and found employment at the Chernofski sheep ranch just before the war. After the Kashega residents were evacuated and brought by ship to Wrangell, he briefly worked as a cook for the large group of relocated Unangaġ. Instead of going with the other Kashega residents to Ward Lake near Ketchikan, George was able to find work in Juneau. As we planned a trip to revisit Kashega, George was determined to go, even though he was having trouble with his knees. He would have been very happy to revisit Chernofski as well.

Jane Mensoff, originally from Akutan and descended from Kashega and Biorka, responded to my posting on Aleut-L. Jane lives in Seattle and has been active in the Pacific Northwest Aleut Council, a group that brings together Unangaġ living in Washington and Oregon. She immediately expressed interest in going to the villages and was frequently in touch. She and her partner Gregory Jones even volunteered



Josephine Borenin-Shangin (left) and her great-aunt, Mattie Abloogalook, May 2009. Photograph by Rachel Mason.

to pay for their own travel from Seattle to Unalaska in order to participate in the boat trip.

As the circle of those connected to the Lost Villages widened, I also met Unanga from other villages whose lives were intertwined with Makushin, Biorka, or Kashega. Millie McKeown, Cultural Heritage Director at the Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association, suggested I talk to Bill Ermeloff, then living in an assisted living home in Anchorage. Bill, who passed away in 2011, lived in Nikolski most of his life. His parents died when he was young and his adoptive father was Afenogan Ermeloff from Nikolski. Annie Olsen, Pete Olsen's adopted daughter who died in Makushin before the war, was Bill Ermeloff's biological sister. With the other residents of the smallest Unanga communities (which included Nikolski and Akutan as well as Makushin, Kashega, and Biorka), Bill had been evacuated to Southeast Alaska and spent the wartime years at Ward Lake, near Ketchikan. While there, he had been able to find work at Metlakatla, clearing trees away from the airstrip for the military.

Genealogist Marti Murray, a longtime Unalaska resident now living in Kodiak, contributed an extremely useful component of the project by compiling "mini-biographies" of each of the Lost Villages. Marti combed through census data, marriage and death records, newspaper articles, and other sources to find genealogical information about each of the residents present in Biorka, Kashega, Makushin and Attu in 1942. Later, she created genealogical mini-biographies for Akutan, Nikolski, and Unalaska. Marti's work made me appreciate the complex kinship and marriage connections among the Eastern Aleutian villages. It also showed how common it was in the early 20th century for an Unanga to have stepparents, adoptive parents, half-siblings, and/or several marriages. Family disruptions through death, illness, or divorce led to moves between villages.

### ***Beginning the Village Journeys***

The next task for the Lost Villages project was to find a way to bring people to the villages. My assistant Shannon Apgar-Kurtz and I called numerous airlines and air taxis, and could not find a satisfactory way to charter a plane that would take more than three or four people. We also looked into chartering a boat and ran into the same problem. We were finally able to charter the *Tigla*, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's research vessel operating for the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge. The *Tigla* had enough bunks for 12 people; already, there was so much interest in the trip that we knew there would be a lot of competition for those spots. Shannon and I organized an informal Boat Trip Steering Committee in Anchorage. One of the committee's major functions was to arbitrate who was "on the list" to go on the village trip. We gave priority to elderly former residents of the villages, and their descendants, but we also wanted to ensure that we had someone to videotape and photograph the experience.



*Tiġlaġ* at Unalaska, September 2010. Photograph by Greg Jones.

Patty Gregory had told me that we needed to go early in the summer, before the grass got too high. I saw pictures of Biorka in July, with very tall grass there. Unfortunately, the only time we were able to charter the *Tiġlaġ* was at the very end of summer, on August 31. That meant the grass would be at least shoulder-high in Makushin. It wasn't a problem in Kashega, however, because that village site was frequented by feral cows that ate the grass and trampled the remains of buildings. The situation had not changed since archaeologist Chris Wooley documented the cows' damage to the site in summer of 2005.

Cow damage in Kashega, July, 2005. Photograph by Chris Wooley.

Because of concerns about the health and safety of the elderly or frail passengers, we brought along a medical provider. Irene McGlashan, a community health practitioner at Unalaska's Oonalaska Wellness Center, agreed to come on the trip in this role. I also worried that it might be difficult or unsafe for the elderly participants to walk around the villages. Patty suggested we bring chairs to sit in near the church. The elders could drink tea and talk about memories of the village while the younger people dug the hole to plant the cross at the site of the church.



The crosses were Patty's idea. The Ounalashka Corporation, where Patty's husband Dave Gregory was the head of the maintenance department, constructed and donated two five-foot wooden Russian Orthodox crosses to set up where the churches had been at Makushin and Kashega. The priest in Unalaska would bless the crosses before they were loaded on the boat in Unalaska.

We had to obtain consent from the St. George Tanaq Corporation to go to Kashega and from the St. Paul Tanadgusix (TDX) Corporation to go to Makushin. The Pribilof Island communities, first established after 1800 when Russian colonists brought Unanga there to harvest fur seals, have many kinship connections with Eastern Aleutian villages. In the first part of the 20th century, residents of Kashega and Makushin traveled in the summer to the Pribilofs to participate in the seal harvest. The close relationship with these villages influenced the Pribilof Island corporations to choose these now-empty sites as land selections under provisions of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. The Pribilof Islands and nearby smaller islands did not provide sufficient lands for St. George and St. Paul to select. The need to complete a right-of-entry agreement irritated one of the Makushin descendants, who complained that they should not have to seek permission to visit their own village.

Because many of the descendants of the Lost Villages lived in Unalaska, it made sense to charter the boat to go from Unalaska to each of the villages. Participants from Seattle, Juneau, and Anchorage flew into Unalaska to await the beginning of the trip.

The list of participants from Unalaska was not final until the last minute. AB Rankin, Alice Moller's daughter and Mary Diakanoff's half-sister, was very interested in the trip, but regretfully declined to go on the boat, saying she gets terribly seasick. AB's son Brian Rankin, however, was an enthusiastic volunteer. His email ID was "kashega," a clue to his strong attachment to the village.

Nick Galaktionoff, originally from Makushin, planned to come with us, but on the day before the trip he decided against it. He thought the seas would be rough, and it turned out he was right. In his stead, Nick sent his younger relative Fred Lekanoff, whose grandfather was from Makushin. Eva Tcheripanoff, from Kashega, was happy to see her relatives and friends as they assembled in Unalaska before the trip, but her health prevented her from going.

The oldest passenger in the group that boarded the boat was Nick Lekanoff, Sr. from Makushin, addressed as "Starosta" because of his position as a lay leader in the Russian Orthodox church. Also aboard were Nick's daughter Patty Gregory, Mary Diakanoff and her son Darryl Diakanoff, George Gordaoff, Josy Shangin, Fred Lekanoff, Brian Rankin, Jane Mensoff, our medical provider Irene McGlashan, videographer Lauren Adams and her assistant Laresa Syverson, Debbie Corbett of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Rachel Mason (myself) of the National Park Service.



### *Makushin after a Rough Ocean Voyage*

On the night before we left, the community held a send-off ceremony for the boat passengers. It was also for the elders who remembered the Lost Villages, but whose health prevented them from going on the boat. Laresa Syverson and some of the youth performed Unanga dances, and I presented a slideshow with old pictures of Biorka, Kashaga, and Makushin.

We started out in the early morning. Nick Lekanoff, Sr. had second thoughts at the last minute about going, but finally arrived at the boat with encouragement from his daughter Patty and her husband Dave. Lauren Adams, from Unalaska's television and radio station KUCB, came on the trip to document it on videotape, with assistance from Laresa Syverson. The *Tigla* has a man-lift to help passengers on board if they have difficulty climbing up and down ladders. One way or another, everyone was eventually on board and we were off before daylight.

From the moment we left, the seas were rough and almost everyone got seasick. George Gordaoff was the only one who seemed to be unaffected, although in the first part of the trip I was proud that I was

Nick Lekanoff, Sr. at Makushin, August 31, 2009. Photograph by Josy Shangin.

able to stay up and even eat lunch. Later, though, I gratefully lay down on my bunk. George, a retired sea captain, spent much of the trip up in the wheelhouse with Captain Billy Pepper. After fighting the wind and seas throughout the morning, Billy proposed that we not try to continue to Kashega, but to return to Unalaska after a visit to Makushin.

As we came into Makushin Bay, suddenly the sun appeared, the seas calmed, and a rainbow arced across the sky. The boat crew helped the passengers from the *Tiġlaġ* into an Achilles inflatable boat to go to the beach. The cross was also carefully loaded into the Achilles for transport to the village. George, Mary, and Mary's son Darryl decided to stay with the boat instead of going to shore.



Transporting passengers from the *Tiġlaġ* to Makushin beach, August 31, 2009. Photograph by Josy Shangin.

The young men and the boat crew brought shovels to the village to dig a hole to plant the cross, and two of them shouldered the cross to carry up to the church site from the beach. Patty had brought a chair for her father to sit on. Lauren and Laresa lugged their camera equipment. We had to push our way through shoulder-high grass.

Rainbow at Makushin, August 31, 2009. Photograph by Lauren Adams.







There wasn't much left of the old houses, but there was a large roof of what looked like a barn. From old pictures of Makushin, I knew that the biggest house had been Pete Olsen's, and I could see its remains at one end of the village. I gathered some dirt and a nail from what I thought was Nick Galaktionoff's old house. Later, he was happy to get the dirt and he slipped the nail into his pocket.

Nick Lekanoff showed the others where to place the cross. Brian Rankin, Fred Lekanoff, and Billy Pepper shared the digging. Once the cross had been planted and participants sang "Memory Eternal," we all sat on the ground and Nick talked to us about the old church and the houses in the village. There was one grave still visible near the site of the old church, and he thought it belonged to Annie Olsen, Pete Olsen's adopted daughter, who had died in 1936.

When we got back to Unalaska a crowd of family members and well-wishers was waiting to greet us. Brian Rankin's seven-year-old daughter Sasha came aboard and got a ride in the man-lift. The cross intended for Kashega was also taken off the boat in the man-lift and put in storage to wait for the boat ride the next year. Brian and the other descendants of Kashega were disappointed that we had to forego the trip there this time, but no one would have been eager to continue under the sea conditions we had experienced that morning. All understood that in the Aleutians the sea and the weather are powerful factors. The trip to Kashega was postponed until the next year.

Carrying the cross  
at Makushin,  
August 31, 2009.  
Photograph by  
Lauren Adams.



Brian Rankin and his daughter Sasha in the *Tiglaâ*'s manlift, August 31, 2009 Photograph courtesy AB Rankin.

### ***Launching the Boat Trips in 2010***

The *Tiglaâ* charter for 2010, the second year of Lost Villages trips, was accomplished thanks to a Challenge Grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, facilitated by Debbie Corbett. Roberta Gordaoff, an anthropology student at University of Alaska Anchorage, offered to come with her grandfather George on the second trip. The two of them showed up in Unalaska with George in a wheelchair.

Carlene Arnold, a student from Lawrence, Kansas, contacted Debbie Corbett, who had been collaborating with Carlene's professor Dixie West on an archaeological research project and a book about the Aleutian Islands. Carlene, who grew up in Sitka, Alaska but now lives in Kansas, had only recently learned that her mother was born in Kashega. She was writing an M.A. thesis for the University of Kansas's Global Indigenous Nations Studies program about her mother's experience of evacuation during World War II, about her grandparents' hospitalization and death after the war, and about her discovery of these events. Debbie Corbett arranged for Carlene to come to Unalaska as we all assembled for the second trip.

Here are some excerpts from Carlene's thesis, *The Legacy of Unjust and Illegal Treatment of Unangan During World War II and Its Place in Unangan History* (2011):

*When I was growing up, my parents rarely discussed the family or the history of the cultures from which they came. Regrettably, I did not realize that my parents were of different tribes. Dad was Tlingit, born and raised in Sitka. Mom was Unangan, born in Unalaska before she moved to Wrangell. (4)*

*Because my mom had not disclosed her family background to us, I decided to look into Unangan culture. I began by researching the Aleut Corporation and other Unangan corporations. I discovered that there was a history I did not know, that during World War II there were some Unanga who had been taken as prisoners by the Japanese while others who were on other islands had been evacuated to Southeast Alaska by the United States military. (5)*

*I found my mom's and her family's name on the list of evacuees from Kashega. Needless to say, I was surprised, not only because they were on the list, but I also discovered that my mom had a brother I did not know about. ... I needed to know for myself, but also for my siblings, kids, grandkids and for those thereafter, what this story was all about. (6)*

### **Trip to Kashega**

At the end of August 2010, participants again assembled in Unalaska. We visited friends in Unalaska and waited for the boat to arrive. As had occurred the year before, there was a send-off ceremony at the Senior Center in Unalaska the day before we left. Laresa Syverson and some of the Unalaska youth performed Unanga dances. Elders who were unable to go on the boat trip and other community members assembled to wish the passengers well. Carlene was meeting relatives for the first time:

Laresa Syverson leads dancers at send-off, Unalaska, September 1, 2010. Photograph by Roberta Gordaoff.



Audience at send-off, Unalaska, September 1, 2010. Nick Galaktionoff Sr. (left front); Irene McGlashan, (right front). Photograph by Roberta Gordaoff.



*At the Send Off Ceremony, I was excited, but nervous at the same time because I knew that I was going to meet new family members whom I did not know before. After the ceremony, Mary caught my attention and told me that she knew my parents and grandparents from Kashega, and how they kept their house very clean and that it was the biggest house there in the village. Later, I discovered that Mary and I were cousins. I also was introduced to Eva Tcheripanoff, also a cousin, and she had known my grandparents. Eva lives in Unalaska; she was from Kashega at the time of the evacuation. (78)*

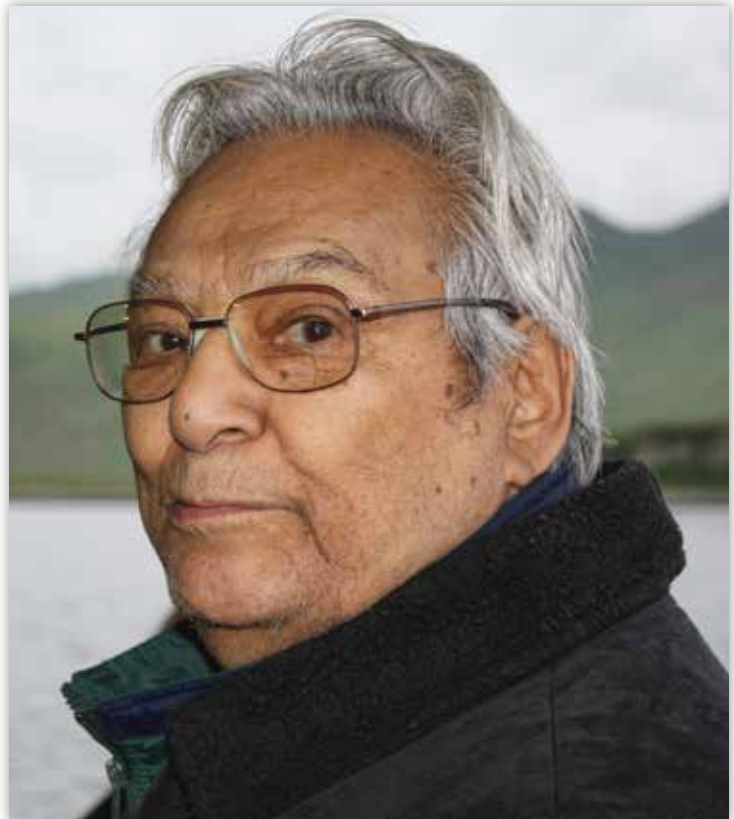
Again, the Ounalashka Corporation had donated two crosses to plant at the church sites, this time in the villages of Kashega and Biorka. These were two new crosses, because over the past year, the corporation had used the one set aside for Kashega for a grave marker. This year, when participants asked the Russian Orthodox priest in Unalaska, Father Kashevaroff, to bless the crosses, he expressed his concern that if the crosses were to be placed on church property, it was necessary for a priest, and preferably the priest's wife as well, to be present. He did not insist on that condition, however, and he blessed both crosses. They were brought on board the day of the trip, using the manlift.

Passengers on board for the trip to Kashega included George Gordaoff and his granddaughter Roberta Gordaoff; Mary Diakanoff and her daughter Evonne Mason; Jane Mensoff; Ruth Kudrin and her daughter Anesia Kudrin; Eva Kudrin; Brian Rankin; Fred Lekanoff; medical provider Irene McGlashan; videographer Lauren Adams; Debbie Corbett of USFWS; and myself of NPS. We were happy to see Billy Pepper, the captain of the *Tiġlaġ*, and some of the same crew members we remembered from the year before.

The *Tiġlaġ* left port on the evening of September 1, to give the passengers a chance to sleep as we traveled. The seas were much calmer than the year before, and the passengers crawled into their bunks and slept peacefully until the vessel anchored up off Kashega. In the morning, crew members ferried the passengers ashore in an Achilles, along with a cross for the church site. Very little remained of the houses and other buildings in the village. Wild cows, holdovers from the ranching days, had trampled the foundations and kept the grass short.

On September 3, George Gordaoff stood in Kashega again for the first time in almost 70 years. George was 17 in 1942 when a boat arrived to evacuate the villagers. After joining the Army during World War II and after a long career mainly on boats in Alaska waters, George is now retired and living in Anchorage. George's knees were worse this year and he needed a wheelchair to get around in Unalaska before getting on the boat. At the site of Kashega's former church, though, he looked pretty spry.

George Gordaoff  
aboard the *Tiġlaġ*,  
September 2, 2010.  
Photograph by  
Lauren Adams.







George Gordaoff and his granddaughter Roberta arrive at Kashega, September 2, 2010. Photograph by Lauren Adams.



Heading to Kashega, September 2, 2010. Photograph by Carlene Arnold.



Left to right: Anesia Kudrin, Ruth Kudrin, Jane Mensoff and Irene McGlashan at Kashega ruins, September 2, 2010. Photograph by Carlene Arnold.

*The rest of us joined up with them. The Tiġlaġ crew were great, in that they were very patient and worked well with the elders. (79)*

*When everyone else had arrived, they began to explore the area of the former village. There were very little traces that remained. We found a few boards or posts from the original church that people picked up to take back with them. Everyone was gathering little souvenirs such as berries, pans, and soil to take back with them. They were also taking pictures of each other and the area of the former village. I could hear people talking about how beautiful Kashega was—and still is—nestled in a nice location for fishing with a good beach for gathering seafood and berries when they were ripe for the picking. (68)*

*Afterwards, everyone gathered at the former site of the church. A Russian cross was brought out and, with George's direction, the cross was placed there followed by a small service where the group blessed the cross with holy water and sang a song. Having the opportunity to go back to Kashega meant a lot to Mary and George. One could see it in their faces and the emotions were more than words can express. By the end of the ceremony it was early evening and time to head back to the Tiġlaġ for the return to Unalaska. (68-69)*





George Gordaoff  
at Kashega,  
September 2, 2010.  
Photograph by  
Jane Mensoff.

*After everyone explored the former village site, we gathered and placed a Russian cross at the former site of the church and had a small ceremony, blessed the cross, said a prayer, and sang a song. Also, when the cross was being placed, everyone placed a shovelful of dirt at the cross, as is a tradition with the Russian Orthodox Church. While the ceremony was taking place, I felt a sense of peacefulness, and I could sense the ancestors who were there during the ceremony. It was an experience that I have never felt before, and I will always remember that day of the ceremony at Kashega and keep it dear to my heart. (81)*

*I had never thought that I would be able to see where my mom was from, much less to have walked on the land that she knew, before being taken to the Southeast. While I was exploring, I picked some salmonberries, gathered some soil from the area of the church, and took it back with me to Unalaska so I could take it to my grandparents' graves and give them something from Kashega. (80-81)*

Carlene also talked about the boat ride back to Unalaska:

*While on the boat, Mary and George told stories of their childhood at Kashega, from the time when Mary was only ten or eleven and George was a little older. (79)*

*They enjoyed listening to George's stories of his childhood in Kashega. I was excited to see where my mom and her parents were*



Mary Diakanoff and  
George Gordaoff  
aboard the *Tiglaġ*,  
September 2, 2010.  
Photograph by  
Lauren Adams.

*born and being able to walk where they lived. It had a certain beauty to it. I have grown up with trees around us all the time, but seeing the landscape of Kashega was beautiful and peaceful. I could see how the people loved this place and were disappointed that they could not return to it after the war. As we explored the site, we mostly found boards from the houses. At the site of the church, there were posts. I stayed with Mary, who was trying to remember where everything was. She pointed out where my grandparents' house was and said that it was the biggest house there, and that everyone kept their homes clean. For her, it was a special place when she was growing up; it was her favorite place to go of all places. She did not like Unalaska; it was big and was like a metropolitan type place for her. (80)*

### ***Trip to Biorka***

The second boat trip of September 2010, to Biorka, was a day trip. Kathy Dirks was the senior Biorka descendant who made this year's journey to the village. Kathy's grandfather Andrew Makarin, a church reader in Biorka, led about 20 people to resettle Biorka after the war,

despite the lack of support from the government. After several years, it became increasingly difficult to make a living there. The call of home was strong, but the need for economic survival was stronger. One by one, each family began spending more time in Unalaska each time they traveled there. Finally, after a storm blew down some of the houses, even Andrew Makarin realized he had to leave. He returned with some of his grandchildren, including Kathy Dirks, in 1965 to construct a small house where the altar had stood in the former church.

Many of the others who went to Biorka had gone to Kashega the day before. Again, Irene McGlashan served as medical provider. Brian Rankin and Fred Lekanoff came partly to provide strong labor for planting the cross. Eva Kudrin, Jane Mensoff, Lauren Adams, Carlene Arnold, Rachel Mason and Debbie Corbett were back for another trip. Greg Jones, Jane Mensoff's companion, and Alexandra Gutierrez, a reporter for the Unalaska TV station, joined the group. There was room for two more, so George Gordaoff and his granddaughter Roberta decided they would come back for another trip as well.

The *Tigla* left in the early morning and was anchored off Biorka a couple of hours later. Again, the passengers came ashore by Achilles, this time well bundled up from the rain. With difficulty, the group climbed up the steep bank and broke a path to the site of the church. There were no cows in Biorka to eat the grass, so it was shoulder-high. There were still remains of some houses at the village site. It appeared that foxes had already been living in the house Kathy Dirks identified as Andrew Makarin's home.

Biorka, Beaver Inlet,  
September 3, 2010,  
Photograph by  
Carlene Arnold.



Here is Carlene's account of the trip to Biorka:

*After the Kashega trip, we returned to Dutch Harbor; the next morning we departed for Biorka. Most of the same people that went to Kashega also attended the Biorka trip. Jane's father was from Biorka, and Kathy Dirks is a descendant from Biorka. Nick Galaktionoff and his son John were unable to attend because of health conditions; maybe the rough weather also was a part of the reason they did not go. Anna Mercurief, a former resident of Biorka, decided not to go because such bad weather was predicted. Although this portion of the trip was for the descendants from Biorka to actually set foot on the site of where their family originated, some people from other villages also participated in the trip. (70-71)*

*Friday morning, September 2, 2010, we left Dutch Harbor and headed to Biorka, a shorter trip than the one to Kashega. The weather was bad, but not as bad as it had been on the 2009 trip, according to what everyone who had gone was saying. It was mostly the women who had ties to Biorka, so they were especially excited to go. (71)*

*The seas were rough during the entire trip. When we arrived at Biorka, I was surprised to see the way the grass was there. It was unlike Kashega, which had wild cows that helped keep the grass low. At Biorka, the grass was so tall that one could not see the ground. Because ground visibility was poor, a couple of people fell into relatively deep holes, but no one was hurt. At times, the wind blew sideways, making it hard to look around. However, I have to say that even with the bad weather it still seemed as if it had been a beautiful place to live. It was mountainous, good for hiking, with a nice beach for beachcombing. Fred Lekanoff and Brian Rankin dug a hole for the cross to be placed at the site of where the church had been. At Biorka, it was easier to locate where the church had been because an altar was still standing. Although it had deteriorated, it was possible to see what it was. Andrew Makarin, Kathy Dirks' grandfather, had built the altar on an earlier visit in 1965. A storm had blown down some of the houses there. Makarin had torn down the walls of these and the surviving roof of the church and built the altar on the church site. (71)*

*While the men were digging, we went exploring. There was a lake near Biorka and it was very peaceful although the weather was bad. From the boat, I had noticed that there was a partial building still standing. I learned it had been the house of Andrew*

*Makarin. One could see some items in the house, such as a dresser and part of a bed. It was amazing to see these items still in place after all these years. Kathy was excited to see her grandfather's house... Words could not express her feelings of seeing the house still standing there with the possessions of her grandparents still inside. (72)*

*I have to say though, even with the bad weather there, it was still a beautiful place to live. The weather did not let up while we there at Biorka. It was rather hard to explore the village site, because of the weather and the tall grass, and it was hard to take good pictures there. There was a partial house still standing, after all these years; it was amazing, with the strong winds that the islands get each year. Either Brian Rankin or Fred Lekanoff went inside the house to retrieve something from there and gave it to Kathy Dirks, because it was her grandfather's house. For Kathy, it meant a lot to see her grandfather's house still there, and to see what was still in there and retrieve something from there was a bonus. (82)*

Preparing to plant  
a cross at Biorka,  
September 3, 2010.  
Photograph by  
Greg Jones,





Kathy Dirks at Biorka with beach-polished stones in a blue tinware plate that may have come from her grandfather's home. "I told myself it was," she later said. Photograph by Lauren Adams September 3, 2010.

In 2010, the small house Andrew Makarin had built still stood at the site of the church. Boat passengers Brian Rankin and Fred Lekanoff, with help from *Tigla* captain Billy Pepper, planted a new Russian Orthodox cross nearby. With Irene McGlashan, our health provider, Kathy Dirks said a prayer. Tears fell down Kathy's face, and the faces of others, as she and Irene sang Memory Eternal beside the now-weatherbeaten little house. I thought of how sad Andrew Makarin must have been to close down the church. The brief ceremony was a fitting memorial for the village and for its residents who are no longer with us.

*After looking at the house, everyone gathered at the cross to begin the ceremony. In Russian Orthodox tradition, we blessed the cross with Holy water and each of us put dirt in the area where it was located. Both Kathy and Irene McGlashan said a prayer and we sang —Memory Eternal—a song that had been sung at funerals. The cross and the ceremony were a suitable memorial for the village and for the remains of those who had been left behind. By the end of the ceremony, it seemed as if the weather was getting a little bit better. We headed back to the beach and waited for the Zodiac [Achilles] to come and take us back to the ship (73).*

*When the cross was ready to be put in place, there was another ceremony as mentioned earlier. While they were singing Memory Eternal, I had the same sense that the ancestors were [83] there again. During both ceremonies, it seemed like there was a peaceful or calmness about it. I believe everyone there felt the same way. (82-83)*

Nick Galaktionoff, Sr., originally from Makushin, married a girl from Biorka and was one of the people who moved to the resettled village after the war. The couple's first child, a son, was born there but died as an infant. Nick wanted to go back to visit his son's grave, but he didn't want to make the trip at this time of year, when rough seas were likely. At least he knew we had planted a cross near his son's resting place and had remembered him and the others who once lived there.



Carlene with her grandparents' graves, Unalaska, September 4, 2010. Photograph by Rachel Mason.

### ***Back in Unalaska after Kashega and Biorka***

Carlene recounted her thoughts about the trip after we returned to Unalaska:

*Both trips to Kashega and Biorka were a success. Former residents and descendants got to see the villages, gather mementoes, take pictures and videos of the area, and participate in the ceremony of blessing the cross before it was placed in the former site of the church in each of the villages. Stories and memories will always be in the hearts of everyone who attended the Lost Villages trips to Kashega and Biorka. (76)*

*Although my mother and I were not close, I feel that she or her parents had a part in my findings or research. I don't know why my mother did not disclose this part of her life to me or my siblings. But I am glad to have the opportunity to discover this part of her life for myself and for the rest of my family. However, there are still some unanswered questions that I will continue to look into. (76)*

Carlene also had an opportunity to visit her grandparents' final resting place in Unalaska. Her grandmother Nellie Yatchmenoff was evacuated to Southeast Alaska with her two small children, Laura and Paul, ages 4 and 2. Laura was Carlene's mother. When Laura's parents died in Southeast Alaska before they were able to return to Kashega, Laura was adopted by a non-Native family. Nellie and Peter Yatchmenoff were anonymously buried at the tuberculosis sanitarium in Sitka. Their remains were identified in the 1990s and returned to Unalaska, where they were buried in the cemetery. After our boat trip to Kashega, Carlene visited her grandparents' graves, bringing soil and berries she and others gathered in the village. She sprinkled both on the graves of Nellie and Peter so they would rest with something from their home.

Carlene's research had uncovered surprising information about her grandparents' experience in Southeast Alaska.

*While conducting research, I discovered some information that I really did not know about. I found a newspaper article in Sitka telling that the city was expanding its airport, and while they were working they came across an underground bunker that had a collection of caskets with no names on them, only numbers. Apparently, during the years from 1947 to 1966, there was a tuberculosis (TB) epidemic, and these patients were sent to Mt. Edgecombe Hospital in Sitka. I learned that my grandparents were a part of this story. My grandparents were evacuated from Kashega to Southeast Alaska, and while they were there, both contracted TB. They were sent to Mt. Edgecombe, where they*



*eventually passed away, and were buried in the underground bunker. This explains why my mom and uncle were adopted. But I still do not know in which town they were adopted; this is one matter I will follow up on after my graduation. (77)*

*It had been twenty years since the mausoleum had been opened up. After it was opened, Bob Sam, coordinator of the Native Graves Protection and Repatriation program at Sitka Tribes of Alaska at that time, researched hospital records and had DNA tests performed on the patients. I believe that most of them were identified. They contacted my brother with the findings, and the city had a ceremony for those families that had family placed to rest in the mausoleum. In addition, if they found the family or where they came from, in accordance with the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), most were repatriated back to where they originated. (77)*

*My grandparents were repatriated back to Unalaska. I had been in contact with Laresa Syverson from Ounalashka Corporation in Unalaska on various inquiries about the Unangâ. After informing Syverson about my thesis and family history, she discovered that my grandparents were buried in the Unalaska cemetery. I was very appreciative that Laresa had gone out there to look for me. I understand that there was a ceremony for my grandparents when they were returned to Unalaska. I wish I could have attended the event myself, but what has passed is still heartwarming. (78)*

*The next day Rachel took me to the cemetery in Unalaska, where my grandparents are buried. There I place the berries and dirt that I collected at Kashega on their graves, and talked with them for a little bit. While I was in Unalaska, Rachel had taken me and a few others to visit with Nick Galaktionoff, also an evacuee from Biorka. While visiting with him and his son John, we discovered that we are cousins. Rachel or I told Nick who my parents were, and Nick told us that his mother was my grandmother's sister from Makushin. My grandmother was Natalia Lekanoff and her sister was Parascovia Lekanoff. Nick was unable to go on the Lost Villages trip to Biorka, due to his health and worries about the weather. John calls me every once in a while to see how I am doing. So, this trip was a discovery of new family for me as well. (84-85)*

*The timing was perfect; I would have never discovered where my mother and grandparents came from, had it not been for doing research on the Unangan people. Seeing the beauty of Kashega*



Peter Yatchmenoff's grave, Unalaska, September 4, 2010. Photograph by Carlene Arnold.



Nellie Yatchmenoff's grave, Unalaska, September 4, 2010. Photograph by Carlene Arnold.

*and sensing the ancestors that were there during the placement of the Russian Cross was more than I could have imagined or hoped to experience just reading other peoples' articles or books. Furthermore, while on the trip, I got to meet new friends and family who will always be a part of my life. Also, I discovered more about my mom's family, such as that her grandparents were interned in Sitka and were repatriated back to the Aleutians, and that my mom had a brother that I did not know about. I will continue to search or find out what happened to him. (87)*

The same morning that Carlene put the dirt and berries on her grandparents' graves, Roberta Gordaoff and I took a hike down to



Rachel Mason at top of the pass to Ugadaga, September 4, 2010. Photograph by Roberta Gordaoff.

Ugadaga Bay, following the trail the people from Biorka used to take. Mary Diakanoff remembered seeing them walk up the trail to sell their baskets and furs, returning with food and supplies they had received in trade or for cash. We drove to the top of the pass over an old military road. The trail down and up seemed long now, and we reflected on how much longer it would have been when there was no road to town and the Biorka residents had to walk five or more miles in addition to their boat ride to Ugadaga Bay.

### ***2011: Ketchikan and Ward Lake***

In May 2011, I had the opportunity to visit Ketchikan and Ward Lake, the Civilian Conservation Corps camp where the Unangañ residents of the smallest Aleutian villages, including Makushin, Kashega, and Biorka, were relocated during World War II. Charles Mobley, who had already investigated the Unangañ wartime relocation sites in Southeast Alaska to determine their eligibility for a National Historic Register designation, also traveled to Ketchikan to conduct further research on Ward Lake.

We learned that Feckla “Faye” McGlashan Schlais, from Akutan, had stayed in Ward Cove as a teenager during the war and was now living in Ketchikan. We met with Faye for lunch at the at the Rendezvous Senior Center, and she provided us with a photograph of her family, Hugh and Mattie McGlashan and some of their nine children, in front of the bus that Eugene Wacker used to transport Unangañ between Ward Lake and Ketchikan. While at Ward Lake, she found a job in downtown Ketchikan. She married Evard Schlais and stayed in Ketchikan after the war.



Boardwalk at Ward Lake, May 4, 2011. Photograph by Charles Mobley.

Chuck Mobley and I went to Ward Lake, where little remains of the CCC camp. There is now a picnic shelter at the site, and a sign has been placed to recognize the UnangaꝻ who were relocated there during World War II. Chuck took pictures and recorded information about the little evidence remaining, such as a broken footbridge and a coiled piece of metal. I also visited the Bayview Cemetery and walked over the row of unmarked UnangaꝻ graves. They included the graves of Ephemina Kudrin from Kashega, Jane Mensoff's grandmother, and of the two Eva Borenins from Makushin, one a teenager and the other a woman in her 50s. I knew about the graves from my colleague Greg Dixon, who had visited the cemetery the year before and met with the caretaker. Greg told me that although the burials are unmarked, the caretaker knows the location of each.

### ***Telling the Painful Story***

A common experience for descendants of the Lost Villages is that their parents never or very rarely talked with them about the evacuations of World War II. Former residents of the villages were far more willing to reflect on memories of life in the old villages, than they were to reminisce about the painful times of evacuation. Noticeably, in the transcribed oral history interviews, there is very little description of the actual experience of internment. Perhaps it is a cultural trait of UnangaꝻ to avoid talking about painful memories. After I spoke at the senior citizens' lunch in Unalaska, one woman asked, "Why did you have to bring up all these sad memories?" Before I approached another woman to ask her about her experiences at

Ward Lake, her daughter-in-law warned me that it was very hard for her to talk about, and she might not want to say anything. Other people handled painful memories as they dealt with the painful events: by getting through them and moving on. I asked Bill Ermeloff, from Nikolski, about his short stay with his young family at the Wrangell Institute, which I assumed must have been a difficult time. He said, “It was something new.”

The narrative style in the oral histories is related to the traditional Unangâ art of storytelling. According to Laughlin (1980) Unangâ had several different types of stories and styles of storytelling. In one style, described by a man from Akutan, the speaker paused frequently, followed by sounds of approval by the listeners. Although accuracy of memory was important, it was considered in bad form to correct a mistake. In the Lost Villages oral history narratives Ray Hudson recorded and other Unangâ interviews, I have noticed that even when memories differ, speakers do not usually correct other storytellers.

Narratives Jochelson collected in Unalaska in 1909 show another convention of Unangâ storytelling: to characterize each story, as storyteller Isidor Solovyov did, as the “work of my country.” The question-answer format of the Lost Villages interviews makes it less obvious, but there are still hints of this perspective in the way Nick Lekanoff, Nick Galaktionoff, Eva Tcheripanoff, Irene Makarin, and Moses Gordieff talked about their lives. Of Ray’s interviewees, Nick Galaktionoff stands out as a storyteller, but each had a personal style. Even as they recall their own experiences, the narrators still convey the work of their country, the foggy coasts and mountains of Unalaska Island. They were less inclined to comment and report on the unfamiliar country they lived through as a result of wartime relocation.



*At the Beginning of a Story.*

Unangaꝯ have experienced many displacements in their history, voluntary and involuntary. Before European contact, settlements were occasionally moved, usually for better access to resources, but also because of natural disasters, such as volcanoes. Under Russian colonial rule, men were forced to hunt sea otters, and hunting parties left their families and communities for months at a time. The Russians moved groups of people to work in the Pribilofs, or to consolidate the population into larger villages when smaller ones were decimated by disease and hardship. When Unangaꝯ communities were evacuated and their residents placed in relocation camps during World War II, their residents underwent a new kind of displacement. In a presentation at the Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association Senior Potluck in 2009, I referred to the Lost Villages as “abandoned” and was corrected by Alice Petrivelli, who told me that the departure was not voluntary.

Most of the former residents of the villages that Ray Hudson and others interviewed were children in 1942, when the evacuations occurred. Perhaps because many of them moved after the war to Unalaska, Akutan, Anchorage, Seattle, and elsewhere, they had relatively little chance to develop a collective memory of the old villages or about the wartime evacuation. They remember childhood events such as a doll left behind, or a fight with a cousin or sibling. There were some funny or matter-of-fact stories about presumably traumatic times. A collective view of the evacuation began to emerge after the reparations hearings in the 1980s. There have been disagreements and revisions of the stories of individual or collective migrations. Ironic editorials are added or implied in the retelling. Mary Diakanoff, who had stayed at Burnett Inlet in Southeast Alaska, said her future husband got work “building that nice camp for the Germans.” She was referring to the prisoner of war camp whose inmates were much better cared for than the Unangaꝯ housed in terrible conditions nearby.

Those who remembered the Lost Villages wanted to revisit the landscape and feel the wind, rain, and sea air as they had in the old days. George Gordaoff worried that he wouldn’t be able to walk very well around Kashega if he went back, but he wanted to see the coastline he remembered from the boat. For those evacuated to Southeast Alaska during the war, the alien landscape was one of the worst parts of the experience. Several people mentioned how difficult it was to get used to living among the trees in Southeast Alaska. The Unangaꝯ place of comfort was on treeless windswept islands.

Return visits by boat to the ruins of the villages, with the elderly surviving residents and some of their younger descendants, were key to the Lost Villages project. We planted a cross at the site of the church in each village, filming the residents. Almost all the surviving residents of the villages that we have been able to contact have said that they would love to go back now to the old villages. In fact, it was difficult to choose who was most “qualified” to go. Two of the elders who wanted to revisit their villages in 2009 were blind or nearly blind, but still wanted to go

back to the places they once lived. One of them, Nick Galaktionoff, often sat by himself on the beach at Unalaska while he fished. He could tell when there was a fish in the net. He could still feel the Aleutian wind and know when a plane was unlikely to fly or when a boat would encounter rough seas. He felt the landscape, even when he didn't see it.



Nick Galaktionoff on the beach at Unalaska, July 2, 2002. Photograph by Shelly Hudson.

The Lost Villages project speaks to those Unanga꥕ who remember being separated from their home villages, years of living in relocation camps in Southeast Alaska, and not being able to return home. It also speaks to their children and grandchildren, and to the descendants of all those who experienced the loss of their villages but are now gone. It is meaningful, though, to all of us. Many can relate to the strain of abrupt, unwelcome change from a familiar landscape to a foreign one, and the sadness of never being able to return home.

Sometimes people want to return to a painful place. Some Unanga꥕ have made trips back to Southeast Alaska to revisit evacuation camps. One reason they want to do that is to visit the graves at Funter Bay and Ketchikan. As they remembered and revisited their former villages, participants in the Lost Villages project did not want to return only to a place of happy memories. They wanted to honor their parents and relatives, and put them to rest.

### ***MEMORY ETERNAL***