

These stories come from interviews with elders as part of the *Learning Through Cultural Connections: The Northern Lights* project, developed by the Geophysical Institute.

Listen to elders tell these stories and learn more at culturalconnections.gi.alaska.edu/multimedia/

Note: *Some stories include references to death or may be unsettling for some readers. Adults may want to preview the stories, or read them along with children.*

Grace Pullock – Shishmaref

I'm originally from Shishmaref, but lived here in Nome. Our kids are born and raised in Nome. Those northern lights occur when it's real cold out at night time. The elders used to tell us not to whistle so much. Otherwise if we do those northern lights will come down, take your head off, and then use it for a football. Then that means we have to not try to make too much noise.

My brother and I were so cheap we used to really believe what elders tell us about those northern lights. We'd be right in the center of the village playing out, nighttime, and our house is way over there! "How are we going to go home alone? Those northern lights are up there. They're gonna take our heads off!" So we used to run home real fast, put our head down and make it to the door.

Elmer Goodwin – Kotzebue

I'm from Kotzebue, Qikiqtaġruk in Iñupiaq, that's where I'm from. I was born and raised there. I grew up with my grandparents up in Kotzebue. They brought me up speaking all Iñupiaq and English language came later.

Growing up in older times especially when we had cold-cold weather, that's the time when my grandpa would take me out and he'd say "igñiġa," which means *my son*, "I want you to see something here – it's the kiuguyat." The first time hearing that I didn't know what it was but then he said, "It's the northern lights. You see the colors up there in the sky there?"

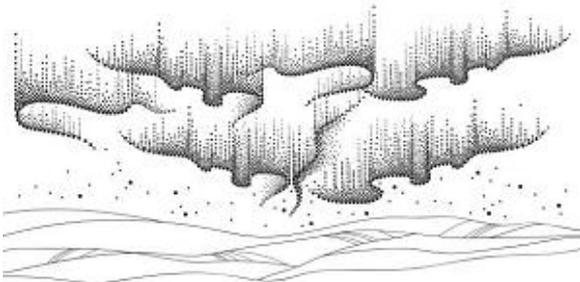
And I said, "Yeah it looks like they're chasing something, they're moving."

And he said "The northern lights - when I see the northern lights when I'm traveling, there's no roads, no trails, I'm out by myself," this is my grandfather talking, he said, "when I'm out by myself hunting caribou, chasing foxes... I like to watch which way the northern lights are going."

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He said, “I like to dog team travel at night. The dogs are comfortable, I’m comfortable and when it’s cold-cold out we have the northern lights. You can see things that you don’t when there’s no northern lights. You can notice things better at night than you do in the daytime because in the daytime everything just goes white. You don’t really stop to think about it. In the nighttime you have to notice. You have to look at things. You hear things that you don’t normally hear during the day.”

He explained to me that northern lights helped him a lot when he was younger because his parents and grandparents had taught him the same thing that I’m teaching you.



Annie Conger – Brevig Mission

As an educator I teach my kids about the northern lights. I teach them the Iñupiaq word for it, which is kiuguyat. And I use that lesson as a weather prediction so that the kids know that the next day it's going to be really cold out, so make sure you dress warm the following day because the kids here go outside for recess.

I also teach the folklore about the stories that have been passed down, letting them know that the stories have been passed down from one generation to the next. John who grew up in King Island, Elmer who grew up in Kotzebue, me who grew up in Brevig – you hear the similar stories and some that sound about the same.

I remember growing up in Brevig hearing stories from my grandparents, my parents aunts and uncles and they would talk about – in the disciplining part – they would talk about not having to walk by yourself going home, that you should have someone come with you. Otherwise, if you're walking home alone and there's the northern lights out there, that the northern lights will get you and take your head off.

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And once they do that, they'd be moving slowly, but once they got your head they would use your head as a football and when you see them really dancing then you know they're having fun playing football and really moving around.

And also our parents would talk to us about not having to whistle at the northern lights because when you whistle at them they come down low and they'll find you that way when you're whistling and then get you from there.

As kids we used to get really excited and we'd really whistle – we wanted to see the northern lights come really low and then when it's time to go home – because our houses were spread apart and our house was on a hill, my two brothers and I would run home!

There was that one time I was visiting my uncles kids, my cousins, they were on the beach, we were on the hill, I was by myself and when it was time for me to go home I saw the northern lights and my two cousins had to bring me home and they were not happy about it! But I was so thankful they took me home because I was so scared thinking about those northern lights.

Helen Allen – Kotzebue

When he died, it was the beginning of August. I think it was like August 11th and we had his funeral August 14th. In that time what brought me about the northern lights- my dad had always told us that the northern lights are a reminder that our ancestors are still here and they're a reminder that our ancestors are still watching us.

And so the night of August 14th there's still daylight and it doesn't get really dark-dark you know? The darkness is just starting to come. But that night, the day of his funeral, his house is just across over here by the Chukchi College, but it finally got dark like around midnight and the northern lights were out and you never see the northern lights in August!

But that night it looked – we went outside and the northern lights themselves looked like a person standing – you could see the head, you could see the hands, you could see the legs. Both of the legs were right above my brother's house.

And then it was really cool because we started whistling and hollering and it started dancing and it looked like someone Eskimo dancing and that's what made me think of my brother.

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And it was a few months before that where my other brother disappeared in Iliamna Lake – his name was Tony- but he was an Eskimo dancer and him and his buddies were the ones who started the Northern Lights Dancers and they got the name “Northern Lights” because when you dance it kind of looks like northern lights – I mean you know the movement when you look at the northern lights in the sky.

But that’s what helped me understand when I saw the northern lights that night: that he’s still there and he’s with all our relatives in heaven and they were having a big celebration. So when I saw the legs and the body and the movement I knew that they were celebrating both of my brothers coming to meet all their relatives before us. And so that’s why I had the story.



Write or Draw Your Own Northern Lights Story!