



Yuguai'yak in his home.

photo by John Amato

Yup'ik-aaq Piyualriaruuq Qiaryigluni

Amy Eisenberg, Ph.D. with Tan'iq, Larry Bartman

Yup'ik is the sound of ice crunching beneath my steps. It is the language of the ice floes on the Bering Sea as I walk among its frozen waves. It is the crackling of the tundra ice as I ski over its thawing pools. While working at Kakanak Native Hospital in the bush of Alaska on Bristol Bay and the Bering Sea, I nominated beloved and respected Yup'ik elder, Yuguai'yak, Gust Bartman of Curyung (Dillingham) for an honorary Doctorate of Letters through the University of Fairbanks, Alaska. He will be awarded in May 2015.

Gust taught me some basics of his Nushagak River Yup'ik dialect. In Yup'ik language, Nushagak River is Iilgayaq – river with a place of hiding. Gust and I would often meet and discuss Yup'ik linguistics and cultural heritage preservation. He studied Yup'ik linguistics at the University of Fairbanks, Alaska and was a major contributor to his Professor Jang H. Koo's book, "A Basic Conversational Eskimo", published by the University of Fairbanks in

1975. Gust was trained as a translator during WWII and served in the Alaska Territorial Guard. He has been a devoted and passionate teacher, storyteller, and mentor of Yup'ik language and heritage for decades. Up on the Kuskokwim River in Kipuk (Bethel) he is called Nayuumiqan – one who supports an elder – a person to depend on. Gust is a powerfully inspiring Alaska Native spokesperson for abstinence from alcohol and substance abuse, which plagues so many of his people.

Gust Bartman was a Featherweight Champion professional boxer and boxing instructor who studied and boxed with Joe Lewis. He is an excellent speaker who often presented Yup'ik language and culture on KDLG radio, in schools throughout the region and in the Dillingham Senior Center, etc. Yuguai'yak speaks the Iilgayaq (Nushagak River dialect of Yup'ik) and understands other Yup'ik dialects including Cup'ik as well as Alutiiq language and some Inupiaq. His aana (mother) was from Iggneg (Nelson Island) and his nephew

related that today, many members of his family are teachers because of Gust's generous guidance and traditional knowledge sharing. Tan'iq means a young boy in Yup'ik language. Tan'iq, Gust's nephew Larry Bartman teaches Yup'ik Studies with the South West Regional School District in the village of Manokotak, Alaska. He is also the Technology Liaison for the SW Regional School District at the Manokotak site. He shared, "My uncle is an amazing man. I have always enjoyed being around him."

Gust explained that "Nelson Island is Igagneq, meaning wind that is pressing down from the mountain; downdraft. Iggnenmiut are the people of Igagneq. In addition to his Yup'ik language contributions and extensive specialized traditional cultural knowledge of Yup'ik toponyms, Gust is an exceedingly important spokesperson for inspiring his people to abstain from alcohol and substance abuse. He is a deeply committed leading speaker for those who are struggling with this serious disease that afflicts First Peoples of Alaska and their remote indigenous villages and families. A prominent language specialist at the University of Fairbanks used to drink with the Yup'ik people. Gust stated, "Whoever is involved in education should never have bias. This affects how people learn."

"I was born into this land", Gust shared with me when I visited his home on February 1, 2014. He came into this world on February 18, 1924. His mother died of tuberculosis when he was in the first grade and his aata (father) died before he was born. "My father, who raised me told me that he did not want me to forget my mother tongue. He respected the native people." In Yup'ik language, aana is mother and aanaka is my mother. Aata is father and aataka is my father.

As a boxer, people called Yuguai'yak, "Little Gusty Bartman – small and scrappy";



"Little Gusty Bartman - Small and Scrappy (with Joe Lewis in the photo) by John Amato

Gusty because he was fast! "In boxing, we had to learn strategy and discipline. One can apply this in learning Yup'ik language. If young people can point their mind in the right direction then maybe they can learn with great interest. "

Gust is a genuinely spiritual man. He conveyed to me that Hlam Yuua (G-d) is guiding him in his research of the roots of Yup'ik language. "Accuracy and discipline are important so the young people will learn the right way. Some are ashamed learning by rote. Some say, it's good enough but if one wants to get into literacy then it's another thing. I would rather see young people learn the proper way. Once they learn, they can progress if they realize



Yuguai'yak in his home by John Amato

they are learning the proper way and their eagerness will be emphasized. If the Yup'ik word is spelled properly, they will have more faith in getting into the proper education of literacy and their learning will have more power and progress. There was some secrecy and shame involved in learning our language and some of the words would not be brought out. We were ordered not to speak our native language, and thus were deprived of speaking it. Yup'ik people need to learn our indigenous roots."

Director of the Dillingham Senior Center, Paniguaq - Ida Noonkesser, who has known Gust for many years, speaks with great respect and admiration for her teacher, Mr. Bartman is always willing and able to answer her questions about Yup'ik language. "If I don't understand something in Yup'ik, I always ask Gusty and he has an answer." Paniguaq wishes that

Gust would work for the schools. He is a humble man of integrity, wisdom, and kindness who is actively engaged and generous with his time in sharing knowledge of Yup'ik language and heritage. Gust Bartman is truly a blessing for our local and international community. His breadth of understanding of Yup'ik cultural mapping, toponyms, storytelling, boxing, and wisdom sharing, and the kindness and patience he demonstrates, as a teacher and leader are quite extraordinary. Gust served as Bristol Bay Native Association Coordinator, KDLG translator and Kanakanak Hospital interpreter. Yuguai'yak is a gentle person who has many friends. He is highly respected and beloved in Bristol Bay and in his honor, some have named their new babies after him!

I ran into Gust on a chilly winter afternoon when he was returning home after kindly transporting an injured man to the Emergency Room at Kanakanak Hospital. The University of Fairbanks requested a rationale for the recommendation of nominating Gust Bartman for an Honorary Doctor of Letters degree; I have had many meaningful and informative conversations with Gust. He is my teacher and friend. Recommending Yuguai'yak is a way to honor this beloved elder for his dedication, contributions, and achievements in actively teaching, sharing, and preserving Yup'ik cultural heritage and values.

When I visited Gust in his modest home on January 12, 2014 he affirmed, "I am not interested in the money. My interest is in researching the roots of Yup'ik language so that young people can learn something right and be proud of their language and heritage." He added, "G-d is the one who gave us our Yup'ik language." He explained that, "Dillingham was formerly called Snag Point - Niaggnag Nuuk", which is a meaningful Yup'ik toponym "because fishnets and boats would often become stuck or snagged here." In addition, he

continued, “Curyung is the place above Snag Point, where people would stop for water. The name means strong water, like a brew.”

Yuguai'yak discussed how “the Gold Rush was the raping of indigenous peoples' riches. They used to call us Siwash”, which is a derogatory noun and adjective relating to American Indians of the northern Pacific coast. Its origin is Chinook Jargon from Canadian French meaning savage or wild. “Yup'it means indigenous people and Yuppik was one whole tribe. Miuut is tribal people in Yup'ik language.” “Regarding Pebble Mine”, Gust stated, “The government wants to dictate, disregarding the people. The people's money is being spent to straighten this out... The Yup'ik law has never been told. Bring it out in reference to the mine. The Yup'ik law can have some weight.”

Gust, a strong and determined man with a vision, uses an inhaler and nebulizer because he has asthma and part of his lung was removed in 1952 when he had tuberculosis, yet he came to my home at Kakanak on January 18, 2014 during a fierce blizzard and casually mentioned, “I have been in worse weather than this when I was caribou hunting. When we hunted caribou with dogsled, we would be able to know where we are by looking at the grass with snow, to get our location.”

“Kakanak is not a Yup'ik word”, he indicated. “It is Qengarqnak, which means ridge complex because the ridges are like those of a nose.”

Spring is Upenakeq and April is Tekiiyut'it – arrival of the migratory birds. Spring is the preparing for summer subsistence activities. “Melucuaq is iqalluarpak, Pacific herring – *Clupea pallasii* spawn, elquaq on *Fucus* kelp, qelquaq. Uquq, seal oil served with melucuaq, is quite delicious.

Yuguai'yak has been a bilingual interpreter for many decades. He learned literacy and it was the roots of his bilingual understanding. He underscored, “Learning by literacy is more

effective than learning by rote. Don't let these people ruin our language.”

Tan'iq, Larry Bartman kindly translated the title of this article into Yup'ik language and carefully edited this paper. Tan'iq, Larry Bartman teaches Yup'ik Studies with the South West Regional School District in the village of Manokotak, Alaska. He is also the Technology Liaison for the SW Regional School District at the Manokotak site.

About the author



photo by John Amato

Amy Eisenberg is an ethnecologist, botanist, scientific artist, and organic sustainable agriculturist and agroforester who conducts collaborative research with indigenous peoples of Asia, the Pacific, South America, and North America. “Aymara

Indian Perspectives on Development in the Andes” is her new book; a collaborative project with the Aymara people. She became an Associate Scholar with the Center for World Indigenous Studies in 2006 while serving as an International Expert at Jishou University's Research Institute of Anthropology and Ethnology in Xiangxi Autonomous Prefecture in Hunan with ethnic minority graduate students of China. She conducted participatory research with the Kam people of China through the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and UNESCO - Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems. Photos of her work by professional photographer John Amato, RN can be viewed at: www.pbase.com/jamato8

Cite this article as:

Eisenberg, A. & Bartman (Tan'iq), L. (2015). Yup'ik-aaq Piyualriaruuq Qiaryigluni. *Fourth World Journal*. 13,2. 57-60.