**1NALUKATAQ 1:54 pkg** **Alena Naiden/KNBA 7.1.25**

**HOST INTRO:** Several coastal Arctic communities hosted festivals throughout June to celebrate a successful whaling season. In Utqiagvik [[oot-KA-GHA-vik](https://www.ktoo.org/2016/10/17/say-utqiagvic-formally-known-barrow/)], that meant four full days of sharing subsistence food, prayers, dance and traditional blanket toss. It also meant gathering as a community, in joy and in loss. Alena [ah-LYO-nah] Naiden [NIE-den] with the Alaska Desk has more. And a note to listeners: this story discusses suicide.

**HOST OUTRO**: If you or someone you know is in crisis, contact the [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](https://988lifeline.org/) by call or text.

[ambi: Quincy Adams jumping on the blanket, then dip under…]

Whaler Quincy Adams soars above a seal blanket at Simmonds Field in Utqiagvik, with a bag of candy in his hands. He leaps even higher and tosses the kaleidoscope of sweets, as the children around him whoop with joy and catch treats.

[...kids yell and fade]

Adams is one of the captains of the Aaluk [AH-luk] whaling crew. They were among those who landed a bowhead whale this spring and threw a feast for the community – especially for elders and widows who can’t hunt for themselves.

On a recent visit to Anchorage, Adams watched his kids play in a park as he reminisced on the season.

**1NALUKATAQ :11**

“It's all for the community, not just for us or our crew. It's to make sure everybody gets a bite to eat, to make sure that nobody goes hungry. Feeding our people.”

Nalukataq, which means blanket toss in Iñupiaq, is a traditional celebration of the successful bowhead harvest. The whaling crews serve several courses of subsistence dishes throughout the event: caribou, duck and geese soup, donuts, boiled whale meat, muktuk, akutaq, and a delicacy – fermented whale meat and blubber, or mikigaq.

When the feast is over, the whalers stretch a sealskin blanket, inviting everyone to jump on it. Then, the crowd moves indoors and continues with Inupiaq dancing and drumming throughout the night.

This year's Nalukataq also had an emotional side for Adams. A young member of their crew died by suicide earlier this year, and the crew opened the event with a prayer and a message of hope.

**1NALUKATAQ :12**

“It's just something we wanted to get out to the other people and to the young people and the teens, tell them that there is hope, there is family that loves them, and if they need to talk to somebody, talk to somebody.”

Whaling captain Herman Ahsoak says that dedicating Nalukataqs to those who passed is not new. He says the event is about the community coming together.

**1NALUKATAQ :06**

“We put on the blanket and jump and let it all out on the blanket and just jump for joy.”

The communities of Wainwright, Kaktovik, Nuiqsit and Point Hope also celebrated whaling festivals in June.

*In Anchorage, I am Alena Naiden.*