

Ugiaqtaq Wesley Aiken was born in Utqiagvik, Alaska on January 25, 1926 and went to heaven on January 6, 2020. He was 93 years old, 19 days short of becoming 94. His mother, Pamiilaq Lucy Aiken's biological father was named Ugiaqtaq so that was the name given to him. His father was Aviugana Johnny Aiken, who was the son of Iqilasuk, grandmother to Wesley. Johnny's brother was Ross Ahngasak and his sister was Bertha Aaluk Leavitt, uncle and aunt to Wesley. He grew up in, Isuk, east of Utqiagvik, in a complete subsistence way of life. The family moved to Barrow when he was 12 years old so that the kids could go to school.

Wesley became a reindeer herder at 14 years of age. He was there for 3 straight years. He said that he didn't want to be a bother to his parents but wanted to help them in any way he could. He worked at various jobs as a laborer, or building houses with Arctic Contractors. Jobs were scarce, so like most people, he trapped for foxes to sell whenever he was unemployed. He married Attagnaq Anna Kayutak in 1947. He became a whaling captain until the big ivu on the ice took away his equipment and boat. However, he continued to hunt for whales and taught his nephews how to hunt both on land and sea.

Ugiaqtaq participated in the Barrow Duck-In when their subsistence way of life was threatened. The Federal government had prohibited duck hunting in the spring when birds came back in the spring. A treaty had been made by the US government and Mexico to hunt for ducks only in the winter months, forgetting that Alaska had recently become a state and the law applied only to the southern states and Mexico. Wesley was part of the formation of the Alaska Federation of Natives in the 1960's when the federal and the newly formed state governments began selecting lands which we felt were ours. He was always beside the late Mayor Eben Hopson in the formations of the North Slope Borough, Arctic Slope Regional Corporation, the village corporations and Inuit Circumpolar Conference. Ugiaqtaq worked for ASRC as a Land Chief for many years. Another controversy hit the North Slope in 1980's with a Whaling Moratorium, prohibiting Inupiat people from hunting the bowhead whales. The injustice was again overturned by determined Inupiat people by proving that the bowhead whale population was not being depleted. Today, the AEWC is able to negotiate with IWC for a just quota of whales to hunt.

Ugiaqtaq was often asked to pray after the successful landing of a whale and when whaling crews were ready to feed the community, during the Nalukataq celebrations. He prayed at numerous meetings and churches throughout the North Slope and other community gatherings. He was a strong believer in God, who blesses our people with animals in the sea and the land and the birds in the sky. Therefore, we have to give thanks for these many blessings. Ugiaqtaq was also a strong believer in education and youth. He was a strong advocate, as part of the Inupiat Heritage Language and Culture Commission, to keep our Inupiaq language and culture alive. He always said that he would never give up in advocating for a culture camp where only Inupiaq language is spoken. He felt confident in passing the vibrant cultural torch to the young people to keep the Inupiat language and culture alive. He lived from a complete subsistence way of life into the technological world during his lifetime. Lastly, he was a strong believer in God who make all things possible through prayer. He was a doer and worked hard in making things happen. He will be missed by many.