

Georgianna Merrill was born in the summer of 1950, in Shishmaref, Alaska, to Fred and Lola Avessuk. She grew up in a large family of eight siblings and was also raised by her Aunt Edith Okpoqruk. Her grandparents were Thomas and Mattie Okpowruk, and her extended family includes Alfred and Dolly Kiyeutelluk and John and Mary Avessuk. As a child, Georgianna attended Shishmaref Elementary School. In the early 1980s, she began volunteering with Kawerak's Eskimo Heritage Program. She continues to dedicate her time to the Alaska Public Interest Research Group as a Language Panelist, representing her region and working to preserve and revitalize the Iñupiaq language, a cause she is deeply passionate about. Her exceptional skills in transcribing and translating Iñupiaq are commendable contributions to preserving this vital language. Georgianna was married to the late Henry Ahgupuk, and together they had five children: Thomas, Alfred Charles, Wilsa Mattie, Irene, and Thomas Ahgupuk. Her favorite subsistence activities include berry picking and caribou hunting. In her free time, she practices skin-sewing and creates beautiful fur hats, mukluks, and beadwork. Georgianna considers her children to be her greatest achievement. She speaks with great pride about her ten grandchildren, five great-grandchildren, and one more on the way. She attributes her inspiration to the faith her mother had in God, which guided her path. Georgianna's advice to young Shareholders and future leaders is to persevere, never give up, and embrace their traditions. Drawing on a lifetime of cultural dedication, Georgianna Merrill reflects on her community's resilience and evolution, "We are Native people with ancestors whom lived here in our great land Alaska from time immemorial. We have learned to live despite sometimes harsh environments into many changes as the years go by. Changes such as how many Native Corporations are incorporated brought on by our Native leaders, past and present and I believe our descendants will be our next great leader. Being resilient is why our Natives are still here and will still be empowering in the future."