

“I was Grown up Before I Was Born”: Wisdom in Kangiryarmuit Life Stories

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I grew up in the Canadian north, an only child in a family of migrant bush pilots. As a young woman, I landed in Yellowknife, the capital of the Northwest Territories; it was there, at St. Patrick’s High School, I earned the nickname, “99.” “Ninety-nine” was a pun on both my alleged academic scores (a percentage I rarely, if ever, actually achieved) and the competent and ever faithful “Agent “99” of the 1960s *Get Smart* sit-com fame. Agent “99” was the intelligent sidekick who tirelessly rescued the bumbling secret agent, Maxwell Smart, from himself, while she simultaneously saved the *free* world from KAOS and its nefarious plots to take over the *entire* world. KAOS was a thinly disguised spoof on the Soviet KGB. By assigning me the nickname “99,” my northern friends suggested that I was perhaps too smart for my own good, and not quite smart enough in ways that truly mattered.¹ Rather than “get smart,” the nickname was an admonishment to “smarten up,” a familiar northern reprimand for lack of maturity and social intelligence with the potential to harm self or other.

After high school, marriage, children, divorce, teaching and working all in no particular order, “99” moved to southern Canada for graduate school—there are no universities in the Canadian north. Encumbered with a doctorate, I remained in the south, teaching at a university, getting even smarter in that bookish way of the academy.

In 2003, Helen Balanoff, a researcher with the Northwest Territories (NWT) Literacy Council, invited me to be part of a northern research project. Given our shared interest in language and literacy, the research questions we lighted on were: What might literacy mean? How might it be practiced in northern communities? What was literacy in these predominantly indigenous communities? Before the global reach of multinational corporations and the relentless babble of English? Before the heavy weight of the Cross, and the dark corners of the church-operated residential schools? Before diamonds, before oil?

Emily Kudlak was from the small arctic community of Ulukhaktok, Northwest Territories. It was she who had peaked Helen’s interest in these questions. Emily Kudlak was, and is still, a tireless community volunteer and a fierce advocate for the survival of Inuinnaqtun, the predominant local Indigenous language. Emily had applied for funds to offer drum dancing and printmaking workshops as local literacy programs but, at the time, the territorial government rejected the proposals on the grounds they didn’t address “literacy.” Emily then turned to the NWT Literacy Council for help. She asked: Why isn’t drum dancing literacy? Why isn’t printmaking literacy? (Chambers & Balanoff, 2009). Thus, began a lengthy collaboration among Emily Kudlak and her community, Helen Balanoff and the NWT Literacy Council, and the University of Lethbridge and myself.





The research team: Alice Kaodloak, Helen Balanoff, Emily Kudlak, Cynthia Chambers

In this research team made up of “insiders” and “outsiders,” I could not be Chief, even with a Ph.D. In this research team of northerners and southerners (which now I am technically), the project could not be under my CONTROL, the counter-intelligence agency to whom Agent 99 and Maxwell Smart reported. Headquarters could not be 123 Main Street, Washington, DC; nor could it be the University of Lethbridge. Headquarters had to be in the North. And this mission needed local agents. English-speaking graduate students raised and residing in the South would not do; they were not smart enough, not in the right way. We needed community-based researchers and we needed salaries to pay them.

After two years of relentless proposal writing, Helen Balanoff and I secured a few small grants to begin the project: salaries for the community-based researchers and dollars needed to cover the exorbitant costs for travel and accommodation in the arctic (Chambers & Balanoff, 2009). In the winter of 2004, Helen and I journeyed to Ulukhaktok, NWT to meet with Emily Kudlak who arranged for community members to interview us. Ulukhaktok is a small community of five hundred, mostly Inuinait and Inuvialuit, on Victoria Island in the Arctic Archipelago. Three hundred miles north of the Arctic Circle. Seventy degrees latitude. Seventy degrees north, that is. Not that Ulukhaktongmiut locate their home in this way.

In the 1950s and early 1960s, the bush pilots in my family flew into Ulukhaktok (they called it *Holman Island*); I went to school with children from Holman in Aklavik and Inuvik; I was in *day* school but they were in *residential* school: All Saint’s (Anglican) and Immaculate Conception (Roman Catholic) in Aklavik, and Stringer Hall (Anglican) and Grollier Hall (Roman Catholic) in Inuvik, supervisors in the latter now convicted with sexual abuse of their young charges. But 2004, with Helen, was my first trip to the community of Ulukhaktok.

Emily Kudlak agreed to be part of the research team if she could work with her aunt, Alice Kaodloak. Emily was re-learning to speak Inuinnaqtun and Alice Kaodloak was a fluent speaker. While Emily had grown up mostly in small village of Ulukhaktok, Alice was from one of the last Inuit families to move into town from the land and sea ice; Alice’s knowledge of the

language and “our ways“ would be invaluable to Emily and the project. Emily Kudlak, Helen Balanoff and I met with representatives from the Local School Authority, the Hamlet Council, the Inuvialuit Settlement Regional Development Corporation and the Student Council. Over tea and snacks, Helen and I pitched the project and the community members interviewed us. There were no formal meetings, no protocol agreements were signed; yet the community agreed to the project on the condition that Emily Kudlak and Alice Kaodloak were partners in the research team. Community members believed that Emily and Alice’s presence would protect the people’s interest. They agreed to the project if it meant that Emily and Alice would document Elders’ knowledge about the past. And their wisdom. The people knew their Elders were smart. The problem is, they said: how do we help our young people be smart like our ancestors were?

Although a scholarly endeavour, this project offered that rare chance in life, as disco artist Maxine Nightingale sang, “to get right back to where we started from” (Edwards & Tubbs, 1975). With this research I found myself right back in the past, learning about a different kind of smart. The kind of smart the world needs now.

Over the next two years, Emily Kudlak and Alice Kaodloak interviewed fourteen Ulukhaktok Elders in Inuinnaqtun. To begin, the four of us designed interview protocols on topics related to local literacies; drum dancing, songs and clothing; sewing and clothing; tool making and use; astronomy, weather, and travelling; storytelling; and names and naming for people and places. These interviews were moderately successful; Elders on their own, or in pairs and in groups of three, recalled what they remembered about each topic. Then Emily and Alice labored to translate the interviews into English. Reading the English translations of interviews, and Elders’ comments, such as “Why are you asking me my name when you already know it?” Helen and I realized what Emily and Alice had been perhaps too polite to tell us: “collecting” knowledge on topics following a set of questions, “designed to elicit” maximum knowledge and wisdom, wasn’t smart! It wasn’t how people in Ulukhaktok transfer knowledge. The transcripts were as disjointed and stilted as the steps of awkward dance partners struggling to follow an unfamiliar rhythm.²

Like Maxwell Smart and Agent “99,” the team needed another, smarter plan! The literacies of Ulukhaktok are living literacies, ways that people learn what they need to know and do in their daily lives. At one time, their daily lives were lived entirely on the land, and now they are lived primarily in town. In the past, people learned and practiced these literacies in a context: in particular places, in the midst of a particular life and language. The people were constituted as Ulukhaktongmiut as they practiced these literacies (Ingold, 2000). We hoped that stories of lives lived would reveal clues to these living literacies so Emily and Alice went back to the Elders of Ulukhaktok, and invited each of them in turn to tell their life story. Once again, Emily and Alice translated these stories, recorded in Inuinnaqtun, into written English.

These English transcripts were only intermittently intelligible to Helen Balanoff and myself who were continually “lost in translation” (Hoffman, 1990). Like many non-indigenous researchers before us, we presumed that the Elders’ life stories would reveal fully accessible sets of (fixed) meanings that each man and woman had accumulated over his or her lifetime. Professional researchers and smarty pants that we were, we supposed that what Elders knew from lived experience—and were able to articulate in fluent, and often lyrical and elegant, Inuinnaqtun—could be (easily) translated into English. We unconsciously assumed the exchange was equivalent, that a word or idea in Inuinnaqtun has a meaningful equivalency in English and

vice versa. Helen and I were oblivious to the surplus of meaning that leaked out of either end of the transaction. We assumed that what the Elders knew could be transmitted outside of the context in which it was learned; that, in spite of Paulo Freire's warning to the contrary, the Elders' knowledge could be deposited into our empty bank accounts available for withdrawal at a later date. We assumed that the narrator of a life history could explicate what he or she has learned in that life, and perhaps most naively, that researchers, such as ourselves, could decode their wisdom. Like someone without hands reading poems in Braille.

So for several years Helen and I have bumbled and fumbled through those English transcripts searching for clues. Both us more like Maxwell Smart than Agent "99." But now, it is a different kind of KAOS that threaten the entire world: global warming and the melting of the polar seas and the ice caps. Irrevocable climate change brought on by the smart money of corporations, greedy bankers and Ponzi scheme promoters; the sassy practices of corrupt and ignorant politicians; and the habits of insatiable southern consumers and gullible citizens who bought into world domination by capitalism (anything is better than communism). Drawing Western societies and economies into debt, as Margaret Atwood (2008) reminds us, from which there is no default, for which the actual "payback" is unimaginable. "It seems like our earth is getting tired," sighed Mary Akhoakhion, one of the Ulukhaktok Elders (2006-002, 286). "You know how it is when people are getting old and older; well, our earth is getting old, too," Mary said, "and the weather is getting bad very quickly."

Of all regions on the planet, it is the arctic, and all its inhabitants, which smarts most intensely from global warming. Far away from the southern sites of production and consumption, Ulukhaktongmiut watch the ice melt, the polar bears decline, the snow deepen, the temperatures rise. Yet, dwelling in the arctic has never been easy for humans or any other beings; Ulukhaktongmiut have always needed smarts to dwell in *nunakput*, what the people call "our land." And those smarts were both transferred and gifted rather than inherited, as in Western notions of intelligence. When describing how the ancestors made *inukhuit*, or stone structures which often resembled human form, to keep animals out of their food caches, Ohkeena (2007-003 #079) remarked, "The people back then were smart" and her old friend, Taipana (2007-001, #353), concurred: "People back then were unbeatable." Elsie Nilgak said, "We can't top those people from the past."

For Ulukhaktongmiut, wisdom is not accumulated like capital or interest on a deposit. Nor are human beings naturally developing in civilized Darwinian style. Rather knowledge and skill, and what it takes to maximize both, seem to be *retrospective* rather than *progressive*. Describing the variety and ingenuity of the tools of that "our parents, and their parents and the ancestors before them used," Kapotoan said, "Making tools, our ancestors were very smart, while us we don't know how." When Rene Oliktoak describes the tiny copper needles the women made and the even tinier stitches those needles made, she said, "People back then—*unanminaitut*—you couldn't beat them... Today we use these wide needles and our stitches ... get too big."³ Tiny stitches help keep clothing waterproof and windproof.⁴ What is gained with ease is lost in quality. It seems that mediocrity threatens to triumph in the north, as it has in the south.⁵

Perhaps smarts, and the returns on them, are diminishing rather than accumulating. Akoakion (2005-003, #349) said, "It seems like we were smart when we were younger, back then. But today we are not smart anymore." When he was young, the people read the directions

of drifting snow to find their way in terrible arctic snowstorms. To wayfind (Davis, 2009; Ingold, 2000) was to visualize the destination before departure and throughout the trip so you could see it even when you couldn't see it. Finding your destination, in the midst of a whiteout: that was smart. Akoakhion tells the story of his father, Niakoaluk.

Once Egotak, my father,
and myself caught
a polar bear way out
on the sea ice
where there is no land
to be seen.

We were in a storm
on our way back
and used the snowdrifts
formed by the west wind,
and the wind direction
to get home
to Pitotak.

We came to land
right at Nauyaat
(where our camp was).
I thought
Niakoaluk was
very smart.⁶

Smart people learned the names and movement of the stars; they knew how to use the stars to guide them when they travelled, and to tell the time of day in the darkness of winter.⁷ Morris Nigiyok said:

Long ago
the people would
travel in the dark,
using only dogs
—no headlight,
using only dogs.

Black,
nothing but black.
When there are completely
no clouds,
they would use the stars
to guide them

to their destination.
Just like a compass to them.⁸

When these Elders were young, there were no two-way radios or telephones, certainly no cell phones or Internet. No electronic means of contact across large expanses of sea ice, coastline and land. But people would meet, converge, disperse and meet again, all at predetermined times and destinations.

At first, we would travel together;
then, when it is time to separate,
we would go our own way.
We would camp overnight;
then, the next day
when the weather is fair
we would all separate
and continue checking our traps. ...

They had no radios,
but they would tell each other
that in four days
they would meet
in the same area.
They would meet
each other again.
People were smart back then.⁹

Today younger Inuit rely increasingly on satellite-operated GPS to find their way and the Internet to predict weather (Aporta, 2003). And older Inuit are getting, well, older.

The Elders' life stories were filled with stories of others, of the people that others looked up to, the ones the people depended on. Smart people. They told stories of dancers who were very smart. Men like Kangoak: "The women would help him sing and Kangoak would be their dancer." Or women like Mimi: "an old lady who could follow the fiddler and jig even without a partner" (Andy Akoakhion, 2005-002, #866). These were very smart people: Kangoak with his capacity to learn drum dance songs with no pen or MP3 player, and to remember those songs so he could dance long into one winter night and then all through the next without repeating a single song. And Mimi, the jigger, with her ability to follow the fiddle and its music, instead of a male partner. Very smart, the Elders said.

Taipana tells the story of Milukhuk and how the place, Ulukhaktok, came by its name. The ancestors knew they could find *ulukhahat*, the slate material used to make arrowheads and the *ulu*, or woman's knife at the site of present-day Ulukhaktok. *Ulu* means "woman's knife" and Ulukhaktok means "the place of the material used to make the woman's knife." The ancestors knew there was *ulukhahat*, the flat, soft but sharp rocks, on the large steep cliff next to the present-day town. Although the ancestors knew the location of the *ulukhahat* no one bothered to

climb in search of them. No one, that is, until Joe Milukhuk. He dared climb the steep cliff high above the sea and he returned with the rocks used to make the *ulu*. Taipana says, “[Milukhuk] must have been smarter than all the rest; he never tumbled down the steep cliff” (2006-005, 398). Smart people are agile and courageous; qualities needed to locate and collect materials essential for living. They are skilled at making tools with those materials—knives, needles, iglus, fish hooks, floats and toggles. They are dexterous in using those tools. They knew how to store, maintain and repair the tools needed for living.¹⁰ For Ulukhaktongmiut, smart people understand what is required to “make a living” in this place.



Alice cutting orange with ulu

Inuinnait, like other indigenous peoples, learned to live, and to live well, in the places that sustained them. Ulukhaktongmiut call these places *nunakput*, our land and that includes all the other-than-human beings who live there. And *hila*, the sphere that encompasses the land: the ocean and tides and all the beings who live there such as the fish and the seals, as well as the sky, and all the beings who inhabit these places, including the birds, the sun, the moon, and the stars. And then there is weather—perhaps the most powerful element in *hila*, the force from which the people have learned many lessons. Smart people learn from experience and adapt to what is both predictable and changing. “Our earth is getting old,” Mary Akoakhion said, “and the weather is getting bad, very quickly.”

At the end of a long, and sometimes bitter, doctoral program, I interviewed for a tenure-track position in qualitative research at Ohio State University. Near the welcome end to a two-day interview marathon, a distinguished and elderly member of the search committee turned to me and asked: “How did you get to be so smart?” In the end, Patti Lather, the distinguished feminist scholar, and qualitative researcher, got the job.

How did Ulukhaktongmiut get to be so smart? Eugenics aside, in Western education, intelligence is generally considered an individual trait. However, Ulukhaktok Elders referred to the collective smarts of their teachers, the masters: "the ancestors," the previous generations to whom people today simply cannot hold a candle. Clues to how smart the ancestors were and how they got that way are found in the stories: Niakoaluk brings home the hunters in a whiteout; Milukhuk defies death on the cliffs of Ulukhaktok in search of the elusive materials needed to make the *ulu*.

Animals are smart, too. People studied the animals carefully, and shared what they learned in stories.¹¹ Taipana (2006- 005, Side A: #038) says there are many stories about

...our ancestors, their way of life,
angayuqapta hivuliita, and
the way they hunt, and
the animals they see, and
their way of hunting
the animals...

They would tell stories
of where the animals have been.

These stories are told
to the next generation, and
to the next generation,
so the next generation
after next generation
can know those stories

Dogs—the early means of rapid transit—were much smarter than snowmobiles. Mary T. Okheena told us (2005-012, Side B: 329):

Dogs knew how
to follow the weather,
even if it is dark out...
they knew where to go.
They could not get lost

Dogs would announce the arrival of strangers, particularly dangerous ones. When Morris Nigiyok was very young, he spotted a polar bear outside the iglu. He immediately yelled for his father to come outside. His father did not hurry because the dogs were not barking a warning. Morris' polar bear turned out to be an arctic hare. That is when Nigiyok (2006-003, Side A: #300) learned:

The dogs will be
the first to know

if a polar bear comes.
They will know before me.

And the dogs will not keep quiet about it.

There are other stories about when the animals “take their hoods off” so human and other-than-human could speak to each other, a time when animals and humans shared a language, shared their experiences and their stories: shared their smarts. These are stories of transformations where animals turn into humans and conversely, smart and powerful humans can turn into animals (*qanuqliqav havaktut*).¹² These are the “smart stories,” said Andy Akoakhion (2005-003, #596), the stories that are “disappearing.” Part of being smart is having the power to act, to enact, and to make things happen. To come out on top, or at least alive, in dangerous situations. And part of the path to becoming smart is to listen to and to learn the stories. Keeping the stories alive would be really smart.

Being smart is also a gift, not necessarily a reward from God for the good behaviour of your parents—the opposite of the sins of the father. Not really karma, either, not a reward or punishment for the good (or bad) deeds of your soul from a previous lifetime and different bodily manifestation. For Ulukhaktongmiut, being smart has more to do with what might be poorly translated in English as *reincarnation*.

Families can give a child a path, one that, if followed, may lead the child to being smart. Elsie Nilgak (2004-001, #016) explains:

When a couple is going to have a child,
[or] when their child is born,
when they want to name the child,
either grandmother
or grandfather picks...
[the] name of a family member
that has passed on...

Giving a baby an *atiit*, or name of someone who was smart, “helps” the child, gives him a path. As a hunter, a seamstress, someone who treats others well. Babies or children “inherit” the traits of their namesake, as well as her life experience and kin relations, her wisdom.¹³ Referring to his namesake, Jimmy Memogana (2005-01, #928) said,

Memogana.
I have his name.
[And so]
I was grown up
before I was born...

When asked why the people named their children in this way, Elsie Nilgak said matter-of-factly, “Because a person cannot live without a name” (2004-001, #033). A name of an ancestor gives a child a path and a life. Rather than starting fresh at birth, with a name each newborn is

given the possibility of accessing the smarts of their namesake. Naming a child also continues the life of the namesake, keeping alive the wisdom, knowledge, memories, stories and traits of the deceased person. Keeps the smarts of several lifetimes in circulation. Morris Nigiyok (2004-016, Side A: # 148-172) lost his parents when he was very young. Later he wanted to name one of his children named after Kongoatohuk, the one who “watched over him and fed him” when he was orphaned. He wanted one of his children to be Kongoatohuk’s namesake so he could “keep her” and still “see her.” Like Morris Nigiyok, names may be given in gratitude. Families of the namesake may respond in gratitude for the continued life of their loved one, presenting gifts to the newborn.¹⁴

Smart people pay attention to dreams, and the instructions the dreams may bring. Like other knowledge necessary for living smartly, instructions for choosing the best name for a newborn often comes from dreams. A deceased person may appear in a dream and in some way indicate that he or she wants to be, or should be, a namesake.

Songs come in dreams as well. Jean Ohkeena (2005-011, #291) tells this story of her late husband, Kagyut.



William Kagyut drumming

Kagyut's song
that is sung often
came from his dream.

When he returned
from the hospital
(he was hospitalized
in Edmonton
at the Charles Camsell hospital
for ten years
with TB),
no wonder
he was going to get better,
the dream that he had,
he made it into a song.

In his dream,
this person
that he did not know
was teaching him this song,
so when he awoke
he made that song
that he learnt
in his dream.

The dream not only gifted Kagyut with a song but with the healing he needed after a long illness. Okheena (2005-011, #308) continues:

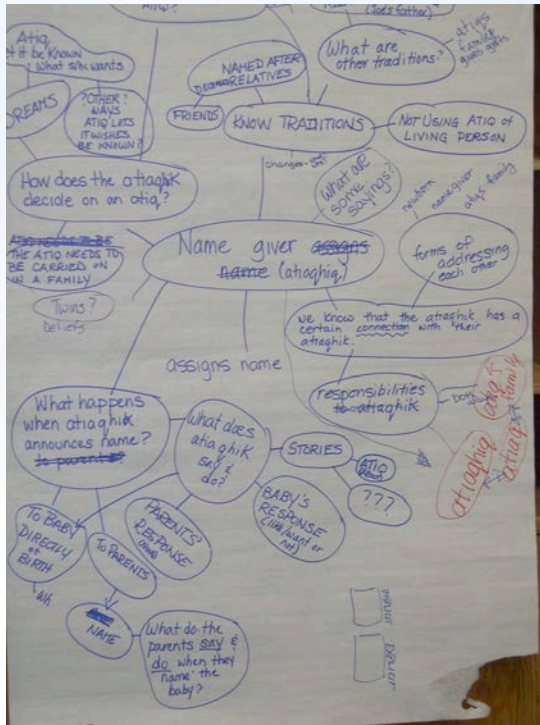
The first part
of the song
got him back
on his feet.

The last part of the song
is about his catches
during his hunts.

He added those
so he would be able
to get back on his feet.

...It seemed like
he was not going
to get cured,
but he was cured

and around
for many years
afterwards.



Namegiver concept map

But an *atiit*, a name, is not like a password that activates computer software. Newborns are smart because they are grown up before they are born, and because they are so smart they have a say in their name; they have what poststructuralists might call “agency.” A baby can reject his name (*atiqluaqqakpa*); she can cry or be sick until she is given a different name. If the new name is acceptable, the crying will cease, the illness will subside. Kapotoan (2004-008, Side B: #732) tells this story:

My first born didn’t survive,
the infant was a boy.
He didn’t live long.

The next one was Elsie.
Higona.
Her name was *Poinik*.
Egyokhiak gave her that name.
He had named her after one of his parents

so they can have a namesake,
but it was very hard.

She didn't seem like she was going to survive;
she always stopped breathing.
She was like that for a long time...

When the minister, Mr. Sperry, came
he would put her above the Coleman stove,
where it is warm,
keeping her there
...until she would start to breathe again.
She was like that for a long time.

There were a lot of people down
there at Kitikat waiting for spring.
It was around May.
Algiak and the minister had come in.
While they were there
she kept having trouble breathing.
People were all at my tent.

The old man, Unayak,
finally started to yell
from their tent (to ours)...
"Give her another name.
Name her Higona."
He was yelling loudly,
"Name her Higona.
She wants a name."

After they gave her the name
Higona,
she did a lot better.



Mabel Nigiyok interview with Emily and Alice

Even before a child was born, the Elders said that parents would *amaaqtuq*, a practice which could be roughly translated as “modelling”.¹⁵ Parents would rise early in the morning, before others are awake, to work, do chores and help others. In the darkness and stillness of early morning, parents would do the very things they wanted the baby to eventually learn to do, things the child would use throughout his lifetime. Parents would practice those traits they wanted their children to have. If a son was born, it was the mother’s responsibility to *amaaqtuq*, (to practice cooking, cleaning, hunting, and helping others) for the baby. If a daughter was born, these responsibilities fell to the father. Kapotoan remarked on the sacrifice that parents made to lay down a good path for the child. “They don’t get tired,” she said, acknowledging both the stamina of the previous generations and the toll this practice must have taken in spite of their endurance. Kapotoan wasn’t sure she could parent in this way: “I would be so frustrated!” But she acknowledges the wisdom and steadfastness of “our parents’ parents, and their parents’ parents before them” (Elsie Nilgak, 2004-016, #421). “They were so smart... following their beliefs and traditional ways from way back. That is how they were” (Nigiyok, 2004-016, #416).

People tried to borrow or capture the smarts of animals, on behalf of their children. Elders, such as Kalvak, a renowned shaman and healer of the Kangiryuarmit, attached *atatat* (poorly translated in English as “amulet”) to the sleeves and hoods of the first clothes of small children: a loon’s throat for a singer, a ptarmigan’s beak for a great ptarmigan hunter, a weasel for a light-footed drum dancer.¹⁶ *Atatat* transferred the powers and smarts from an accomplished human to a newborn: scrap material from the work of a renowned seamstress were attached so the girl would grow up to be a great sewer, miniature kamiks (called “mukluks” in English) so she would grow up to make the perfect tiny stitches necessary for waterproof shoes. *Atatat* are

strong and they give strength and power to small that can last a lifetime (Ohkeena, 2005-011, #844).

The people from back then
were very strong,
people were very strong
back then, right?
Must have been very strong.
They had very good helpers (amulets).
(Nilgak, 2005-011, #455)

Adults can help children become smart, to build their skills and confidence. They can give newborns a strong name and a powerful helper (an amulet); parents can *ammayuq*—practice the important character traits they want their children to have. Adults also train children in specific tasks, particularly by giving them opportunities to practice. From the time children were young enough to play outside they practiced making snow blocks and building iglus “because this was not learnt easily” (Akoakhion, 2005-002, Side A: #381). Young girls began by sewing small items such as doll clothes and mitts; later they progressed to larger and more difficult projects. Good teachers combined show and tell. Taipana (2005-007, Side B: #879) describes how she learned to sew as a young girl:

Kongoatuhuk and Agligoitok
were very good teachers.

They showed me
how to make the marks
with the *ulu*, woman’s knife,
on the area where I will cut by,
because there were no pencils...

[They’d] tell me
not to make the stitches
too tight.
How do you say it in English?
“Don’t wrinkle it.”

Young children “tagged along” with fathers and grandfathers to learn how to hunt and trap. Mary Akoakhion (2006-001, Side A: #457) said,

I would follow
either my grandfather
or my father
when they are going hunting,
and that is how I learned...

Mary Akoakhion learned to trap for fur by following her mother on her short trap line near the camp. While Mary Akoakhion's first kill was a seal, most young hunters start with small birds, and progress to small animals, like rabbits, and then on to big game.¹⁷ Andy Akoakhion explains:

When a person
follows their father
on hunting trips
like polar bear hunts,
it is like this;
their father would let them
shoot their first bear.

When there are
three or two bears
they were taught
to shoot the cub.

Outside of Tukhuk,
my father shot the mother bear
and he had me
shoot the cub.

Girls are smart enough to learn to hunt and they are taught in the same way. Taipana (2005-007, Side B: #906) learned to hunt before she learned to sew:

My parents didn't have any
male children, so when I got old
enough to carry a gun
and bow and arrow,
my father and my uncle would
let me hunt small animals
like birds, rabbits and others.

They would bring me
closer to the animals
and let me try to make a kill.

That is how they taught me,
so I would try my best.
I was taught the hunting
skills first.

Taima ingilrat pivaktuniqtut: it was the way of the ancestors, They taught their young apprentices how to walk and walk, without giving up, how to find *inukhuit* (stone structures) and

other signposts left to mark important places, such as fishing holes, camping spots, river crossings, as well as caches of food and supplies. Ida Kuneyuna describes how she learned.

Taima ingilrat pivaktuniqtut,
that was the way of our ancestors
—walking, walking
and going fishing
even during the winter,
where the markers are
that tell you where to fish,
when they get to the places
where they know.

My adoptive father taught me
by letting me walk down
onto the ice and he would stay
way up on the land.

And then, when I got very small
he would gesture with his arms,
to let me stop.
That is where we would make fishing holes.

Even after the young were able to hunt larger animals, their apprenticeship continued.¹⁸ Elders told their sons about ice conditions and the dangers of travel. Young people learned to listen to what their Elders had to say. Akoakhion (2005-002, Side A, #495) was critical of the modern order where teaching is a profession, rather than a social relation among master, apprentice, the places they inhabit and the other beings with whom they dwell. Today, he said children follow the words of professional teachers rather than their parents; they are learning to dominate rather than participate.

Back then,
our parents would lecture us
on *pitquhikhaptingnik*,
what will be our ways,
like scolding us.

But today children don't
get scolding from their parents.

Because they have teachers
now they do not get scolding
from their parents,
and now children are running

their parents' lives,
bossing them around.

Back then, we were
not the bosses;
we followed their words.

We would hunt following
their words. We didn't do
what ever we wanted
ihumainaqtungitugut.

When the Elders were young, the smarts that a person needed to make a living, to support his family, were learned from others. Although some Elders spoke about being "self-taught," these were not the skills at which they excelled. Mary T. Okheena (2005-012, Side A: #381) attributed her present-day difficulty with sewing to how she was taught when she was young:

[My adoptive mother] would
try to teach me sew,
how to make the stitches.

She would tell me,
'You are very hard to teach.'

No wonder
sometimes I have a hard time
trying to sew.

The Elders expressed profound gratitude for the adults in their life who took the time and had the patience to teach them and to teach them well. Noah Akhiatak (2005-015, Side A: #144-369) was an orphan and so when Mona, his older sister, began living with Kuneyuna, he was both relieved and grateful.

[Kuneyuna] was to be
my brother-in-law and I
really cared and loved him
because I had no
male to teach me
hunting skills.

When they got together,
I was very thankful [to him]
for teaching me.

I am not sure how
old I was [but]
...I was very thankful
when he started teaching me
because I had no
male teacher.

Although their Elders gave them plenty of direct instruction, they also were given plenty of opportunity to play and to learn on their own. Sometimes there were very few children in a camp, and so the times when families gathered together at one place were very important for the children as well as the adults. Children played at games where they honed the skills and smarts they would need to support themselves one day. Taipana (2005-007, Side B: #799) explains:

They would play
together, games like
pretending to be a wolf,
hide and seek,
rope skipping,
string games,
also other games.

Then, during the spring and summer,
we would pretend
to make *kikhuk*,
fire on rocks,
and play house with rocks,
making them look
like a campsite...

Although women in the past were so smart they delivered their own babies, the Elders said *quana*—“thank you”— for Western medicine and doctors, for social programs, employment and the security of food supplies. They acknowledge that life is a fragile and risky venture for which all the best efforts and intentions of parents cannot guarantee a win.¹⁹ And they remembered the hard times when parents were forced to choose between the survival of those infants with a name and a namesake, and the burden of those without. Mothers often had to “throw their newborns” away, never able to forget the sound of the infant left crying for his name.²⁰

As important as courage and steadfastness, as critical as stamina, dexterity, and ingenuity, as indispensable as craft and skill, the Elders told us that being smart is about living well. It is about loving and being loved, about caring for one another. It is about relations and relationships. When parents practiced *amaaqtuq* (see above) with newborn babies, they taught these things as well. Contemporary parents may not always rise early to do chores as a way to set a path for their newborns. But like their parents and grandparents before them, contemporary *Ulukhaktongmiut* are still devoted parents, always showing babies, toddlers, and young children affection and

practicing infinite patience. Jean Briggs (1970), the eminent anthropologist, memorialized the consequences of losing patience, especially with young children, in her classic ethnography of an Inuit camp entitled *Never in Anger*. For Inuit, open displays of anger suggest a lack of self-control and constitute a serious threat to group safety and cohesion. Brigg was ostracized and without the social and economic support of her adopted Inuit family, she could not survive in the camp. Her fieldwork was over. For Inuinnait, you must be as patient and respectful of children as you would be of adults because, as Jimmy Memogana said, children “are grown up before they are born.” The child you encounter is not only a son or a daughter but also a namesake, perhaps a deceased grandmother or great-uncle. Inuit ancestors are not dead; instead they live on, happy, healthy, and never hungry, accessible from the realm where they now dwell. When *aghalingiak* (the northern lights) flicker, you see the ancestors playing a never-ending game of ball.²¹

Smart people know the importance of respecting other beings, particularly animals, such as the caribou and the polar bear. Death transforms animals, as it does humans, but it does not destroy them. If treated properly at the time of death, large animals make themselves available to be killed again, their flesh, bones and hides continuously available for human consumption and use. Treating animals respectfully means disposing of their bones properly (Kapatoan, 2006-004, #032).

Morris Nigiyok tells the story of a time when starvation came, “when the land ran out of food.”²² Morris and Kapotoan were newly wed, and there were so few seal that their dogs were starving. The couple resorted to feeding their sled dogs the sealskin bags they used to store and carry food; with this sacrifice, they saved five dogs out of a team of eleven. Eventually, Morris and his hunting partner tracked and killed a polar bear. The hunters knew they must never feed polar bear heads to dogs but Morris’s partner tossed the head of the kill to their famished huskies; they gnawed and crushed the bear’s skull into tiny slivers and fragments of bone.

The polar bear had his revenge; Kapotoan (2006-004, Side B: #32) laments: “From there it did not go well and we had [even more] hardship...” For Inuinnait, human mistreatment of the larger animals precipitates hardship, and even disaster. The people must never violate the protocols between humans and these animals—even in times of great hardship.

In the arctic, smart beings know the power of words. People learn to speak carefully and respectfully to, and about, all beings, one another, as well as, animals. For Inuit, animals are smart and powerful beings: they understand human language and they can hear across great distances. Animals, such as polar bears, hear and understand what people say, know what humans do and how they behave (Keith & Arqviq, 2009). “Large animals can hear you,” said Kapatoan. “Yeah,” her husband, Nigiyok, agreed, “you must not talk badly about them” (Nigiyok, 2006-004, #041-48). When hunters search for polar bear, the people waiting for their return must be careful in their speech. They must not say things like: “Maybe they caught a polar bear” (Taipana Oliktoak, 2005-007, Side A: #225). People must not compliment polar bears on how good they look or how good they taste. A person mustn’t brag about her ability to hunt a polar bear or patronize these animals by calling them “cute.” Smart people respect the sensitivity, intelligence, and power of other beings.

There are many protocols for showing respect and gratitude for the animals who give up their lives so humans may eat and have clothing. In fall and early winter, for example, the people camped at various sites along the coastline fishing and hunting. Once the snow was the right depth and texture, they built *iglus* and worked on the caribou hides. Sometime after the sun had

set for the winter, they moved out onto the sea ice, where they set up camp to hunt seals and the occasional polar bear.²³ But the group would not make the move out onto the sea ice until the women had finished sewing the winter clothes because, out of respect for the caribou, the people cannot "sew caribou hides...on the sea ice" (Taipana, 2007-002, Side B: #031); they cannot "work on them again until the sun returns...*aqliktuuniqtu* those were the beliefs they followed" (Okheena, 2004-010, Side A: # 860-873).

Animals offer themselves up to humans for food and materials (Ingold, 2000), and in return the people are grateful and treat animals with the agreed upon respect. In *nunakput*, humans depend on each other as well as the animals and other beings for their survival. Smart people do not assume that their survival and successes are individual achievements; they recognize that in spite of their best efforts, life ultimately depends on the contribution of beings and forces other than human, animals as well as *hila*, the atmosphere, weather and celestial beings.

For example, if it is well built, a snow house can remain warm with only a seal blubber lamp for warmth and light. To build a warm snow house, people must know how and where to find the right snow—not too old, too new, too hard, or too soft.²⁴ Jimmy Kudlak (2005-014, Side B: #074) remembers the snow house at night:

When it is nighttime,
the snow houses
would be warm.

When people talked
about the snow houses
getting warm,
they would say,
"The ones below
us have lit
up their lamps."

...That is what I have heard.
I have never forgotten it.

I know of this
from when I can remember.
I know that from my parents.

Both the sun and the moon provide light, and their conditions predict weather.²⁵ Smart people know how to predict the movement and abundance of animals from the phase and direction of the moon (Nigiyok, 2006-003, Side B; 75-100). With few wristwatches or calendars, the ones from before

...tell time
only by the stars,

when night falls and
when daybreak is near,
when daylight will
be getting longer.

The significance of these celestial beings is memorialized in stories about their origins. The people acknowledge their dependence on these beings; they cannot take the sun's return each year for granted. Egotak (2005-009, Side A: #013) recalls:

When the moon shows
up in the wintertime,
the women who went
to get meat,
they would do this
(hand gestures)
to their pots
because the moon is a man.

When the sun shows up
for the first time,
they would run
towards it and put
out some meat for it,
because the sun is a woman.

They would also throw
some blubber
from their stone lamps.

The life stories of the Elders of Ulukhaktok remind us that human weakness and folly can precipitate hardship at any time. At the heart the Elders' wisdom is the knowledge that while smart individuals accomplish much, survival is a collective endeavour that requires collective wisdom. As animals share their corporeal and spiritual being with humans, humans are called to share what they receive from the animals with their relations and neighbours. Taipana (2004-003, Side A: #200) and Elsie Nilgak (2004-003, Side A: #204-) reminisce about their parents and the people of that generation:

They were all
related to each other.

They were all
happy with each other
and would share everything...
they would share their food

until the weather was good enough
to go hunting.

If one did not have enough
material to make clothing
they would get some from others.

...But nowadays people cannot
get anything for free. (Taipana)²⁶

Family members would gather
across town
in a large family snowhouse,
at Nipalakyok's.

They would gather food
together and share
with all
and eat together. (Nilgak)

Important as it is to be generous with food, materials and teachings, it is equally important to accept gracefully the generosity of others. Children are taught not refuse food or drink when it is offered. Olifie told the story of his first seal kill, and how his *atiaguk* (the person who gave him his Inuinnaqtun name) invited Olifie over to his place to eat and celebrate Olifie's (2005-005, Side A: #159) first kill.

[When] Kahak,
my *atiaguk*,
found out
[about my first seal kill]
he asked me to come over.

Because he was
my *atiaguk*,
he would always
feed me.

He asked me
to come over,
really asking me
to come over
[insisting I come over];

I went over to their tent.
It was such a happy
and shy time!

He was really telling me
to eat
[insisting I eat].

Although I did not want to eat,
I started to eat at their place.

Food sharing is smart for many reasons. It renews relationships and it ensures that as many as possible survive. Stories remind the people that stinginess (or thoughtlessness) is potentially fatal. After the caribou were no longer scarce, Morris Nigiyok became a successful hunter. Then he experienced hard times again. Upon reflection, Morris (2006-004, Side A: #329) remembered that he neglected to share food when he had it; and he neglected to share with two men, in particular, who had the power to teach him a lesson.

...at the time,
I caught lots of caribou.

But I did not bring
my two grandfathers
any meat
when they were camped out
on the sea ice.

I did not take
any caribou meat
to them and I had
hardship
after that.

...Back then,
when one does not
get any meat
(from a hunter)
one will give hardship
to the hunter.

That was the way
they were,
hivuliit,
our ancestors.²⁷

All beings are flawed, and even smart people make mistakes so it is important to have compassion oneself and for others, particularly during times of difficulty. In the interviews, the Elders laughed and were often wistful for the good times of their childhood and life in *nunakput*, but they did not romanticize the past. Noah Akhiatak (2006-015, Side A: 037) remembers a time when the seals were scarce.

It was always blowing
snow and bad weather.

We had no more food
...my older sister made broth
from an old sealskin bag
that she stored food in.

When we had broth
we were very grateful
because we were quite hungry...
and [after the broth]
our stomachs felt so good.

During that period of starvation, someone killed a single seal and shared the meat with everyone in the camp. Akhiatak continues his story:

I brought meat
to Hologak and Akhok.

When I went in
[to their iglu],
Akhok was very happy
when she saw fresh
blood from a seal.

...She was very grateful.
They had no more food
...I have not forgotten that...

Noah concluded his life story by saying: "Life is hard, life is on its own." The Elders' stories remind the present generation of the hardships that befall people when their food source disappears: life is much harder without the seals, without the polar bear and without the caribou. The Elders' experiences warn us that such terrible events from the past can occur again. Elsie Nilgak (2004-002, Side B: #341-345) told the researchers:

After the caribou came
back, there was plenty of caribou;

then recently the caribou
got scarce [again].

When the caribou came back,
there were caribou,
but now caribou are scarce again.
Taryukutli ai.

For Ulukhaktokmiut—like many people throughout the world—longevity is prized. Being smart can increase one's chances of longevity. So can being kind and generous. Okheena (2005-011, Side B: #254) tells the story of how she earned her longevity, how her kindness, and that of her older brother, was rewarded.

There was a noise from a *nalaktaq*
(a springtime *iglu*) close by.

A person was making
a lot of noise,
someone who was sick,
making a lot of noise
from pain.

My brother and I heard that person.
... When we went inside her place,
it was Kitaaluk lying
in her blankets
in pain,
making a lot of noise
like she was going to die.

...She must have had a very high fever
...She said, "Give me water, I am very thirsty."
...She put out her arm and asked for water
...that I have not forgotten.

Elgayak, my older brother,
... gave her the cup of water
and she drank it all.

After, she said, "Some more."

She drank all the water again.
After she drank water, she was able to talk.
She said this to us—

"Thank you very much
to both of you
for giving me water when
I was very thirsty.
May you live a long life."
That is why we got old.

How smart are we, contemporary citizens of the falling Western empires and failing post capitalist economies? How smart are we, really? The Elders' life stories tell us that the arctic has never been an easy ride for humans; *Uluhaktokmiut* have always needed smarts to live in *nunakput*. The Elders of Uluhaktok are in awe—not of GPS, the snowmobile, or stick-frame houses heated with an oil furnace; they are in awe of their parents and their ancestors. They punctuated their stories with: "The people back then, they were really smart." "We can't top them."²⁸

"Back then," as the Uluhaktok time marker goes, smart people followed the direction of drifting snow to reach their destination in an arctic storm. Finding their way, in a whiteout: now that's smart. The stars guided their travel on clear nights, and told them the time of day when there was no day. They could read the sun and the moon to predict changes in the weather. Smart people paid attention to dreams, and the instructions they bring. Like the best namesake for a newborn. Like a song that will heal the singer. They showed animals the deepest respect. And their children intense affection. They cached tools and food. Built *inukshuks* to mark the spot. Waited for hours without moving at seal holes on the ice. Sang and danced through dark winter nights. Walked for endless days and through thick clouds of mosquitoes to the caribou calving grounds. They crafted elegant tools, used them dexterously and maintained them meticulously. With fine copper needles they sewed tiny stitches to keep out water and wind. Staying warm and dry is an art form and a necessity of life.

Humans don't have a corner on smarts, either. Parents attached amulets to a baby's clothing. Hoping the animal would gift the child with its traits. A weasel so she may be light-footed; a loon's throat so he may sing. There was a time when animals would "take their hoods off" and speak to humans and share their smarts. Polar bears still understand human speech. They can hear disrespect from great distances. Caribou, too. They want their bones and hides treated with respect.

Wendell Berry (Cayley, 2008) says the primary responsibility of the human species is to adapt to the places where they dwell. Not to make the place, and the beings who already live there, adapt to humans. There are consequences when humans ignore their collective agreement with the animals and the other beings. One of them is withdrawal of services.

So how smart are we, really?

When we were very young, the Elders said, we remember a time when the caribou were "scarce."²⁹ The caribou disappeared when the rifle appeared. Others killed caribou taking only their hides, leaving the carcasses and bones to rot.

Not smart.

Not part of the agreement. "Caribou wish their bones respected," Kapatoan told us.

Back then, no caribou meant no *sinew* for sewing or making bows; no *fur* for winter parkas and pants, for dance clothing; no *hides* for bedding and packing heavy loads; no *legs* to

make shoes, winter mitts and tool cases; no *antlers* to make hide scrapers and adzes, or sled runners and snow knives; no *knee joints* for the mouthpiece on a bow drill; no *calf skins* for children's clothing; no *skins* for the drum; no *skins* to paint with ochre; no *rumen*, no *liver*, no nutrients; no *fat*; no fresh *blood* soaked in snow to quench thirst and hunger, to energize. No caribou meant no *meat*—no *food*.³⁰

Now the caribou are disappearing again.

Mary Akoakion (2006-002, Side A: #275-293) told us:

The ocean does not freeze
too much any more.
During this winter,
it is not very cold.

And last winter was
not cold at all.
...Seems like the earth
is tipping over to one side...
Our earth is getting old, too
and the weather is getting bad
very quickly.

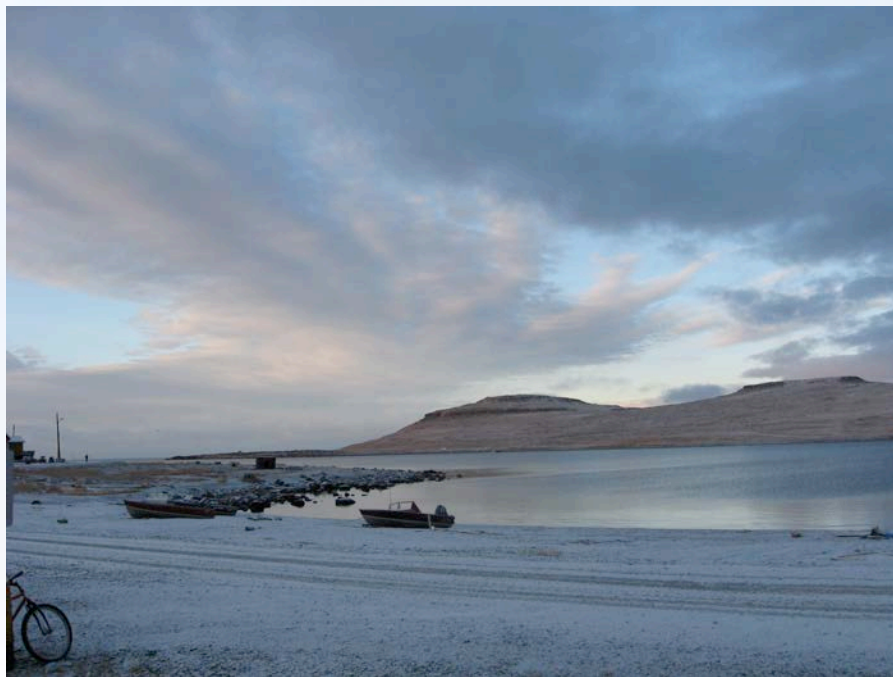
Seems like our earth
is getting tired.

Listening carefully to the Elders' life histories contemporary audiences learn that people "back then" studied the world carefully. And they shared what they learned through stories. And those stories were "smart, too," said Andy Akoakhion. But, these "smart stories" are "disappearing," along with the sea ice and the caribou. Smart people pay attention to what is around them. Learn to watch and listen. They remember what they see and hear. Paying attention, listening to these Elders, remembering their stories, that would be really smart.

Because their stories tell us about the kind of smart that the tired, old earth needs.

I'm 99% sure that I haven't got those kind of smarts.

Yet.



Bluffs of Ulukhaktok

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¹ In northern indigenous communities, people expect that as children mature into adults, they will “learn to be smart,” that is to be competent and creative, to have bodily-kinesthetic and spatial intelligence, as well as personal or social intelligence. People who grow older but do not mature—that is, do not learn these complex and interrelated intelligences—need to “smarten up.” Sometimes people in communities take it upon themselves to educate outsiders, like me, who do not know how to behave and participate

in locally appropriate ways. In the north, humor, including teasing, is an appropriate way of helping someone to “smarten up.” See Stern (1999) for more about what intelligence means in Ulukhaktok using two theories of implicit intelligence: Gardner’s (1983/1993) multiple intelligences (linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal and intrapersonal) and Sternberg’s (1985) triarchic model of intelligence where competences is a product of innate ability, social and physical environment, and experience.

² Most if not all these Elders had been interviewed before as “research” is part of the local economy, with as many as six southern researchers in the village in the summer of 2007. The point to the Elders’ questions and implied critique was that while southern researchers did not know better, Emily and Alice should. What can be asked and how in an “interview” or “conversation” is dictated as much by the relationship between the conversational partners as by the topic.

³ Rene Oliktoak (2005-010 #086).

⁴ Jean Taipana tells the story of how Manoyok always wanted his aunt, Jean’s mother, to sew his clothing because her stitches were small keeping the clothes windproof and waterproof (2006-006, Side B: #280).

⁵ The idea of the triumph of mediocrity arriving in the west during the last century is from Alain Badiou’s *The Century* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007). I first came across reference to this in Charles Noble’s *Sally O: Selected Poems and Manifesto* (Thistle down Press, 2009).

⁶ Andy Akoakhion (2005-003, #393).

⁷ See the interviews with Elsie Nilgak (2004-018, #440) and Jimmy Kudlak (2005-014, Side B: # 065-071).

⁸ Morris Nigiyok, (2006-003, Side B, #143).

⁹ Noah Akhiatak, (Life History, 2005-015, #300-360).

¹⁰ “Some people that have relatives, they know the lifestyle of the deceased person, the way he/she hunted and their traits to the people . . .” (Elsie Nilgak)...“If it was a female (deceased person) they would remember the way that person’s traits such as, if she was a good worker or a good seamstress. They would tell stories amongst themselves about her traits” (Rene Taipana). (Interview with Rene Taipana & Elsie Nilgak, 2004-001, #148).

¹¹ “Back then, the people knew a lot about the animals. They have talked about them from the time I can remember” (Jimmy Kudlak, 2005-013, Side A: #430).

¹² Jean Okheena Kagyut tells the stories of humans that turn themselves into foxes (Storytelling, 2006-006, Side B: #034).

¹³ See interview with Mabel Nigiyok, Jean (Ohkeena/Okhealuk) Kagyut. *Tools and Shelters*, 2004-007, #205).

¹⁴ “You know it is just like the generation today, when one of your relatives names their child after one of your immediate family members, you would buy them clothing, pampers or a small gift, but in our ancestors’ time, before we were born, there was no material clothing that was ready to use, (so) when a child was already named, the relative of that namesake would then get them something” (Rene Taipana). “A way of saying “Thank you””

(Elsie Nilgak). "To use as pampers or something to cover up their body" (Rene Taipana). "Because they are thankful that their family member has been named through a child" (Elsie Nilgak). "Same tradition as today" (Rene Taipana). (Interview with Rene Taipana & Elsie Nilgak, 2004-001, 075-079).

¹⁵ The interview is not clear about whether *amaaqtuq* was with new-borns only or goes on during the pregnancy. Mabel Nigiyok (2004-015, #427) said: "Parents would teach their children the beliefs and traditions that they followed once they found out their offspring/child was expecting." This suggests that the practice began before the birth.

¹⁶ For more information on *atatat* (amulets) see the interview with Ohkeena (2006-006, Side B: 301), with Taipana (2005-010, Side A: 125) and with Nilgak (2006-006, Side B: 301).

¹⁷ Gender was not an absolute categorical difference; nor was it used as a hard-and-fast criterion for determining which life-skills a child would learn or master. Women often hunted and men learned to cook and sew. Ida Kuneyuna (2005-005, Side A: #36)0, in her life history explains, she learned to hunt not sew:

When the ducks and other animals started to arrive, my adoptive parent would not let me sleep in as much. He sure taught me a lot about hunting. That was the first skill that I learnt without learning how to sew or other skills. I was not taught how to sew.

¹⁸ In an interview with Rene Taipana Oliktoak (2005-010, Side A: #186) about traditional clothing, she described this gradual, way of teaching.

The father would try to let him hit the small game and kill it, to see if he can kill it. Back then the word was *tuqutikahiniariaha*. And then they would let them try to kill bigger game later on. They do not teach them everyday, but would teach them every other day.

¹⁹ "But some ladies deliver babies with no helpers. They are smart, and tough," said Mabel Nigiyok.

²⁰ Jean Okheena Kagyut (Life History, #1, 2004-010, Side A: #044) remembered:

Long ago they gave birth to children even when they were busy doing things. My mother was herding caribou with Napayualuk, my father's younger sister, when she gave birth just out there. She went into labour out there. They were going to herd caribou to the blinds. She went into labour so they delivered the child. Must have been my older sibling. But when my mother and Napayualuk were leaving the baby, she cried like an older baby and not like a new born, left in a crevice. She must have wanted the name Okhealuk. They have told of that story.

In a future interview on storytelling, Okheena said:

They had ways like that all right: throwing away their children. Throwing them away, because they travelled all the time, always walking on the land and never staying in one place. They (the babies) were on the way. That is why some people had very few children. (2006-006; Side A: ##170).

In this interview she explains how she was "picked" to survive and be raised while others of her siblings were not.

²¹ Interview with Elsie Nilgak and Kapotoan (Mabel Nigiyok) on astronomy (2004-018, Side B: #648-707).

²² Annie, Emily Kudluk's aunt, described a time from her childhood when they lived on rabbits for an entire winter, it was a time "when the land ran out of food" she said. She told this story to Helen Balanoff and myself while we were eating at the Coop hotel in Ulukhaktok.

²³ In the interview with Elsie Nilgak and Kapotoan (Mabel Nigiyok) on 25 November 2004, Emily began the interview by commenting that sun was "already disappearing." In his life history, Andy Akoakhion (2005-002, Side A: #005) noted that people "They must have started to travel (onto the ice) by the end of January, beginning of February." Other elders reported the move would take place around the winter solstice or Christmas.

²⁴ Morris Nigiyok identified six different types of snow:

The snow all had separate names. Some for snow houses, for tea, *qiquktutikhamutlu*. They were not the same. They did not make snow houses with any type of snow long ago. They would go looking at the snow and go through it with a harpoon. They could tell what type of snow it was. When they find the right type of snow, then they would build a snow house. And then down there on the ice, they would have different types of snow for tea. Then they had a different type of snow for *umiktuut*. It was a different type of snow. Also the houses used to drip back then. They would make the snow stick to the snow house to make the dripping stop. That type of snow is also different from the other snow. It is called *nipitaaq* (base word *nipi*, to stick and also voice). It's got to be really hard snow, right? It is called *qiqumaniq* (base word *qiqu*, cold or frozen). The one that is *nipitaaq*, and *aqiluqaq* (base word *aqit*, soft) is used to block cracks on the snow house. And *pukaq* is used for tea water. And the one that is not *pukaq* is used to build snow houses. All different names. They are not the same. Also, the snow used for traps is different than the one they use to build snow houses. They would find the snow for the traps by poking the snow with a knife, poking around the snow near the trap. That is what they used to cover up the traps. That snow outside is not all the same, the snow that people need to use outside around here. *Qaffiyungaqhivuqli*, I wonder how many there are? *Paqaqpalluktuq*, *pukaq*, *igluqhaut nakuyuuq*, *aqilluqaqlu*, *qiqumanaklu*, *naniriangmutlu atuqtukhauyuq*. Six different snows.

²⁵ Mary Akoakhion described how people forecast weather from changes in the sun, moon, clouds and wind (2006-002, Side A: #001-033).

²⁶ The importance of sharing was repeated in the interviews with many of the elders. However, in her interview about the "long walk" inland during the summer to hunt caribou for winter clothing, Taipana (2007-001, Side A: #137) reiterated what she had said three years earlier:

They don't think of it [what has been hunted] as being [only for] them. They would always share with relatives and neighbours. ...Also when their relatives don't have enough for clothing, the caribou hides, which they have, they would give the hides, and also, meat.

See *Pihuaqtiuyugut: We Are the Long Distance Walkers*. Yellowknife, NWT: NWT Literacy Council/Inkit Publishing, 2010 for more information on the long walk and on the literacies of the Kangiryuarmiut.

²⁷ I have edited the English translations of the quotations to assist the readers ease in understanding the elders. I apologize for any errors I have made. I hope I am not one of the people that Rene Oliktoak (Taipana) referred to when she said: “You know, these white men, they just guess at times and they are never true at times” (2005-010, Side B: #704) in reference to a loon-skin parka mislabeled in the museum.

²⁸ See Jean Okheena Kagyut (2007-003 #079) and Rene Taipana Oliktoak (2007-001, #353).

²⁹ References to the “first” time in living memory when there were few, if any, caribou are found throughout the interviews.

³⁰ The late William Kagyut (2004-004, Side A: #507; Side B: #002; 007) speaks about caribou antler being used for adze, drills and sled runner. Rene Taipana Oliktoak in her life history (2005-007, Side A: #320) describes how caribou antler was used for snow knives when there was no copper. In the same interview, she also describes how they stretched bull caribou hides on a frame to make a travois or gurney to carry her father on the long walk (#354). When interviewed about tools and shelters, Kapotoan and (Jean) Okheena (2004-006) described the use of caribou knee joint for making the bow drill (Side A: #036); caribou legs for tool cases (*ikhirvik*) (Side A: #246); hollowed out caribou antler for needle cases (Side A: #250); caribou antler above the forehead (*qingautaa*) drilled to make a “straightener” —a tool used to straighten curved objects such as arrow shafts; braided sinew from the hind leg of a caribou (*nuilnnganik*) used to reinforce the curved part of a bow (Side A: #397) and at the tips of either end of the bow (*Ihua*) (Side A: #380-436); pounded caribou leg bones for pegs or spikes (*qapurat*) to hold down the tent or tipi (Side A: #757-760); skins for the tents or tipis (Side A: #775-813); caribou hide with fur on as mats, for example to muffle the crunching of the snow at a breathing hole, so as not to alert the seals to the presence of humans (2004-007; Side A: #269, Jean). In their interview on seasons and places names, Elsie Nilgak, Rene Okheena, Taipana and Kapotoan (2004-014, Side A: #114-125) describe those sites where people camped on the coastline of Prince Albert Sound to *inakhaktun*, that is, make winter clothing with caribou skins. In the interview on dance clothing, Taipana and Okheena (2005-011) describe how this special and decorative clothing was made from caribou hide. Okheena explains that drums were made from caribou skin (Drum Dancing, 2005-011, Side B: #810). Jimmy Kudlak explains the value of caribou blood:

...when a person has caught a caribou and it went down on the snow and bled on the snow and the snow is soaked with blood, they would eat that snow which is soaked with blood, so one cannot feel tired anymore ... One does not feel any tiredness or does not think of hunger and will not be thirsty (2005-014, Life History, #2, Side A: #015). Jean Okheena explains how caribou calf skins are used for young children’s clothing (2006-006, Side B: #142).