

Between Two Worlds

by Rhoda Kokiapik

L'auteure décrit le choc culturel qu'elle a reçu lorsqu'elle est venue étudier dans le sud. Elle parle du passé de son peuple et des espérances qu'elle entretient pour le futur.

I live in Inukjuak on the Hudson Bay coast about 1,500 kilometers from Montreal, where I attend college. I have experienced two completely different worlds. The crowded city life of Montreal is the last place I want to be, though I have to be here to study. Many times I sit on the public bus wondering if I should continue my education. This thought comes to my mind often because studying and raising a child isn't easy when you're 1,500 kilometers away from your home.



Elda Ward, *Untitled*, Woodcut.
Courtesy Ward Collection.

Photo: Yukon Government

Inuit, or "Eskimos," have been deeply influenced by European life style. Before the Europeans arrived in the Arctic, Inuit lived their traditional life style.

My ancestors hunted with their own tools, made of stone and animal bone. Pots, oil lamps, and needles were also made of animal bones and stone.

For weeks Inuit hunted in hopes of finding game. Sometimes they would come home with no luck. Some days my ancestors drank only melted snow to stave off their hunger. But, if they were in luck, they ate what they caught and shared the meat with the other people in their group.

Back then Inuit wore clothing made from caribou skin, fox fur, and seal skin. If an animal was killed, nothing was wasted. Inuit ate the meat, made clothing from the skin, and tools from the bone.

Everything started to change when trading posts were established by the Hudson Bay Company. At that time, Inuit still led a nomadic life. Then, Inuit began trading furs for "white" goods, and they were introduced to currency.

Around the 1950s and 1960s, when the federal government set up schools, Inuit began moving to what are now the small communities of Northern Quebec. Children went to school and health services were introduced. It was then that the communities slowly formed. Up to this day, they are still growing.

Inukjuak, where I live, is one of those communities. Inukjuak, with a population of 1,100 people, is located on the 58th parallel on the Hudson Bay coast. Inuit today live in modern houses, and live a modern life style. We have schools, municipal government, a store, and a co-op which was formed to combat the monopoly of Hudson's Bay Company.

Inukjuak also has a nursing station, social services, a power station, several small businesses such as an arcade and a pool house, and other small organizations. Everything in northern communities works in today's life style. We even elect a mayor every two years.

Small communities like Inukjuak face social problems like any other communities. Sexual abuse, violence, alcohol and drug abuse exist. Young people unfortunately turn to solvent abuse when they don't have access to alcohol and drugs. This problem is serious in most northern communities.

Seeing these kinds of social problems, I decided to further my education and hopefully become a social worker. When I got my high school diploma, I felt I had to help young people and respond to their cry for help. After college, I hope to get my degree in Social Services despite the hard times I face in urban life.

Sometimes it is hard for me to be in college because no one in my family encourages me to continue my education.

When I arrived in Montreal, I didn't expect life to be very different from my community back home. The weather is a lot warmer and streets and buildings are everywhere. Traffic lights were new to me. At first I didn't know which lights represent what. Fortunately, I soon became adapted to this new environment.

When I haven't been home for a while, I crave a nice frozen arctic char and caribou meat. I sometimes feel as if I haven't eaten properly if I haven't eaten Inuit food. Imagine you're stranded on a small island somewhere on Hudson Bay. You would crave a hot meal of steak, and baked potatoes, and a nice hot bath. It's like that for me, except I'm in a big crowded city where I can't fish or hunt.

My daily life is totally different down south, too. First thing in the morning, I take my son, Andrew, who is two years old, to the day-care, and from the day-care I commute to the college by bus. When my day ends at school, I do my assignments before I pick up Andrew from the day-care. In the evening, I finish my remaining home work when my son is asleep, trying to finish what I have to do before another big assignment is due.

My great-great grandmother lived in seal skin tents and struggled to survive. My grandmother saw the changes when the Europeans came to the Arctic. Now, I'm facing different challenges—challenges that didn't exist during my great grandmother's time. I struggle to make good grades and raise my child at the same time. Using my ancestors' will to survive, I think I can get my degree.

Rhoda Kokiapik comes from Inukjuak, Quebec. She has just successfully completed her first year at John Abbott College in the social sciences program.



Patti Flather and family

PATTI FLATHER

Winter Solstice for Housewife/Woman/ Mother/Other

After eight and
still dark when
Erin climbs in
asks, is Sophie finished eating?
yes, you can cuddle then
fall back to sleep because
nowhere to be by
eight-thirty or
nine those
times when
others
wage-earners are
commanded to appear
for duty
after nine and
dawn light trickles in
ahhh
after ten and
finally up for
pink clouds blue sky sunrise at
ten after ten to
be exact like it says
in today's Whitehorse Star
so just five hours and
twenty-seven minutes of
daylight before
dusk
dark
night
the kind of day to
cut some branches of
wild rose hips and
northern sage then
light a candle to
celebrate the
return of
light

Patti Flather is a writer who has lived in Whitehorse since 1988. She currently runs a freelance journalism business and writes plays, poetry and short fiction.