

VERBATIM

Madeleine Allakariallak

My name is Madeleine Allakariallak. I am living in Iqaluit but I was born and raised in Resolute Bay in the High Arctic. I am the daughter to Elizabeth Roberts and my papa Paul Charest and the granddaughter of Minnie Allakariallak, who I basically grew up with. She was my best friend; she and I were like this.

Question 1: How was it growing up in Resolute Bay?

My childhood in Resolute Bay was an interesting one I can say now, as a grown mother and a grown woman when I reflect on my life. I was blessed by having a very strong mother I could say now, single mother. People asked me when I was growing up, why I didn't have a father and I didn't question it. She did such a great job I never wondered why I didn't have a father. But my grandmother, Minnie Allakariallak pretty much raised me because my mom was a young parent. She was a social worker and she spent a lot of her time taking care of other people and her children with the help of her mother.

But to be quite honest and to be quite blunt, Resolute Bay was not the easiest place to grow up in. Looking back now I could say, wow! It was a scary place! And we survived it but as a child, you don't know any better. I had never lived outside of Resolute before in my life. So the everyday things that we saw... we saw a lot of alcohol abuse, but again I was blessed because Minnie Allakariallak didn't drink. She was a safe haven for all her grandchildren, that where they came to.

But also because my mom was a social worker, I was her little sidekick. She took care of the mothers who ran and hid in our house and I took care of the children. I made sure they were okay on my bed. I made sure that... this is what six, seven, eight year old child. But that was life, so I'm thinking I help my mother. If my mom is not there, I have my grandmother. And my grandmother, from the stories I hear, she was very protective over me and I learned recently that it was because of things that happened in my life that she felt that she needed to make me feel wanted.

So growing up in Resolute Bay, I can honestly say that it was extremely scary at times. It's a place where I had a lot of fun. I can say that as a family we are very close as cousins and it was a place that made me, me. Yeah, Resolute Bay it's my home.

Question 2 : How did you learn about the relocation?

So what's fascinating for me now, as a mother, as a grown woman reflecting on her past, on my past, I left for school when I had just turned fourteen, because they didn't have grade nine in Resolute Bay. So I had to leave home. I left home to live with my aunt in Taloyoak. And as a fourteen, fifteen years old that was pretty hard to do. I didn't make it through the whole year. I came back at Christmas and I couldn't do it, I stayed home. I stayed at mom's but she said: « You're going to do something », so I went to school at the Arctic college and it was after that that I knew that I didn't want to be in Resolute anymore. That break, that break from when I was fourteen to fifteen, I realised I couldn't be there, it wasn't a place for someone with so much ambition and I had that. I wanted to go places and I wanted to do things and I know that my grandmother knew that.

When I started going to High school at age fifteen, so I left for high school at that age, this time coming back only at Christmas and summertime. And at one point she said in Inuktitut: « Maala » « Madeleine why don't you just ever learn »? She didn't understand the concept of education, that there were grades that you had to follow. So it was such an honor for me to invite her to my graduation in Pond Inlet when I finished my four years and for her to see that: « Okay, she was leaving me for a reason.» She knew... I was such a loud mouth, I had questions every night to her, I had things I wanted to ask about and everybody that came in to Minnie Allakariallak's house knew that that's the kind of person I was. And it goes to show where I ended up in my life.

I ended up doing some really amazing things because I had that support and because I had her love and because I had such an incredible mother who showed perseverance, no matter what we did, no matter what they did.

And Minnie Allakariallak, I know now lived through some horrific things. I've looked at pictures since her passing and the passing of my two beautiful aunts in the past year and reading the letters of my late grandfather about how difficult life was when they were relocated. She loved us so much, she thought way ahead of herself, she knew that... I know this now that she knew that in order for things to move on, in order for our family to heal, that she would take the blunt end of the pain so that we didn't have to.

Reading those letters I cried. I cry when I hear that my grandfather begged and begged to leave Resolute Bay because life was so hard, because my grandmother was being punished and beaten and his children, his daughters, my aunt ...

Yeah Minnie Allakariallak lived a really really tough life, but she was a woman of strength. I'm learning, to this day I'm learning so many things about her. How she had polio as a child. How she felt she was saved by her husband, my grandfather Joamie, how she had all her children regardless of her condition and how she loved them very much. Because she felt like she saved him... because she felt that he saved her. I'm sure

it worked both ways, I'm sure she saved him as well. They were a very good team. And I think Resolute survived because of the two of them. They were the heart and soul and the foundation of life in Resolute Bay.

And I didn't hear about it until I was in high school. Things started to... so this would be when I was sixteen, seventeen, the talk about the Royal Commission and the discussions about the Relocation started coming out. I came home one Christmas from High School and I said: « Anaanatsiaq, grandma, how come you didn't talk about this... how come you didn't share these stories» and she would brush it off. And I didn't realize how painful it was for her until I saw on television what had happened, when she revealed just how painful and heartbreaking her life was and how she endured that, and how she held to herself together and her daughters and her sons and her community and her neighbors, out of pure love, out of pure strength. And I think that strength resonated in me, in her granddaughters, in her daughters. She was one quite role model.

She protected and loved her children to her deathbed. When she was dying, I was pregnant with my youngest child. She had a stroke, but my children, my two young daughters were very fortunate to have had experience of their great grandmother and they loved visiting her and they would ask her to take her dentures off and they would burst out laughing and that was when she was stuck to her bed she couldn't walk anymore. However that night she suffered a stroke, my aunts came to visit because we are all spread apart, we're all over the place.

My aunts live here and there, my uncle is here and I believe now that it was because she shared so much love with her children, that that love and understanding needed to be spread out, it really was because she implanted some beautiful things in all of us I find. And that night we were losing her, I said: « You know, it's okay, you don't have to be strong anymore anaanatsiaq. Just go be with your husband, go be with my aunts that have left us. Go join them. We're going to be okay. » Because she fought to the very end and breathing in her breath and Inuit have... that we have a belief that once you lose an elder, their spirit comes back to you through a child. And though my son was born a boy, he has so many, so much of her spirit, of things that she was like. Minnie Allakariallak didn't like pictures very much, she felt that the camera stole a little piece of your spirit. She was very superstitious that way. And my son doesn't like his pictures being taken. So little things like I'll notice about them 'cause he carries on her name, he's Jackoosie Eckalook, which was her maiden name. But he's also named after my late uncle Jackoosie Eckalook, my grandmother's brother.

So I could go on and on about how amazing this woman was, but really it's something that is overwhelmingly... her spirit is everywhere, to this day. To this day, if one of us grandchildren we'll talk about it amongst ourselves, when we think about it, she comes to visit us, in our dreams. When we're going through difficult times, she's there, that's how much she loved us. She still comes to be with us when things are tough, because she really was the rock. She really was our foundation. We could have ended up... we

could have been very corrupt and dysfunctional, I mean no family is perfect, but she made sure that we had beliefs, that we had spirituality, love, compassion, always compassion. Every night we prayed for the less fortunate, every night we prayed for those in the hospital, not just every night, in the morning too. So I grew up praying a lot!

And I promised and I still teach my children that there is important part of grandmother's teachings that are very important and we need to keep them alive and they understand that. So Minnie Allakariallak was a pretty amazing woman and I'm very very glad I had the honor of being the one that lived with her and was loved by her and that I could love her and adore her right back.

Question 3: When did you finally decide to leave Resolute for good?

So I graduated from high school and I went back to Resolute and I knew that I couldn't be there. I had already experienced some interesting things, having been in high school, I got a chance to travel outside of Canada with my drama group and I experienced... I explored singing and I was discovered by a producer all in high school. So when I went back to Resolute Bay, I realised early on that it's probably a place that I could never live in at the time, not as a young person.

It was when I left Resolute by chance to go to Ottawa for school; it was there I knew that I could do other things. Resolute Bay will always be in my heart, but it was not a place for a young person. To this day I feel it's just not a place that's set up for young people, for things you need to see and do. Resolute Bay is great for being a child now I think, it's safer. But at the time, I knew I was going to go other places. Even though it will always be right here, right in my heart.

I knew when I was taking a college program that I had no choice but to go back after, after that year away. After eight months of being away from Resolute, after I graduated from High School I got pregnant with my first born and when I got pregnant I got back and I knew this is not where I want my child to grow up.

So chance brought me to Iqaluit, that was sixteen years ago. Sixteen years I've been here. Also travelling the world, also having moved to other places. But this is where I come back, because this is where I invited all my family to come be here. It's convenient, but my heart always with Resolute and unfortunately I've been there too often this year because of all the funerals that we've had in our family. Too many... It's brought me back to Resolute Bay too many times and I want to be able to bring my children there for happy circumstances. And I'd like for them to see Resolute Bay, my childhood home, 'cause it's really beautiful in the summertime.

In the winters I find it very hard and I can understand now how... I think that growing up I've learned to realise that what happened to my grandmother and the people that were relocated. There was unimaginable. Resolute Bay is desolate; its unforgiving winters are extremely scary. I bumped into polar bears, my cousins were chased by polar bears, we've been chased my people under the influence of alcohol. There's a lot of history there, but you can also see that there is a lot of beauty and there is a lot of love and Resolute Bay people are very nice people... considering what they went through.

And I think that if it wasn't for the people like my grandmother and one of her best friend Lydia Kalluk, who is from the Pond Inlet relocation. They made things livable.

Question 4: What was the inspiration behind the song "Kajusita"?

Having learned the stories and reading the letters and looking at the pictures and now hearing firsthand what really happened there and what people did to each other and, you go through a lot of emotions and I think that's very natural that happened to me. I went through confusion, shock, anger, flabbergasted like how could you do that to a person and then, when you step back and go « wow what a human being can endure and survive from » it's so incredible that when I shared my story with one of the musician that worked in the studio where I was discovered by a producer, I would tell him the stories in our long car rides from when I was going to school in Ottawa to the studio out in Helmont.

And he would ask me questions, so you know: what was Resolute Bay like? Like this, what was life like in Resolute? 'Cause we were trying to think of stories, songs. We were trying to think of ideas to put into songs and when he heard my grandmother's story, my story, my experience in my life in Resolute Bay and what my grandmother went through and what I wanted to move forward from because I saw a lot of crying, I saw a lot of pain, I saw a lot of bruises as did my cousins, as did my mum, as did all of us. Unfortunately, abuse was very common; I can understand where it comes from now, but for a child who doesn't know that it confuses you. I wanted to move on from...I wanted to help bridge that confusion to understanding, to love, to moving forward.

And with the help of Jon Park-Wheeler, he helps me write that song and it was perfect! It made so much sense to me, when I wanted to explain to people where I was coming from, having been the descendant of the original exiles that were forced to move to the High Arctic, from a beautiful land to a foreign land. For so many people who didn't... Jon Parker was like: « Wow, I'm a Canadian and I didn't even know that happened to other Canadians ». And when I thought about it I was like: « There's a song in here somewhere. » And having put that song together was probably the most healing thing for me, but something that I could share with my kids and my nieces and my future grandkids. We don't have to be stuck in anger because it's very easy to be. People can

be stuck in a rut, we don't need that. Minnie Allakariallak was not that woman that needed to be stuck in that anger.

Her favorite word was: forgive. Forgiveness, no matter what people do to you. You forgive because it helps you. And I think that has been the healing point for me and my family and the song is.

Question 5: How do you think your mother felt when she heard the song?

Proud. She's a lot like a sister to me, because I grew up with my grandmother. So we'll talk like sisters, we'll argue like sisters, but I know she was very proud. And I think that it would have made more sense if I could have translated it, but the audience for me was other Canadians. This was my story in English to share with people whom understand what happened to these original Canadians, Canadians first. She tell s me that she's quite proud and she has of course, any mother would, and I'm very happy that I could, you know fill that pride in her. Yeah, I'm pretty proud of her too.

My song was something I'd like to sing again. I was... actually to be quite honest , I was very pregnant when I sang that and even in the video you'll see me seven months pregnant with my grandmother in my arms. Looking back, I asked my producer,: « Who does that? Who at seven months, records a song or an album and has their grandmother in it. Who does that? » He goes: « You do ». I said: « Alright ».

That was the absolute brilliance of my good friend Jon Park-Wheeler and he helped me put those into words because there's a lot of emotion there, there's a lot of... a lot of so much, and it takes someone with so much talent to put it together and I think it was our working relationship and him understanding where I was coming from. And things happen for a reason; that song was meant to be, he and I were meant to meet and I was meant to be there at the time, so truly believe that.

Question 6: Why did you stop singing?

I have a house full of kids. There are five children in my house, I have a full time job, a very demanding job. I sing around the house, my children actually have picked up on it. When I was pregnant with them, I travelled the world with them and that's another thing I picked up I think from Minnie Allakariallak and Elizabeth is: you can do anything, no matter what, no matter who you are. I was seven months pregnant with Nuka, my middle one, and her sister was a year and a half and I took them on this crazy trip in middle of February to a concert, 'cause I had been invited by a youth group in Tuktoyuktuk. And it was, let me tell you this, it was on the ice road, in a school bus, freezing cold, Angajuk Natasha in my arms, me holding my belly, I had about three suitcases and a band full of guys in a bus, on an ice road from Inuvik to Tuktoyuktuk and

I said: « If I survive this, I can survive anything! » I can do anything and I did it! And I thought when I think back , Minnie Allakariallak had how many children, out on the land, survive this incredible journey of miles and miles of confusion trying to understand what the purpose was, meanwhile having her people fall, breaking around her and hurting her children and hurting her, meanwhile her love and her belief in her Christianity, how she kept that so strong having suffered from polio as a child and physically crippled, but the enormous strength and... it's even hard to put into words, where this woman got all of that and how do you share that amongst... it was pure love. She was love. Completely.

I love her. And I miss her every single day, I miss her but you know what, she's around me. I smell her, she comes to visit me in my dreams. I'll be doing something and I can hear her say : « Madla, what are you doing ? », you know ! She use to ask me, when I was doing my make up, I would be getting ready for my shows whenever I had concerts and I could hear her, she would be asking, that's what she was asking me as a teenager when I would put make up on: « Madla, (in Inuktitut) Madeleine, is your heart so beautiful that you're putting make up on...is your heart as beautiful as what you're trying to perceive in your face ? » And that always comes to me and it reminds me that in order to be beautiful, you have to be beautiful here. That was her, beautiful on the inside to be beautiful on the outside. So much truth to that. I try to remember that whenever I need to hear that.

There is so much to say. We could go for hours and hours and hours and talk about some of the things that happened. In all of it I think what Minnie Allakariallak would want is for her great grand children to know that even though all this has happen to our family, to the beautiful people in Resolute Bay, no matter what region they came from and what they endured, to understand that things that weren't supposed to happen, happened, that justice should be served, but that you don't hold that against anyone and that you respect each other as they survived, the two different, two totally different cultures, they were both Inuit from Northern Quebec and North Baffin but they had totally different ways of doing things and regardless you can learn to work together. And that is very important. And to love each other. I know that Minnie Allakariallak wants us to take care of each other so bad. And to remind each other to never stop learning, to never stop loving, to never stop moving forward, to never give up, to always, always remember where you come from but not to be afraid of what's behind. That woman was amazing, I miss her.