

VERBATIM

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Okay, my mother had a sister which is Rynee Flaherty. She has cousin... and other ladies that were relocated to the higher arctic shores. She was, they were in the same camp. They were living together and when they had to leave, they were left out. I didn't know about this until I was about seven or something like that, because my mother uses to ask herself where her sisters are, where her cousins are. And she was wondering how many children she has now. What kind of environment they were living in. That's when I started to learn about exile, I mean relocation. I had no idea long time before I was seven.

I got very angry later in my life, understanding what happened and knowing what happened, learning from family members and other people that were relocated what really happened. I started to, I mean I stayed away for a long time; I didn't want to have nothing to do with relocation. My family's story was just a story, not real people. When I started to connect and understand that we have family members, it was shocking. I mean in the beginning, it was just history for me. I never knew them until my mother met her sister Rynee maybe after 35 years. They met together in Montreal and she talked to me about it. She talks to us about meeting her sister for the first time.

And along with aging and maturing and starting to understand what really happen and could have happen if we were living together as a family and if we were neighbours, we would be close and have hunting partners, family gathering and interactions between our family members. It's not always perfect in life when you have a large family but everything we could have had, make me very angry over the years and gave me a lot of anger because we don't know them. There are stories. They have their own stories, I have my own stories. We are like isolated, apart. We are living with our family here but we are missing big part of it. So all of this was very hard!

Question 1: What kind of hardship have your parents and the other families left behind, experienced?

Maybe in 1970's they started to send letters and some tapes, recorded tapes. They passed on to every one of the community members. When she used to listen, she used to cry. They had many tears. They give news. They tell their live what really happened and what's really happening, their children and their environment. They were talking about their housing... Everything that they lived at the time, they shared. And seeing my mother going through that, it was... not easy. I didn't know it was having effect on me until later on when I realized all of this. The whole idea of relocation. That's when it got difficult.

It's hard to understand what the government was thinking when they decided to relocate people from one place to the next. And all the negative effect that it had, it's big! It's not: I'm not gonna tell you in few minutes about that. It's a long story, all the effects are very painful at family levels, individuals, descendants, grandchildren have been reached. Because it's huge. Something like that will not be solved right away. But the fact that we are talking about it, it opens wounds but, it might be a good start, a feeling journey for many, many people. Because what I saw in people who came back from High Arctic was very joyful in a way but also very painful and very rude, like rough. They had to live rough life.

They had to be rough. They were named. They were given names: « people from somewhere else ». They were not very welcome in many ways. The separation was done already. They were living separate lives and they had... We heard stories about what happened in the High Arctic with alcohol related problems. When they came back they were like blamed to influence community members. I mean the impact was huge. It's still huge but now we are starting to understand that what happened there was inhuman, like... nobody should have gone through that.

They are family members. No matter what happened, they still are our family members. We don't really have to know what happened in their domestic life but that's what the younger children or their children are talking about these days. And they are starting to open it, open about it and that's part of the healing. Because we are making our children. I have grand children now and what my mother went through and what my other family members up there went through there are two different worlds. It's very different and it's hard to connect, even though we are blood and we are related and very close. There is always a wall somewhere but the connection is stronger. That's what really gives me lots of joy inside.

I have reconnection with families and I wanna do that more but they are distant physically and it's very expensive. We can always meet together once in a while but never met together, all family. We have families from Umiq and Puvirnituk mostly. We have lot of family member in Puvirnituk and Inukjuak. When there is somebody sick, we get together these days. But in the past it was totally isolated. We were stranger to each other. I didn't know I had brothers, I mean cousins. I didn't know who they were, how many they were and it's kind of difficult to accept that.

Sometime it's difficult to understand what really happened and it's hard to explain. It's in me. It's inside of me. I see when people talk about the experience... for many years because, I was putted aside, I wasn't really connected. As an adult now, I understand more, but a lot of people are gone like they're past away or... it's like we try to put the puzzle back that was scattered all over.

Question 2: Did your mother tell you about the relocation?

For many years I didn't know till I was about seven. I guess she couldn't talk about it. Maybe it was too much. When the adults would get together sometime they use to talk about their pain but they always ask us to go out or play outside. I don't know how they kept this secret or they didn't talk about it at all.

Question 3: What could be done to break the wall?

There's been a lot of action done so far, people are opening about it and it's not secret anymore. Everybody knows what really happened. Many people take their anger out in their own ways. It could be verbal or physical or any ways. Now it's more calm. It's more like really trying to understand their stories and our stories here because family that were left behind was tremendous too. Now in a household when one of the family members leaves for a week or a month, they leave a big empty space and I cannot even imagine how big it was when their families were sent away. I'm sure they were expecting that they would be arriving in the next ship.

They had false hope and all that. It just gives me a lot of anger. I wasn't born or I never lived through that but just... because they're my families. Now we can talk about it. It's open. It's easier now. We will never really understand how bad the impact is to everybody but at least we can talk about it. That will break the walls.

And through community actions and healing... We gonna raise monument in September. People start to do their healing path. And they went back to their old camps. People went to the High Arctic to see the environment people from Inukjuak and we gonna send more people from here that will go to High Arctic maybe this fall. It's gonna be younger generation like myself. We plan to go up there and go see the environment. That will break the wall. We are trying to break the wall now. We are not stuck in the past anymore. We are going forward.

Question 4: What would you like to say to the descendants of the families relocated and left behind?

Inukjuak people they went through many, many trauma, collective traumas and that's one of the biggest trauma we went through, when our family members were relocated. But we always rise in a way. We gonna have people that will suffer for a long time but they gonna have their own days and they gonna rise again. We believe in that. And people Inuit are very forgiving and... like people say: (in Inuktitut) « too bad it really happen but it's past now ». We have that philosophy and it's our strength. Our younger generation, I hope they gonna have that strength too. They're gonna understand what really happened and from that I believe, like myself, it gives me more strength. We are not fragile afterwards.

We are not like “houhouhou” and all that. We are strong people. And I’m proud of it. What happened is a big lesson. Bad lessons for family members. Shame for people that did that. And through this type of information, sharing, like that project that you are trying to do right now, people will see what really happened. And it’s too bad it took so long for them to admit what they did. I don’t know if they waited for these individuals who were deciding to pass away, I don’t know. I have a lot of questions about that too, to bureaucrats in Ottawa, in other places. Maybe they had to protect them or I don’t know.

Question 5: What did you think of the government’s apology?

Apologies, official apologies... it was good for many people, for many families. It was opening for people to have their own journeys. And also people were not satisfied. It was not prime minister, it wasn’t a big media or anything like that it was like still in a way try to hide it. I mean try to minimize or...that’s how I saw it. Was big but was...short. A few hours visit will not do for many, many years of suffering.

Question 6: Were you sad that your mother wasn’t there to see this?

Yeah and so many other people that were left behind and people that were sent. It’s kind of too late for apology when these people were in it are lost, are not here anymore. I guess that’s how the government works. They wait until they are gone or I don’t know.