

VERBATIM

Martha Flaherty

My name is Martha Flaherty. I'm originally from Inukjuak. We were relocated to High Arctic to a place called Grise Fjord when I was only five years old. I have been living in different places after that. After, I was sent out for school when I was fifteen to Carcross Yukon where I was alone. Only one Inuk in that place called receiving home. I stayed with all these kids that have no parents. I don't know why I was put there. There, I had a horrible year. I was mute for one year. Because I spoke hardly in English and I was everyday, bullied everyday for a whole year. They finally give up. They send me home back to Grise Fjord and from there I went to Churchill Manitoba for school where I was also mentally abused by lots of other students. And then I finished there, I went to Fort Smith Yukon to take nursing. There I was also abused physically and I got tired of this...

So I decided to go to school down south, namely Ottawa. Although it was strange, I felt very safe here. Nobody bothers me. When I finished school they placed me up north. They were very abusive and jealous instead of being happy about your accomplishment. The white people were always nice to me so I stayed there and I love the sports. I've been there ever since.

When we were in Inukjuak, when I was a child. I was born in May 29. I remember very well, because I couldn't sit on my own yet. I had the pillows all around me to sit me up. From there, I remember even being carried in amauti by my mother until we went to the ship. I lost a lot of memories. I still can't remember a lot of stuff of what happened to me till about ten, eleven, twelve because of trauma. And because we were also very hungry, no shelter.

Question 1: How was it growing up in Grise Fjord?

I had no childhood because I'm the oldest. I had to help my mother with the children and how to make kamiks, chewing gum. I learned how to sew when I was ten years old to help my mother. I never really (saw) a childhood in my life. Before these kids arrived to Grise Fjord, I was so lonely. No one to play with. I almost went crazy. My mother used to catch me talking to myself, pretending to have someone around me. The only friends I had were dogs.

I had to help my father because I was the oldest and he has no older boys. In pitch black, when I was only 8 years old, when he was hunting, waiting for seal to come out, I used to go around and around and I used to make him catch the seal. It was so cold that I couldn't even pee on my own. My father used to help to put my pants down and pee and help me up. And I had to look after all the dogs. I particularly remember in winter time, my father used to drink just water because we had no food. He would go out hunting alone. A lot of the time he came back nothing and if

he did trap, whatever he caught was eaten by wolves. The other time I remember so much, is that before Grise Fjord was established we were living further away. In the winter time, everybody used to go to the Grise Fjord station because we were invited to eat with them for Christmas. I remember it was so cold. We had to go by dog team. Being covered by caribou's skins my memory is lost again.

Question 2: How did you manage to survive?

I think I was just covered with blankets when we were living in the tents when it was very cold. I remember people gathering to be warm in one little shelter.

Question 3: What was it like for your mother?

My mom's life I can't even describe it because it was horrible. She went through hell. The word hell is not even strong enough to tell you what it was like. She went through so much trying to feed us. Trying to make some clothes out of scraps. She used to be so worried when I had to go out hunting when I was only seven years old. Worrying about me and my father because it was pitch black.

Question 4: How was the relationship with the Qallunaat?

Before we moved to Grise Fjord, now called Grise Fjord we live in a distance away, they told us that we can't be near them so we don't become independent on them. So we were far away from each other. The only time I remember they came over was to give needles to us who was very sick.

The time I remember when I was a little girl, we didn't have a relationship until in 1962 when the government was going to arrive to build the school they gathered us all to Grise Fjord, it's now called Grise Fjord. They built a school. That's when finally beginning to see children. When I thought I was crazy being alone all the time. We couldn't wait to go to school because at least there was cereal in the morning and some kind of a lunch in the afternoon. Otherwise when we go home there was nothing again. On top of that, people from Inukjuak and other kids from Pond Inlet and Igloodik, we didn't have the same dialect. That didn't work out that great either because they were putting us down a lot because we had a different dialect. They used to even laugh at our fathers' sleds because the strings for the dogs were longer than theirs. They even laugh about our ulu's they were different from their ulu's.

Question 5: Do you know why they sent you to the High Arctic?

What I remember is that listening to my parents in Inukjuak, I was only five years old. That we're going to be moving, moving to wonderful place, paradise. Where there is lots of food. That's what I remember. And they believe it. And as a little kids, we have no say, we have no power. So we just followed them. Once we got on the plane... on the ship it was horrifying. We were with strange people, dogs were howling. We were all together in one room in the bottom of the ship. I thought it was very strange and we were with strange people all the way up. When the water gets rough that most horrifying. You know the pole of the big ship, it almost touches the ground of the rough water especially when it's dark and raining. They had to put us on the life jackets and put us on top. I was horrified, screaming that we were going to die. But eventually I don't remember how it calmed down. When that ship were really rough, all of us were eating. I remember dishes flying all over, everybody is throwing up. Being tossed all over. I remember people wearing masks. I guess they had TB and that's was one of the worst ones. Then doctor Sheffer was told by nurse that one of the kids had lice. I guess mother was looking for lice. They found out. Doctor Sheffer decided to shave every kids head. Both girls and boys.

I was untouchable from there. I'm scared right from Inukjuak. I was not going to get my hair cut. First of all, Inuit believe in girls not to have their hair cut. I was the last one he chased because I was the toughest. I went underneath the bed. He was chasing me with scissors. I kicked him I went out through another door, I ran upstairs in the bathroom with my mother crying. We lock ourselves. That's how I kept my hair. And then whenever they need a needle because they know I was the toughest, they would always leave me alone first. I would have five men holding me up to give me needle and I'm kicking.

Question 6: What do you remember of the boat trip to Grise Fjord?

I remember Churchill first one. They put us on the land. They put a tent by the shore. I remember walking through the shore. We found old whole half-cut grapefruit from the ocean. We were eating them because there was nothing. And then we went back on the ship. That's when they x-ray my sister and two other girls. She had TB apparently. They took her away. We never saw her again. I don't remember being told where she was going. And from there I guess my parents got broken hearted and I don't even remember them talking. On the way there, we went to a whole bunch of communities and the ship was still picking up other people sick. Putting up, putting them on the ship. I particularly remember one boy, crying his heart out calling for his grandmother. Am I ever going to see my grandmother again? He was put in this ship crying and we went to other places and then we finally arrive to Resolute Bay. It was like going to darkness moon with nothing. Rock were sharp. We were wearing kamiks. It hurts. I remember I was a little girl. I had to follow, to look for garbage dump because we were hungry. They make me walk all the way there. I remember half way I was crying.

I was so much in pain in my feet. And then I don't know what happened there again. And then I don't know how long we stayed in Resolute and then we were shipped back into Grise Fjord. We

thought we would be together but we were separated. Finally we went to Craig Harbour. We first stop to Craig Harbour. We stayed there for one or two days. There was only one RCMP barrack. It's still there. They had a lot of dogs. It was horrible. All I saw was mountains and rocks. I was told because inhabitable they put us in a smaller boat again by RCMP they finally took us to a place called Aujittuq (Grise Fiord in Inuktitut) no RCMP either. They put us there. We were all scared and it was rough. And they dropped us there with the tent, no food, nothing. We been there for a year with no food. We were sort of lucky our qarmaq sod house burned down. We had no home for a few days because we had no home. There was an empty old house where Grise Fjord is across the river. There was home for RCMP and special constable. They put us there.

Question 7: Tell us about your young brother Peter who was just a baby when you were sent to Grise Fjord.

He went through a lot too because when we were living in the qarmaq, the outside house that burned down. We had a little stove out of oil barrel and she was trying to fetch the water so you can at least wash a little bit of what we had. She was boiling water and she turns around. She didn't know Peter was there and spilled the hot water on his back. It burnt the whole back of his. I don't know how my mother healed it. He must have been in incredible pain. Few years later, although there was an RCMP, she broke her arm by falling down. It's still crooked. There was no doctors, nurses. She must have been in incredible pain. She broke her arm. She healed it herself. You can tell, it's huge. And there is Larry Audlaluk. There was no doctor. He had eye problems. I use to see him in so much pain. I don't know how they did it.

Question 8: Why did they send you to the High Arctic?

We were told many times from almost everybody that they were sending us to paradise and we could be there for only two years and come back after two years. And I remember people being really sad once the ship arrived they couldn't get on. Then more depression arrived. I remember people keep talking about, especially elders: « I wish I could see my family. I heard they are dead. We can't even see them buried».

We have done research, looking through archive. We even see some letters. They wanted to bring up Inuit to occupy the islands because Russians were interested in taking over. On top of that, they used to try and send people from Pond Inlet, they couldn't live up there. And because it's not so far, they keep going back to Pond Inlet, so they decided to take us all the way from Inukjuak so we cannot go all the way up there by dog team. We can't return.

And then after all this, myself, Larry, John Amagoalik started talking out loud at the meetings, and Zeebeelee Nungak, that was wrong. That's when the issue started coming out. But we were still ignored until we keep pushing it and finally we had a little compensation ten million dollars. That should have been enough for one person each. I've been fighting a lot with others until last

years they were going to keep that 10 million locked until 2020 when my mother is dead, when I'm dead and most of us are dead. What are they going to do with it?

Don't make sense to me. It was just to shut us up. That they give us that little bit of money. And when it comes to apology that was gesture because we pushed for it. At least prime minister should have been apologizing not delegating his colleague. If it really means it to him. It was not enough for me. It's good that they apologized. I still have three buts: They still need money for healing, going back and forth among all these people who were left behind. They should also erect a monument for all the names that have been died up there in Grise Fjord, Resolute Bay. Put all their names in bring them to Inukjuak. That's where they belong. Another one I really feel strong is that horrible story about Canada, what Canadian government did to Inuit which was hidden for years it should be put into a story and put into human right museum in Winnipeg. They did that to holocaust. They are doing that to residential schools. They should do the same thing. This is a horrible history.

Question 9: What kind of future do you see for the people of Grise Fjord and Resolute Bay?

I think most of them will be going on. But there is going to be a lot of bitter people. I've seen especially in Resolute Bay individuals who are very, very angry. Especially the one I talked to their parents, their wives where used by Kabloonak people sexually. These children are still very angry.

I think they'll eventually start talking when they ready only but some of them will probably never talk about it. It's too painful. Once you start talking about it, you start healing. You feel better about yourself and you can start talking to people slowly. I think they should write journals and tell their own stories, it release your pain.

When I was going to school I use to be very quiet. I don't talk to people. I pretend I have no pain. I didn't even know I had pain because everything was blocked. But once I start people healing I started going to healing, just listening. Oh that's what it is and I started crying from there. You know that when you ask me to do that story, I was not ready for a long long time until I was listening to a lot of people a (good old) healing session. Even though I was not necessarily part of it just listening to it. It help me a lot to think about what I went through.

I feel much better. When the relocation was mention, I used to just cry. I couldn't even open my mouth. I came a long way and I still have a lot of thing to deal about.

Question 10: Do you have any advice for young people?

I think for young people besides the healing, the key is education. Because there is so much competition in the world for job, even if they look for job. There is too much competition. I think young people should keep educating themselves; it might be hard but it's going to be worth it.

They have to see the world and learn more about the world. Because they have technologies, they have all the thing that we did in not have. Try to attend healing and try to look at themselves. What's inside me? They have to start to take that out. Although I cannot take that out all at once. Even if you're not going to speak at the meeting, just listening at the people, you'r going to start opening. But the key is education right now.

Healing is one of the biggest way to get up. You can't give up. You have to let the pain out even though if it's hard, even if you feel very guilty and embarrassed. Once that is out, you'r going to start feeling better.