

VERBATIM

Moses Nowkawalk

My name is Moses Nowkawalk, from here Inukjuak.

Question 1: How has the relocation affected your family?

My father's relatives were sent to Resolute bay, his cousins, first cousins, his aunt and their families were shipped out to Resolute. My mother's older sister, Rynee was shipped off to Grise Fiord to validate the Canadian's government claim to the territory. They were close knit families and they were torn apart to satisfy government's claim over the high Arctic.

My father and people in our camp, which was called the North camp at that time, were asked to relocate at the high Arctic, and they agreed to go. They were promised good hunting and all that, agreed to go and they were told that they could come back within two years if they wanted to. And so my father and these other people picked up their traps, they had fox traps inland; they picked them all up and brought them back to the camp and wait for the boat to pick them up.

But the Hudson Bay company manager at the time didn't want people in my camp and another camp down south to leave because they were good trappers. I guess they contributed to the economy, so I guess that you can deduct that it pays to be a...to work hard. It's because they worked hard that the Hudson Bay's company manager didn't want them to leave. I almost went to the High Arctic at the age of one. Less than one maybe.

Question 2: Do you remember what your family had to go through at the time of the relocation?

We heard from them once in a while, but apparently some of the people that were out in Resolute tried to write letters to their families here and they found them in the dump. So I think their communications were cut off in purpose. One of the people who wrote a letter home, here, went to the dump, found his letters and pictures have been thrown away.

If the people here knew the actual conditions, I don't think anybody would have went. And that's even expressing National Geographic sent somebody up from Resolute in the fifties and they wrote...one of the caption under a picture was « Resolute desolate ». Nobody in his right mind would live there, I think!

Question 3: How did you learn about the living conditions they had in Resolute Bay?

I worked for TNI in 1988, 89, 87 and people were planning to move back to Inukjuak from Grise Fiord and Resolute Bay. I went up there with Louisa Samisack to document, well to interview the people that were planning to move back to Inukjuak, ask them questions about living up in the High Arctic, how it happened and all that. So that's how I learned a lot of the conditions and the events that took place up there.

Oh... They had a very hard time. They left the community thinking that they would stay together, but then when they were way up in the High Arctic, near Pond Inlet, they were told that they were going to be separated which came up as a surprise to everybody.

Question 4: How was the hunting up there?

I don't know if you can call hunting in the dark for six months good! Thanks to the people in the High Arctic who knew how to survive in those conditions, they helped people from Inukjuak a lot to survive up there. But still they get stories like my cousin Martha, had to walk around the ice to try to scare the seals to where her father was waiting at one of the breathing holes. Seven years old, eight years old, walking around in the High Arctic in the dark, all in the name of Canada, doesn't sound right to me.

Question 5: Did anybody want to go back to Inukjuak?

People, the older generation grew up here, their families were here, all they knew was here they wanted to come back. The government didn't want them to come back. They had to pay from their own pockets to come back, even to visit... They paid another high price to pay for the airfare to come and visit their families.

Well, the younger generation was born up there and they were just relocated again! Second generation was dislocated again! So it's pretty bad mess. Younger generation wanted to go back up, older generation wanted to come back down, kids caught in between.

Question 6: Was it difficult for the people to return to the community of Inukjuak ?

There was a lot of people with... small minds telling the people that came back « you're not from here » you know, that type of things. Unfolding the unwelcome mat, in many cases... Not everybody, but a few made it rather difficult.

The younger generation yeah, it affected everybody actually. I don't think it was that hard to reintegrate. Maybe for the younger generation it was, but the older generation, people knew each other from way back when.

Question 7: What did you think of the government's apology?

I felt sorry for the guy who sheepishly apologizing for the government. They were apologizing for the previous government action. The Government also apologized to students, residential school students, victims. I call them, survivors. They also apologized to the Japanese, Italians, God who else knows who they apologized to. But it makes me wonder what kind of idiots are running this country at any one time! And I also wonder, who's next? Which group of people is going to be the next victims caught in the Government's crosshair?

And it's sad because, there are a few words in the national anthem, the words « True North strong and free» doesn't quite ring true for me, because we paid a high price, family wise, mainly family wise. We paid a high price to make the High Arctic part of Canada.

Question 8 : What do you think the government should do?

It's great to say that they were sorry, but they have a history of doing sorry things. I don't know... It's hard to say, what would you suggest? Probably compensation is the usual course of action. Financial compensation, but this time I'd like to see the money given to the people and not given to them in bits and pieces like they did with the Relocation compensation money.

I'm proud to be a Canadian, thank god I was born in Canada, but that relocation part of the History is a little dark spot on the otherwise honourable pursuit.

Well they were dropped off on the beach, with a buffalo skin. Can you imagine people doing that today? I mean, makes me so mad. If the people, politicians down south were so adamant claiming the High Arctic, they should have sent their own relatives up there! But then again, but wouldn't have been able to survive, they probably walk out the door and become a stick in no time!

Question 10: How were the relations between the RCMP and the Inuit?

They expected the Inuit to support themselves by hunting, but as you can imagine it's rather difficult to hunt in the dark under those conditions, it's absolutely, completely different compare to here, where at least you get daylight everyday. They were expected to support themselves and when they tried to supplement their meagre belongings at the dump, picking up discarded wood, whatever; they found frozen leftovers from the air force base. So they picked that up and the RCMP officers would chase them back to their tents. That's cruelty...

Question 11: How did the bar opening at the army base affected the community?

One of my father's cousin said what they went through would make anybody become an alcoholic. Not only did they have to deal with leaving their families, friends and country, alcohol dumped another pile of problems on the small community...

That would be human right violation today, wouldn't it? To break up families, to lie to them, make them think they would be able to come back.