

VERBATIM

Georges Echalook

My name is Georges Echalook, I'm born between Inukjuak and Puvirnituk, that's my original hometown. At that time it was an outpost, that time I was eleven years old and then our, my parents relocated to High Arctic. I don't know what was happening. I was just young boy. I don't know what was going on at that time. That's in 1955. So, they relocated to High Arctic but we didn't know where we were going. We were going to Resolute Bay in High Arctic. I grew up there.

I've been up there since '55 and then I started working to different organization until today. It was my hometown in High Arctic, in Resolute because I grew up there. I grew up with local Inuit people and Baffin people. I use to be the mayor in Resolute and I work in organization until today. I've been up there until 2010. Early 2011, I moved down to Iqaluit but I've been traveling a lot dealing with the different organization. Right now, I'm living in Iqaluit.

I work with, right now, QIA (*Qikiqtani Inuit Association*). I'm the vice president. I've been with them almost thirteen, fourteen years and I'm still working with them. And also, automatically when I was elected for the vice-president for the QIA, automatically I'm in NTI board. That's what I do now. I still have two more terms.

Question 1: Do you remember when you left for Resolute?

That time when we travelled by C.D Howe, by the ship early 1955 from Inukjuak, we have to stop in almost every community in Baffin Island. Because at that time, the C.D. Howe is carrying the doctors and nurse and all that. They get x-ray. I don't really know which community we stop but, we stop there for one or two days. It depends how big the population is in the community. They have to x-ray and examined the people, Inuit people.

I heard from my parents, we stopped almost every community on our way to the High Arctic. Really late summer like in August, we arrived to High Arctic in Resolute Bay. I was so happy because I were young and don't know what was going on. But I do remember people, Inuit people with me; we were about seven or eight more family with us. I don't remember. They use to cry. I don't know what's going on.

Because translation was very bad because we didn't speak English that time. (Negotiating) with RCMP's and government in Inukjuak, talking to the parents, they've been ask to be, to go located in the High Arctic but they said no (in a way). They never left home before and they end up saying yes because the government said it's only for two years. The first family did move up there early '53, they said they coming back in two years. We are going to be return after two

years, only two years. They understood that and the, they accepted. The communication was really bad that time. '53's, families wrote letters to us of what were happening up there every once in a while, maybe one or two in years of time.

Communication was really bad that time and transportation was bad. They hadn't been receiving the letters of what is happening up there. The only information they sent, the most of the information they wrote has been torn out by RCMP before they left to the mails.

When we disembarked from the ship, we expected to see lush landscape and nice hills. We had real Inuit kamiks then. As we disembarked, the members of the first party came to greet us and I was happy. I was happy and they were happy to get new company. Their land were very different. All rock and clay. We arrived somewhere very different, like another planet. No vegetation. It was cold, even in the summer. In August. We saw patches of snow and ice at the shore. Very different. We had to pitch the tents as it was summer. There were no rocks, just gravel. They filled the burlap bags and made anchors for the tent with them. They also used sand and gravel to secure the tent walls to the ground. That's how they put up the tent.

We remember this event so clearly. We were kids and wasted no time for play. It was all gravel and it was August. We kept wondering about the vegetation. It was very different from the landscape of Inukjuak. There were no dune peas, no dune grass, no crowberries to munch on as we played. Those who were already there, asked us, like my eldest sister and John Amagoalik... They asked us: «does it feel like you stepped onto the moon?».

That's what I remember the most as we set foot at Resolute. But our parents were hunters, so they already had a sense. They began to inquire where they should go hunting. Those who already lived there said they still did not know. They didn't know where to go for fish, caribou, and waterfowl for instance. There were none in fact at that time.

I also remember the members of the first group, who arrived in 1953, they were crying because they expected to board the ship. Their two years were up and they expected that we arrived to relieve them. They had packed to leave and were lobbying the RCMP. They were ready to board the CD Howe and go back. That's probably why I remember them crying. The RCMP is said to have replied, "It will be all right now that your relatives are here." I remember them asking each other when they would go back. They probably only got a nonsense answer. They had expected to return after the two years.

I also remember Grandmother and how she had prepared. She had many can, pails, tins, full of cigarette ends. She knew of the poverty and of saving. At that time, there were no shops, no health clinics, no school. We did not know where we would buy goods.

There were white people but we were not allowed to fraternize with them. For many, many years, we were kept apart. The government had supplied us but that quickly ran out. We had no idea where we would get food or tea from. I remember those in particular, when we

went to Resolute. It was always daylight too, which was strange for us. We were told that's how it is in the summer. Always day.

Then in the fall, it would get dark and stay dark. It was strange. Nobody ever told us this. All they said was there is plenty of food. Also that it had plenty of game. I remember hearing those things, when I was small. I also remember polar bears coming through our community. We had never seen such things but we had been taught that Polar Bears were dangerous. We had dogs. They were our defense.

These are the things I remember from 1955. We sailed across from Inukjuak to Fort Churchill. My sisters Dora and Mary...and Martha's sister Mary. I remember when they were put ashore, our parents including the kids cried. Our family had never been separated. My parents may have been informed but us children... I don't know if we were told. They cried, wept because of our loss. The damned officials or nurses just took them.

The girls were crying, they were just so tiny. They got in the vehicles as our parents cried. It seemed we would never ever see them again. It was apparent that this was painful for our parents. A long time... They were away for approximately four years.

I remember Mary and someone passing through Resolute. They had grown much bigger. Dora... but she didn't arrive. Dora was mistakenly sent back to Inukjuak. At the time when she was misplaced, they used to ask her where she came from. She would just reply she was from Inukjuak. So they sent her back home to Inukjuak. My parents knew she was missing, so they asked the Constable to search for her. They found her in Inukjuak. She had left by plane and arrived by ship. She was back three years after she was supposed to.

Question 2: How was it like growing up in Resolute?

Growing as a child it was not bad. Our parents were not happy. There was no school. We only got a school years later. We did not live in snow houses. We gathered wood from the dump. We walked to the dump at night for wood and other refuse. We could gather wood before there was snow. We built our own shacks with no nails and no tools. It took us a long, long time to make a shelter. We gathered only small pieces of wood from the dump. That's how we got winter shelter. We went to the dump at night because the Constable made sure we never got near the white people. It took us a long time. We also gathered and distributed pieces of wood for our stoves. There was no other resource, no vegetation.

The growth of our village didn't seem bad. We thought it was the standard way. I used to go with hunters. I used to go with anybody. I loved hunting. It's our tradition so I just loved it. I was also a male child so it was not difficult for me. I was not aware of so many going-ons. I grew up here. I've heard about schools, but we had no school. None.

I had no complaints. Our world was just play as children. It was fine for the young. That was my childhood at Resolute. Imported goods however came to us very, very slowly. They went through tough, tough times, our parents. The systems of communications improved very

slowly. They had communications only by mail at first. Most of the letters however were ripped apart. They had great difficulty. The men were always out hunting. They kept saying "when are we going back?" to the Constable. But they never got a straight answer. It was the hardest thing for our parents. Some families went back at their own expenses in the 1970s. Communication was improving then, but they wanted to go back anyway. But nobody will ever forget the « Can you go up? You can come back after 2 years» remarks. My parents never forgot and they went for a visit at their own expense.

By then their children were raising their own children in the High Arctic. So they only came for short visits. Personally I did not mind growing up in Resolute. I had a wife and children. It was not bad. It was not bad by the 1970s. An inquiry was called for into this matter, including by the ITC. I am still involved in it. We began to push as we became more able, like John Amagoalik.

We had the support of Makivik Corp. ITC, Qikirtaaluk organizations. They wanted more research into the matter, so we began around 1970. It is improving now. There were many of us children. We became very vocal for the love of our relatives, against the government. Which is still ongoing.

Question 3: What did you think of the government's apology?

I'm happy about the apology, but I really want to see what they will come up with and I'm waiting. At the apology last year, our supporters such as Makivik mentioned things like houses, schools, health clinics, even shops which were in the initial plans. Hunting equipment including boats which never materialized. I still expect those things. That they will be made real. I worked in different capacities at Baffin Island and Nunavut.

I began working when I was still not too knowledgeable about the ways of the white man. I can say to the young people. Sometimes I speak only in Inuktitut but I say what I can in English! I just do the best I can. I can speak to the youth in Nunavut, at Baffin Island. I would like them to get a good education in both Inuktitut and English.

They are our future as we say. As for us, we are old. Even if we live long, our desire to work will decrease. I urge our future leaders, to learn and work well. They have better future since the creation of Nunavut. We want them to have good education and get good jobs. Although they will choose their own jobs, if they want leadership position or whatever. They have very good future. They have things like computers and phones, which we didn't have.

But we don't want them to forget the Inuit way. They should work with the Inuit ways. We want to speak and write in Inuktitut in Nunavut.

Question 4: Something else you would like to say?

Not so much. People are aware of what we are doing. We have not forgotten anything and we are thankful. We appreciate the filmmakers and the journalists. We will always be available.