

VERBATIM

Noah Echalook

My parents..., my father was Noah Echalook. His sons were all Echalook, including me, Noah Echalook. Before the relocation to Resolute Bay, we lived where we would be left behind.,We lived pretty far up north.

Inukjuak village was here already. Our camp members came here to trade. I didn't know this place yet, because we lived up north. I normally don't say I'm from Inukjuak. I tend to think I'm from up north and I always go back there. It was there our relatives departed from, to go to the High Arctic. I think that's where I'm from.

Back then, we were semi nomadic. We used to move all the time. Sometimes it was a very short move. I can say that I am from Aajuraq. At certain time, all the children had to go to school. Many small villages converged here. So I came here as a result.

Question 1 : Do you remember the relocation?

In 1953, the first party left. When we were living up north, our own family... Then in 1955, we really got left behind. Juanie Echalook's and Minnie Allakariallak's families... They left us, some really for good. When they left, I really missed them for many, many years.

They were gone to where I didn't know. « Where did they go? » I used to ask. « Where were our family? » I used to think and think. I used to think that if I saw where they left from, that I could begin to look for them.

I used to ask mom: «Where is my nephew?» all the time. I would ask : «Where are they? » over and over. She would reply: « They will come back », even when it was not true anymore. She didn't know, I guess.

We have been devastated by the two years away statement. There was Saumik, son of Saumiapik, he was my best friend.

How old was I? During the first departure I was eight years old in 1953. I was ten in 1955 and I could remember things very clearly. As a result, I missed the people I remembered. I used to ask my mother: "Where did they go?". We used to relocate our camps on short distances. I used to say take me to so and so camp, so I can have a look there. I was around ten, twelve, thirteen. I really wanted to look for them.

« They will arrive. They will come» she would say. « After two years, they will come back. » That's what my mother used to say. Our parents did not get news for long periods. We didn't hear from them for a long time. They didn't even send us letters. They didn't write although airplane used to arrive. Our letters for them seem to disappear. That's how it seemed. We began to hear from them in bits and drabs.

Such things as so and so has passed away when in fact that person was still living. We used to hear about persons passing away and it seemed out of nowhere. Sometimes news was just word of mouth. Then we began to hear how difficult their journey had been. Then we could relate that to the sufferings of our own parents. It was so similar. Struggle here, struggle here. Those who were separated had similar anxieties.

I remember my young parents who despaired in the chaos as they were left behind. So we have begun to speak about it.

Question 2 : Did they come back?

Some did not come back. Now some are back in Inukjuak. Those who are still alive. But for me, I asked where did they go. In a visceral way. I clearly remember when they left. The boat came to get the relocates in 1955. There were tents along this way. I saw my father walking with his dog, his close companion, his very loyal lead dog.

He was just pacing up there as people were boarding the boat. I was terrible frightened. I don't know how come my father was there. My mother totally refused to go. Our relatives, Saimautialluk totally refused to go. Also my grandmother Lucy Saimautik refused. That's how we were left behind.

I was a boy of ten years old and I could see and look around. I was very aware then. They began to visit but just as individuals at the beginning. So we began to see some of them again.

— In which year?

Around the 1970s. It was unbelievable at first but they looked like them and they vouched for themselves. There are so many things to say when we talk about it. Us being left behind was a very big event. We were separated from our family. It was traumatic for many Inuit.

I'm happy to give an interview. But I have this in my mind; the trauma experience of those who were left behind and those who left... Neither party suffered less. Even with that, some have had small compensation and some have not.

It seems we will have this ongoing grievance. As I said before, we felt the pain. We learned our family lived far up in the High Arctic. They were still alive? After all that time? I always wanted to visit their graves so I, as you know, I saw you there. I especially wanted to see my grandmother Maava. I saw her grave and the others. My mind was greatly unburdened at Resolute Bay.

I was emotional but my relatives were there and they were at peace. I was able to stay at peace. To be close to your family is the culture of the Inuit. To know your own.

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

So many of those with the first-hand experience have passed away. Those who could really receive the apology were few. Was this the end of the process for them? Will they cease relocating people now? It is because if they try to do it again, Inuit will be able to fight back ? This is how I think the government thinks.

Today me and Minnie take out youth to youth camps. Even our own children. We look after many youth. I can tell them anything as kids come closer at camp. I would try and inform them of our experience. My kids also.

I think I can tell my whole story from end to end. This experience was very traumatizing. It is always touchy with the relocates who have come back. We share their experience.

When someone confronts a problem, it seems we all need to get involved in some way. So I've cast in my lot.

Question 4 : Do you see your relatives who are still in high arctic?

We have gone to see our relations in Resolute Bay. We knew each other better. One of my children came with us. When we went for a visit, she made some contacts. She even chats on the internet. She knows her cousin and they are continuing to be friends. Even if I had tried to inform her, she might not have thought so much of it. She came with us and met her cousin. Now they communicate by computer.