

VERBATIM

Laisa Audlaluk Watsko

I'm Laisa Audlaluk Watsko, I am residing here in Grise Fiord for the last twelve years, went out of town and then moved back here, been here since and working for QIA (Qikiqtani Inuit Association). My parents are Annie and Larry Audlaluk.

I went out for school in Iqaluit for four years. Our school in 1988 was still going up to grade eight so we had to go for a grade nine, ten until graduating, nine, ten, eleven, twelve. Just recently, I think it was in 1995 or 1996 Grise Fiord's High School finally went to grade twelve. Oh no, couple of years earlier than that. So I went out and then went to work for the government and I started out seeing the rest of the region and our territory. I went to move to a couple of communities and Iqaluit last and then came back here.

There is no place like home. I had my daughter when I was really young and so out there it was kind of tough raising her. The daycare was expensive, subsidy wasn't quite happening yet for beneficiaries because we weren't quite Nunavut yet in 1999, so in 2000 I came back here. Here I had my family's support, my parents and for her to be back in her grandparents realm if you will, was an ease for me. I grew up with no grandparents, not remembering any grandparents, so for my kids, for my daughter then, to be around her grandparents was important for me, like roots. So I thought maybe me I'll be here for a couple of years, but it's already been...a long time!

When me and my husband are working it's fine, routine daily, but it can get tough some days during the dark season. It's like that, I find even when we are in Iqaluit, it's still, not dark season but winter season, so it's not so much different for me.

Question 1: What was Grise Fiord like when you were young and how has it changed?

It's different like... It's home to me, like they say: « home is where the heart is». But it has been for the thirty eight years of my life; everything gone from family time to an empty feeling to having my own family. Family being... I grew up with a lot of my relatives, who have moved since. They went back to Northern Quebec. Those were my growing up family; my cousins, uncles and aunts where all around here and all my cousins, the boys were like my brothers to me. So growing up, that was my family and then only the last decade, I learned or realized, Oh that part of my time has gone suddenly! I mean they are still living but they are not part of my... they had suddenly gone from my life. Like, I only reflected back the last ten years, Oh, so that's what happened.

And then there was an empty feeling in my life after high school. Then I met someone and then, I had my own family. There's been a big change in my generation. I didn't understand too much then, I was naïve. The year that my aunts and uncles decided to move back was the time I was going to high school. It was... I was only fourteen, but I was sent away to high school. But it was like: « wow, I'm getting somewhere or I'm moving. » It was an exciting time I guess in a way; even though maybe I was naïve, I was not thinking the whole picture. I'm thinking they stayed back to help my future or to help support us here.

I had no idea why my father really stayed back. Again, I didn't look at the whole picture. I was in my own little world going forward and my sister and I were went out at the same time, since I had her, wow, it was big for me and her, without you know, seeing the big picture. After high school maybe, then I started to pick it up more: « Oh ok, that's what's happening.»

I think high school time, the four years was my prime, teenager at that time. I like to say we're still different from today; we still had to listen to our elders, to respect our elders. I think it was still that time. It was our prime but afterward, I started to say ok, what's happening here. Like when I came back from high school I wondered there's a missing family. The town started to have that empty feeling that started to grow more and more.

In high school I met new friends. It was new time for me, but as we got back here for the summer holidays, that part of my growing up, that was missing when we came back summer months from school. We were still going on the ice, ice hopping, summer typical kid's time. That's who I would always go out with and that was starting to have an effect on me because they weren't here, even though I had a couple of other friends that were still here we were able to go with. But the family support where we always had each other no matter what we did, or you know, family time camping, it was starting to go like I started to have the effect.

I only remember bits and pieces. I don't remember why, I think maybe because I had a rough time growing up. My parents were alcoholics, I think that's why the attention anyway was really (wild) for me, even getting the attention to go to high school.

I had my best friend, she grew up and had her family too. But it was my cousins were like my brothers. Kid time, yes it was fun but at home, it was different. It was...If I could be out, any day, nice day I would take it, out until everyone sobered up or something. That's part of the childhood I remember. It was tough but I think I grew out of it. I've forgiven them, but that was part of my growing up where half the time I didn't remember anything until my best friend used to ask me: « Do you remember, do you remember, do you remember?»

I didn't remember half the time and I'm thinking maybe that's part of the not so good child memory I had at home, even though I think I've gone past it.

A lot of times, I think I've built my own walls and if that looked familiar and I didn't like it I quickly recognized it and blocked it and I think that's how I grew up for the most part but in the end I've forgiven I think. I think it's gotten easier and I understand why and how that became.

My family...my father's part of the family who's come here has endured a lot of hurt and pain from the move. I ignored it for the most part because there was so much animosity between not just them but between other community members. They were the ones who endured pain and they had so much hurt from being moved from their own will. It was a broken promise for them, to not return after two years. And I think from that it was a growth of pain, anger and resentment from, I didn't know at the time that it was the government. But because I've seen it and recognize not only from my father but from other members of the family, I think that where a lot of it, a lot of the hurt and pain is on my father and in turn affected us. But having grown and matured and having my own kids I'm not going to do that. I've seen that, it's terrible and no kid should have to go through that. So, I hope I cut my own pain and stop it there. But there's healing that's still happening and I think it should continue for us to let go of what's happened. 'Cause it's gone as far as me.

When the monument was erected two years ago here and then last year in Inukjuak where there was family members, original family members talked about what they had gone through having gone to the original camps, where they were picked up. When I put these pieces together « Oh, that's what happened. That's where it started». Then I learned to listen more, that's what my uncle was going through, that's what my aunt was going through. They were in separate camps and when I hear about it I want to learn more. And it was heartbreaking to hear that they didn't do it themselves, they were being directed because you had to listen to the community constable or the RCMP because they were like the kings then. You had to listen even though there was, in 1953 it was only a Canadian (status for charter of rights), it was only a status then until 1962 I think, it became constitution charter of rights signed by the Queen. Even though that happened in 1962 no one was brought back and when you see the whole picture today, it's like that happened to my family, that happened to us like I can say us too because I'm part of it. But at the same time there is another little part of me that says: « my family was given a land, wow, why don't we make the best of it?» It's slowly starting to rise but to hear the rest of the family who got hurt and who were pulled from their will. That part still has to heal, not just for me, but for my dad and family members.

Question 2: Do you think the official apologies have helped people feel better?

I've heard my late uncle's wife, two of them actually; they felt better from it as some part of their life and their kids. But what I don't understand was that why the federal minister Duncan didn't have any medias. Why wasn't it across Canada that it was aired? There is still part of that when... it wasn't in the national media and that's still ignorance at some point where I think even though my family was brought here in the name of Canada Sovereignty, there's that part where you still feel... I still feel for the family, my family who endured all this loss from the move. We lost so much family members... even my grandfather... and they didn't hear the apology even though the time has passed it says only part from our Canada like that part I feel ashamed for Canada because there was no national coverage about our story even though we still hold the flagpole here, if you will.

I like to think that it's everyone that was brought here like my father, Martha, Martha's mother, my aunt who came, everyone who's... I think it's important for them because it give them some part of closure. I think we need to let go of all the resentment to end pain and anger if we can and start healing process.

I want to make sure I don't bring it down to my kids... some part of pain, 'cause I know when my father use to be drunk and mad I use to take it out on someone. I started seeing that string. We want to stop that 'cause I know it's part of his anger roots from his father's resentment, or the family. It's recognizable I think.

Especially when you have children you want to move on healthy. You want to be happy like the rest of the people that you see are happy. You want to cut that anger off because it's unhealthy.

Sadly I think I've taken some of it, like I think I've created my own little animosity from it but from the monuments erections. I wanted to continue the healing process not just from my generation but I want to make sure that everyone of my dad's group, fathers and uncles... It goes that far because they were pulled from their homeland where the original people were picked and scattered the way they have... the way we came up here.

Question 3: Have you ever attended any of the healing sessions?

I went to one session and they started one session here two years ago and to hear what my uncles and my grandma went through, just hearing that it was unimaginable to hear all that, what they've gone through, what they were feeling. When someone died they didn't hear from it for over a year, until there was a ship that went down or those kind of... just hearing about them you feel so much appreciation « Okay, that where I should start». Not the healing but I pick it up and help them to get fine if I can. But I think we should have more healing and circles to continue to tell all the stories that were, that needed to be told or still need to come out 'cause I know there is. I know my generation, the move back down in 1988 after I started to feel emptiness if you will, it happened all over again, like for my generation. And I have some part of healing for it because I felt for those brothers who are still there, who have move back with my uncles and aunts but they are... they've become... they became foreigners down there, like it wasn't their upbringing. It was a different place and they were treated like an outcast sometime so they felt another sense of loss, like we did but less painful than my grandparents went through, but it was ongoing. Like we need healing from that because they heard my uncles and aunts and they took it and they became outcasts because they were labelled as high arctic people, they're blablabla... no good.

They're still needs to be that healing to move on healthily because we know the brothers I grew up with are not the same, I mean we all grew up and change but they are not the boys I remember, growing up. If you remember you grew up with your own siblings you know how they are, you know how they react, or what they eat, their everything favorite. It's different, we

don't just grow up and change, sometimes we still have that little piece where you know, my so and so brother would do this, it's not like that, it's not what I remember.

This year is suppose to be my generation healing. They were suppose to come in June but we learned that they have postpone until September so I'm really looking forward to hearing what they've gone through because I want to cry with them and get over this past. You know continuing like to me I think we have to stop dragging on and bringing our pain and frustrations and just end it. I want to move on and have a healthy life with my children. I want them to have different... not pain, but you know their own little, not mine or my dad's pain or my grandpa's pain, I want to stop here.

Sometimes we end up with bad habits because we have so much pain and at some point, I think I wanted to drink and drink and not hear anything about my dad's pain or anything about my family's pain that they endured. Like I wanted to stop at one point when I was drinking one time and I though looking back that it wasn't the way and I know that my other relatives who are maybe into substance to try and stop their own pain too. I know it's there because I see it.

I think if we can have so much involvement, so much people participate, it's a start even though they don't get to talk in a circle for that afternoon or something. I think it's a seed for them to start somewhere I think even to hear... hearing each other's experience and pain and problem. It's a start for them to you know crack the egg and start the healing from there. I think if we can say it's a start for them then they have the rest of their lives to try and live happier.

Question 4: What are your hopes for the next generation?

The other part of me was saying well we were given a land. My cousin who is maybe more religious than me would say: « well it's the land that God gave us and let's make it happen and live». But I like to believe that but at the same time, there is always a but because it's in the remote Canada, it's in the most northern Canada where it's high in geographical... or in a map if you see it, it's expensive everything is expensive and you feel remote, you feel isolated at times. But you make the best of it. We try and make the best of it.

I want them to come and not just cry with me but with our family members and the community, where everyone would be involved, flush out what they needed to say or hear from each other and then start a better life, be happier. I'm hoping that. I like to think that people who come from here, from our family members or who's been in the move, are leaders now and I think from our own experience and hearing from our own experience, we've become well educated, experience from our own experience, from our parents and grandparents that were leaders. There is a sense of purpose for me there, from what we endured, from this.

I like to think that we've help make Nunavut a better place because I know a lot of the people who are members of the move to Resolute and Grise Fiord, a lot of them are in the leadership roles in boards and organisations.

A lot of the times I miss the good parts of my childhood, like I think I've taken a lot of my uncle... I used to go with my uncle a lot, out hunting; he was one of the sober ones. I would go fishing with him two weeks at a time and camping. I still camp at his favorite campground because it feels like home... and those are the good memories.

I miss them. That's the part that I miss. Sometimes there doesn't seem to be... I mean just sometimes when you feel down or something and it's springtime and we go to the camp that's when I feel not at ease because...when I was a kid, before I knew I move, everything seemed happy to me at one time in my life. That was camping with all the family members, I remember.

Elijah Nutara was the one who was always on the go and he was unpredictable because one time we were camping across Devon Island and it didn't look like one morning, it didn't look like we were moving but he looked out, got his binoculars out and looked around «oh we're pulling camp» and we had to rush everything to the kamautiq and we're moving to the next camp and a long day we will have tea in six stops , for a short ride, that's how fun and unpredictable he was. He acted like there was no worries of anything, maybe I was just a kid and didn't understand anything but that was the family happy time I remember with my uncle. He took care of everyone in the camp and... just fun, yeah.