

VERBATIM

Aipilie Echalook

I am Aipilie Echalook. I've lived in Inukjuak since forever. Actually, when I was a youth... I was twelve years old, my fellow Inuit and my peers disappeared. My father and others were greatly affected. As for myself, I felt the loss of my parents. My father was close to his brother and sister, who left. So I felt the loss too, mostly because of my parent's loss. I also felt the loss personally as the children left, my playmates. For instance, Saumik my cousin left. There was Markusie Patsauq, Lizzie Amagoalik, Rynee, Sarah.... My childhood friends and relatives. Those I grew up with left. There were my female cousins and my male cousins.

My uncles were Juanie Amagoalik and Alex Patsauq. They were my father's brothers. They are the ones who left us.

Question 1: How long before you first heard from the people who had been moved up north?

I don't know how many years... Maybe twenty or more years. Much more. We never got mail then. There was none. Rarely ever. Our parents got mail from our relatives, about once a year or every two years. It was very hard. There were those who left and those left behind. I knew when we got left behind. There was a lot of wailing. I know my father died of depression. When we become big enough, we went hunting with our fathers. I went with my father dog team, before we had ski-doo's. He used to long for his brother while we were hunting. He said: "I wonder about Juanie." He was remembering. He said: «I wonder about Juanie» over and over again. He was just saying it to himself. He kept saying it as he thought of his brother. He had two brothers who had been relocated. Soon after he got sick and died very quickly. I'm not sure if it was 1959. He was about sixty.

I don't remember her. I was very little when she passed away. My father's sister, my aunt, my father's sister brought me up. I used to think she was my mum.

Question 2: When did you learn about the relocation and the hardship they went through?

I had a sense of grief, even when I was still a child. I did not even think of it as grief. I know they cried and cried. I don't remember anybody fighting back. We had to obey any white person.

The RCMP were responsible. Regarding being cross with white persons, I don't remember my parents ever challenging white people ever.

Question 3: Did your father see his brother again?

He never saw them again. After Noah, my father's passing, Juanie and Alex came for a visit. Their brother had already passed away, so they never saw him. They came from the High Arctic to Inukjuak.

Question 4: Are you angry about what happened?

We gained a voice as we became aware of the acts of the government. We were mad. We asked what did the government do to us? What did they do to our parents? They deceived them, didn't they? We came to these issues. Therefore we began to think about ours too. We thought about the descendants too, up there. I began to think; we might never see them either.

I began to talk to some of my friends. I began to think of ways of how we could see some of our relatives. We began to talk amongst ourselves. We began to have private chats while visiting. We began to hatch a plan. Our fathers had been manipulated and we were doing nothing. We began by visits. We proposed ideas. But we were ignorant. I knew more but I still only had a notion. « What condition are my peers in? Us descendants? » That was our question.

Where are they? Nanippisi? Where were our peers taken to? Whom we had never seen... we asked? We began to ask and wanted to see them. We got ourselves a group name. Nanippisi (Where are you?) was our name. That was a name we took as the descendants of the left behind. We formed a small committee. We began to develop and even hired someone.

We hired someone who could speak English and do fundraising. We didn't even have any visibility. We got the support of our local Makivik Corporation board member. We kept the meetings going. We raised money successfully. We managed to fund our first trip up under our

Nanippisi name to Resolute Bay and Grise Fiord, to Larry's community. We are one community here.

But we split our group since there were twenty-seven of us. We went to visit as Nanippisi. Our name Nanippisi is inquiring to whoever it may be. We put our name on all our things, even our backpacks. Nanippisi our name will become more visible. We had this plan. There are many of us with relatives over there. We choose the more elderly like me or the young.

We decided to include some descendants like my oldest daughter. Actually, it was mostly her age group. We plan another trip next year. We thought it should happen in July or August. We still plan to go. We would never know if we never acted. We will build relationships by organizing visits. We are finding each other by this effort. We had to start a search, to where ever. We had no idea where they were. So our Nanippisi is a way of searching.

Question 5: What did you think of the government's apology?

It's good in a way to get an apology from the government. But there are no provisions for organized tours. I said Saumik is my cousin. He is my first cousin. If either one of us died, the government who made this apology will never budget us travel fare. I want to know about their great lies. My parents were greatly deceived by the government. Why did you have to lie?

Were you trying to extend Canada and relocated people? That is my question. They wanted to claim our land for Canada. They must have rationalized it in a lie. We are only beginning to understand what really happened during the relocation. I want people to talk about what happened to our parents. We want to speak about it more and more.

For instance, I still have relatives who I still have not met yet. My cousins who were there. How about my grandparents and grandchildren. What the hell was the government doing? They have to clearly answer these questions. They are connection tours to the High Arctic, they will hopefully continue. I remain on this committee. I always get called to the meetings. We are planning new activities for the fall. I like planning such things. Our children have to know they have relatives in the High Arctic.

Question 6: Do you think the community recovered?

Healing sessions are good and need to occur. I believe I will heal. I used to think that I don't need healing. But I've discovered I really need it. I'm really grateful that a person can deal with his issues. Sometimes it seems we are all alone but we are not. I think healing sessions should be undertaken; it will help us rise again. It is very helpful.