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Leader or Umialik

In stories passed on to us by our Inuvialuit ancestors it seems that there was always a leader (Umialik) named if there was a group of people together. This man was called Umialik which means rich man. It seems that this person was chosen because he was always well-dressed and always had lots of food and furs for clothing which means that he was a great hunter. This person was always looked up to and was well-respected as he was the law, judge and expected to lead his people in their quest for survival. This man organized all hunting and the powers to punish anyone who had done wrong and even could banish someone from their group if he continued to break their code of laws.

Hunting and Trapping/Economy

(how people caught fur bearing animals)

The Inuvialuit many years ago before the arrival of the whiteman and leg hold trap used to use different methods in catching animals. Many years ago the Inuvialuit in the Delta area used snares made from sinew that was taken from caribou. These snares were used for some small animals such as rabbits and squirrels and some larger animals such as lynx and they were used for the kinds of animals that would not chew the snare right away. The

Inuvialuit used to use what is known as a deadfall where they would use green trees to pile up in such a way that there was only one opening on one side which would be held up by a stick upright with another small stick which would be put in at an angle and it would be put in between the bottom log and an upright. This would be the trigger with a piece of fish or meat on the end and when it was touched it would fall or the logs would fall killing the animal instantly. Depending on what size of an animal it was set for - would determine the size and weight of the deadfall. Many peoples used small deadfalls (dependent on size of animal - mink, marten, fox, whatever). When they made a deadfall for a wolf or wolverine then the weight had to be quite heavy. The Inuvialuit also around the Delta and especially the coast hunted muskrats. The muskrats were well hunted the year round and was taken whenever the need arose for food or clothing. In the late fall they would get muskrats for clothing. In the late fall the Inuvialuit were at that time felt they were the best animals for making fur and clothing (skin).

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The methods used to hunt the muskrats were in the spring and fall and they would use bow and arrows as muskrats (if you know how to call and make the sounds of a muskrat) then they will come right up close to you. In the fall after freeze up and in the spring there were some places where the muskrats do not have holes in the banks around the lakes. Now a lot of lakes in the Delta the muskrats have holes in the banks.

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And what we call pushups - little houses that they make on top of the ice that the muskrats come up - they keep it open coming back and forth from that hole in the ground to the push up on the ice. The pushup is where they would feed. Where the rats did not have that hole in the bank then they used that push-up to live in as well as feed from as they had no other place to go. The Inuvialuit would then find these lakes that had no holes in the ground in the banks and they would tear down these push-ups that the rats had made on ice. Then they would sit there and wait until the rat came up and they would have the water where the hole was covered with a little bit of snow. As soon as the rat stuck its head out they would club it or hit it over the head with a stick or whatever they had. In this way, the rat would be killed instantly and just taken out of the hole. ill. 2

The Later Years

Hunting and trapping was the main economy of the Inuvialuit up until the 1950's. In the 1920's and 1930's the only employment available to a few Inuvialuit was working for the RCMP as special constables in guiding when patrols were made by dog team in winter and boating in the summer. The Hudson's Bay Company when they first came always brought in their managers and clerks. Therefore the only employment as we knew it derived from the Bay was when their stern wheelers came and people worked unloading the barges. And when the boats and barges would head for Tuk. They would hire an Inuvialuit to pilot the boat. At Tuk, they would load freight onto small ships to deliver to places like Holman Island, Red Island, Coppermine, Bathurst Inlet and Cambridge Bay. At Tuk, they would hire deckhands to work on these ships. ill. 3

It was only in the early 1950's when the DEW Line was being built that Inuvialuit began to be introduced into the wage economy. There were many Inuvialuit hired to work on the DEW Line and then by about the early fifties it was decided that Aklavik should be moved because of the problem of flooding. The site chosen was along the east branch of the Mackenzie River which was first known as East Three (Aklavik) and now known as Inuvik. Construction of Inuvik started in the spring of 1955. From then on there was no shortage of employment for the Inuvialuit in this region, until the DEW Line and Inuvik were both completed. This meant that a number of Inuvialuit got permanent jobs both on the DEW Line and in Inuvik (Inuvik officially opened in 1958) as janitors and equipment operators. Then from 1958 there were a lot of Inuvialuit who had disposed of their dog teams and lost their traps, canoes and cabins - deteriorated beyond use and did not save up any money claiming the time they had worked did not have anything to fall back on. And then in the early 1970's international oil companies started exploring for and finding gas and oil and then in the mid 70's to the early 80's there was another boom where the Inuvialuit had no shortage of jobs available to them. ill. 4

School at Shingle Point

The first school in this region opened at Shingle Point and it was opened up by the Anglican Mission. I sat and talked to an elder Elijah Harley, who went to school there when the school first opened. This was in the fall of 1929. The Hudson's Bay had been there previously and then days the Hudson's Bay in their store - they used to build a large warehouse. In the front of the warehouse they had a part where the store was. The Hudson's Bay the year before that had moved away from there and they had either moved to Herschel Island or Kitigariut, along the coast by the mouth of the Mackenzie River. The mission had gone down there and built some log cabins for the boys' and girls' residences and also their teacher and principal. In the large building that they used for the school they had one classroom and they also had attached to that a little frame building where they had their kitchen and dining room. They had also built a log church there. The people who went to school there - quite a few from this area - the Delta - there also was some from Tuktoyaktuk - also came from as far away as Coppermine and Cambridge Bay. In 1929 there were about 32 going to school there. There was about 15 boys and about 18 girls. It seems as if the school year started the same time as it does today - the first of September and ended in June. They had one teacher, a girls' supervisor and a boys' supervisor. The principals' wife was the cook. But they were all in one classroom but was split up accordingly to knowledge of what people could do. In them days they started out with classes from A,B,C,.

In the beginning, there, the missions did not have any dog teams or any mode of transportation so therefore it was the responsibility of the boys there who were going to school to haul all the ice for water and the wood for all the buildings that were there. The girls had to do a lot of sewing. They were learning how to sew as well. So they not only learned to read and write in the classroom, they learned how to sew and the girls and boys learned how to keep things going outside such as hauling, cutting, bringing water. This Shingle Point closed down in 1933 and then started up again in Aklavik in 1934.

In Aklavik in 1934 they had built a large frame building - a two story building. Upstairs were the dormitories for the kids. In one end, they had three dormitories for the girls and on the other side there was three dormitories for the boys. They also, in the bottom floor, had the dining room, the kitchen, the office for the principal; they had a small dining room for the staff and then 2 classrooms. In one, then, they called the junior classroom, had grades from A,B,C,. And then in junior classroom, if you completed your classes there you were promoted to the senior classroom which were grades one to six. They had one teacher in each classroom. But as is in the start of Shingle Point, in Aklavik, the boys still had the responsibility of keeping wood and water.

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They would haul in all their wood during the summer with a small boat and scow and pile it along the beach. And then when the kids all went back to school their first job would be to pack all this wood up to the school yard. During the winter it was the boys' responsibility to keep the wood piled up inside the building as they had two large furnaces, one on the boys' side and one on the girls'.

If we had mukluks or our clothes got torn or something like that we had the bigger ones had the responsibility of sewing their own clothes and they also had the responsibility of sewing clothes for the smaller children. The school was divided where the girls were on one side and the boys, they were not allowed at any time to mix or to talk to one another. The boys done their share of the work and girls done theirs, mostly was sewing, cooking, cleaning of the tables, setting of the dishes and so on in the dining room.

Them days, it was much more important for the boys to go and learn to hunt and trap. The only reason our parents sent us to school was to learn how to read and write. So, therefore we would go to school in September and most of the boys would go home in March excepting the children who came from the Kitikmeot region; mostly from Coppermine and Cambridge Bay who could not go home during the winter because of no transportation and also they sometimes could not go home during the summer because of ice conditions or the boats that travelled out that way (the Hudson's Bay boats) could not take them for one reason or another. Therefore, they would have to spend the whole year in the residence.

In them days right up until the 1930's and early 40's when we went to school our classes went up to grade 6, therefore, if you reached grade 6 you were out of school because you had no further to go or regardless of what grade you were in, if you reached the age of 16 you could not stay in the residence. I'm not sure of the date but somewhere in the latter 1940's when the government became active in Aklavik they built a day school. They built one that had 2 classrooms in it. Then there was no more residential school as both missions the Roman Catholic and the Anglican closed down at that time. Therefore, in the 1940's a lot of children did not go to school because the people in them days were mostly staying out at their camps on the traplines, in order for their kids to go to school they would have had to stay in Aklavik. There was a few families who did move to Aklavik for their kids to go to school, an awful lot did not. They did not have anywhere to stay. Then, of course, in 1959 the school was moved to Inuvik.

Hunting Caribou

The Inuvialuit sometimes had to follow the migration of caribou in order to survive and these are some of the methods that were used when hunting with bows and arrows and spears. A group of hunters would go and try to spot a herd of caribou. And when they did, they would then decide where it would be best to herd or drive them. They would then decide then who would hide with their bows and arrows and who would surround the herd to drive them. When this was decided one group of people would hide, wherever it may be in willows or amongst rocks and then the rest of them would sneak around the herd and try to drive them towards the hunters who were waiting. This method is still used sometimes today by the Inuvialuit hunters who although they have rifles, sometimes caribou are not too easy to get or get to, so this method is still used quite often. Another method used by our Inuvialuit ancestors was to wait for caribou to come near a big lake, where they would have kayaks hidden, along the lake. In some cases they would build a sort of a schute, they would either gather willows, rocks, poles or whatever they could get a hold of, to build a shute where the caribou came by, then they could drive them into that and therefore the caribou could be driven into the lake where it was best for them. When caribou was seen nearby, everyone would hide and wait until the caribou got close enough so that they could get around them to drive them. And then if they got them close enough and got into the shute, the caribou usually would all go into the lake. Once the caribou was driven into the water, the hunters would quickly get into their kayaks and go out after them. And the lakes picked were usually large enough so that the caribou could not get across right away, therefore they could surround with their kayaks and kill a large number. And the large number would be a they would try and get enough caribou in the hunt in order to put it away for the winter. So this method was used when they would be storing food for the winter which was done toward the fall season. During the summer months sometimes families or small groups of Inuvialuit would spend months just following the caribou herd, travelling through the mountains and this they done following the caribou in order to survive. When the Inuvialuit travelled on them days they used packsacks and also used packs on their dogs as when they travelled like this, they had with them all their earthly belongings of course, except their kayaks and kamotiks and things like that were too large to take along with them. During the summer when they got caribou they would take the sinew from along the back cut it out and dry it. This they used to make thread for sewing clothing. And they also made string from this to make such things as fishnets and for very many other uses such as string to use when they played their string games. They used it on their fishhooks when they had bone hooks which they used which were made out of antlers. The meat during the summer would be dried. And in drying when they dried their meat then they could conserve it and keep it for a long time. Where they had no other way of keeping it during the hot summer.

In the fall, the caribou skin would be in the best shape to use for clothing and blankets. So therefore, they would pick the best ones to skin and used for making clothes and blankets. And in the fall time when they got a large number of caribou in this way, the people would always save all the marrow and all the fat and this was used for many things such as making aqutuq which is now known as eskimo icecream, where they ground up meat and also cut up small strips and when the fat and the marrow are melted then they would mix this in with the meat and stir it until it was set. And when they got a large number of caribou like this they would take and make a hole in the ground or just a hole in the ground and put the meat in. And it was usually covered with moss, they piled up moss on it, and then to mark it so that they would be able to find it during the winter when they needed it. They would pile up rocks up high so that they would not get drifted under so that they would be able to find their stock pile again.

Festivities

In this part I will be talking about how they held their festivities many many years ago. These stories have been passed on to the Inuvialuit by their ancestors about how they used to get together during the darkest time of the year to have their feasts and dancing and all kinds of games. Each year they would plan where the festivities would be held the next year. Each year when the Inuvialuit started arriving at the designated place where they would hold their festivities, they would start building their own igloos where the people would be staying while they were there through the festive season. And when everyone was there they would build one really large igloo where the feasting and dancing and indoor games and contests would take place. In preparation for the feasting, the Inuvialuit would bring seals, muktuk, dried caribou and whale meat, dried fish and different kinds of roots and berries. They also brought a lot of seals with them both for food and oil for the lamps.

Each year a man would be picked who made up the best song and dance and of course, the best man in all the other events. The Inuvialuit would have been practising since the previous games to try and better themselves during the year. As such the singers would be making up new songs and dances. Some of the Inuvialuit would make up songs about the animals and birds. Sometimes the men would make up songs about what they had done such as going out on the sea ice to set a seal net and would make the motions to the dance about how he went about it. First, he would be walking along the ice and he would be making a motion saying this is a good place where he should set the net. And then he would get ready to chisel a hole in the ice where he would set his net. Then his next motion would be using a scoop to takout the ice slush from the hole. Then he shows how he would be pushing the net down under the ice to set it.

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Then after he set his net he would take a walk around and afterwhile he would come back and he would be pulling out his net at the first motion. And then in pulling up his net he finds he's caught a seal. Then he makes motions and talking, saying how happy everybody will be back at the camp because he has fresh meat. Then in ending the song and dance he's making a motion that he's taking his seal and tying it up and dragging it home behind him. Of course, inside the igloo there were many games played such as arm pulling, finger pulling, high kicking and many other contests. There would also be done string games, making figures like bear, swan, moose etc.. There was also game called napatchuk. Now this game was like a dart and it was from a piece of wood where you and a sharp object, such as bone, put on the end of it. You would throw it in the air and it had to stick upright in the wood. The game started by using the palm of your hand. Then you made a fist and put the napatchuk on your fist and threw so it would stand up on the piece of wood. Then you went from your little finger and you went and used all your fingers to throw the dart by using your hard sharp piece of the napatchuk on your finger and threw it so that it would stand up. Then you would go to your wrist, your elbow, your shoulder and then throw the napatchuk six times and then you would criss cross your arm and hold one ear and throw the napatchuk. You done both ears and then the top of your head and you had made a round. In doing this, it was also a contest playing against people so everytime you threw the napatchuk if it didn't stand up then it became the next person's turn and when it came back to you, you would start off where you left off. So, in the igloo there were many games played and outside there were many games also. They would have footracing, broadjump, tug-of-war and would tie a string tightly between two poles and keep making it higher to be doing the high jump. The napatchuk and the string games were often used by people for pastimes in the evenings and these games were both done by the adults, women and children. And this is how it was taught to be passed on from generation to generation.

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After all was finished and the best was chosen from each category, including the best songmaker and dancer the last night would be spent feasting and dancing and at the end the best dancer chosen would be the one to lead all the dancers out of the igloo and that would mean the end of their festivities. By then the days would be getting longer and everyone would leave to go their own way to pursue their hunting for survival.

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The people always gathered for their festivities at the darkest time of the year which we now know as being around Christmas and when they left to go back to their hunting their days started getting longer which would have been in the early new year.

Festivities (additional items)

As I mentioned in the string games and napatchuk there was a game they played with a bone from a seal flipper. It was cut out and cleaned with a small hole in one end of the bone. They would tie a string to the middle of the bone and attach it to a stick in the hole in the end of the seal bone. These games would be played during the long nights of the winter. In the spring the boys would be out with their bows and arrows, spears, harpoons and slings. The kind of slings used in those days were strings of leather made from whale skin and tied a string on it and used it as a sling. It would have been the kind David used to slay Goliath. The boys had to learn how to use these kinds of things in order to go on hunts for survival.

One of the other things from the caribou was the fat used by the Inuvialuit, who lived around the Delta and the mountains for their lamps or qulliq. The people that were around the mountains and in the Delta used this because they did not have any ready access to the whales and seals along the coast, they used the oil from whales and seals for their lamps.

Whaling Methods and Strategies

I am talking about whaling. I was told about this by a man Felix Nuyaviak who saw it in the late 1880's. How far back I do not believe anyone knows. I do not know for sure but I am doubtful that this has ever been recorded anywhere.

In the late 1880's as recollected by Felix Nuyaviak there were a lot of people living around Kittigahquit near the mouth of the Mackenzie River and along the shores of the Beaufort Sea.

People in those days were still using kayaks to do their whale hunting. In the summer possibly in the month of July when the whales could come into the Bay where there is lots of shallow water. The people would wait until there were lots of whales and there they would go out with their kayaks and surround them. Then they would proceed to drive them into shallow water where they would be grounded then they would proceed to thrust their spears in the blowhole to kill enough whales which would last them for the winter. Each hunter would have with him a stick with a hole in it which he would use to blow air into the whale so that it would float up in the water and be easier to tow. To do this he would cut a small hole in the whale and when the whale floated up enough he would then sew up the hole so that the air would not come out and then proceed to tow his kill back to shore. I was told by Felix that a hunter that he was watching towed into shore five whales at one time. The whales brought from one hunt would be anywhere from one hundred and fifty to three hundred depending on the number of people that were there because this was to be their winters' supply.

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The reasoning behind the taking of so many whales at one time was that they were never certain of how long the whales would stay in the Bay or if the weather would give them another chance to hunt. When the whales were brought to shore everyone would work cutting up the whales. The meat would be dried and the muktuk, flippers and even the heads and other and all other parts would be buried in shallow holes covered with moss and rocks or buried deep in the sand. The women picked the whales that would be best for the skin and would cut off whole pieces of the muktuk and blubber to prepare it for making waterproof mukluks and rope. The part used is in between the blubber and the white part and skin. The blubber was all scraped off and then it was staked out for a couple of days and then it was put on a big log where all the white part was scraped off which we call gaaniq and then again staked out on the ground to dry. This method of making leather from whales was used among the Inuvialuit until approximately 1960.

Another way of hunting that was used when it was not an organized hunt was when an individual went out he would look for a whale in shallow water and when he would get on top of a whale and then scare it and his kayak would be in the whale's wake. He would often stay right on top of it and have to paddle at which point where a harpoon would be used because it would sink otherwise and then the spear. Joe Nasogaluak from Tuk once told me that he can recall for the last time that he saw a large number of whales beached at one time. He was just a boy and estimated that there was somewhere between a hundred and a hundred and fifty as late as 1907 but was not sure how the hunt was done.

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Herschel Island

It was in the early 1900's after the large whaling ships came to Herschel Island to hunt that bow head whale that the Inuvialuit began using for them what was called and known as the whaleboat. Which turns out to be the life boats from the big whaling ships. There were no motors so the hunting was done by sailing (use of sail). By sailing the people had to be very quiet so that they could get close enough to harpoon the whale and attached to the ropes would be a whale or seal stomach blown up or one made up of seal skin with a disc attached to tire the whale or to slow it down enough for the people to be able to catch up to it and to kill it. At this time guns were being used to kill them with. This method and boat was still being used through the 1930's. Although some Inuvialuit had gotten some schooners with engines but some of the schooners still used sails entirely.

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In the 1940's the Inuvialuit started putting engines in their whale boats and of course the schooners had engines and unfortunately this is when people started straying away from the organized hunting that our ancestors always had to rely on. With the schooners the way of hunting also changed because they were not fast enough to catch up to a whale. The whale had to be shot to slow it down in order to get close enough to harpoon the whale. This method and type of boat was used up until the late 1950's when the canoe and outboard motor started taking over. Unfortunately all the schooners which were acquired from the mid 1920's to the early 1930's were getting old and rotten and there were no more left in the early 1960's.

Then the canoe and outboard motor took up where now had enough speed to catch up to the whales when they were in shallow enough water to follow them. The method most people use now is to harpoon the whale before it is shot where because it minimized the chance of killing a whale and it sinking and then not being able to find it.

From the early 1900's the muktuk from the whales has been cooked and put into containers with the oil to preserve it and the meat is dried and some of it is also put in the whale oil to keep.

Many years ago the only kinds of containers they had to use were the stomachs and the throats of the whale which they would take out, clean and blow up like a balloon and put to dry. They were used for many things such as berries, muktuk, containers for drymeat, dryfish, roots and so on and a lot of this stuff was put in oil to preserve it. Then they buried these in shallow graves with moss or in the sand for keeping.

Husky Lakes and Animal Lovers

One story of whales being frozen in the Eskimo Lakes was told to me by Felix Nuyaviak and they could not get out.

In the early 1900's Inuvialuit travelling by dog teams spotted a small number of whales coming up in an open spot in the ice. It being shortly after freeze up and the ice being thin they did not go near the whales and they were left alone. In the early new year when the days become longer a group of Inuvialuit went up to Eskimo Lakes from Tuktoyaktuk with their dog team which they left some distance away so as not to scare the whales away. There had been a sort of a shelter built up around the hole for when the whales came up and sprouted water some of it would keep landing around the hole and a build up of ice around the hole was made and it made a shelter around the hole like a dome. The ice, now being thick enough to haul the whales up on the ice, the hunters snuck up to the hole with their harpoons and guns and harpooned and then shot the whales. After killing them they got their dogs and pulled them out onto the ice; after they cut them up and hauled

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them home for both themselves and their dogs. The Inuvialuit at that time did not know if the whales would have survived the whole winter but at the time they were taken they were still in fairly good shape.

Story

In the mid 1960's it happened again that a number of whales were frozen in the Eskimo Lakes. They were not known to be in there until other airplanes flying over there saw them. This time all the animal lovers (south) got involved to save the whales. As there were no generators in the area (so) one was flown in from B.C. at a large expense. Then there were poles put up around the hole so that the whales would have 24 hour light. There were also people hired to keep watch on the whales 24 hours a day. There was an abundance of fish and meat taken/flown there in trying to feed them. When the whales eventually started to deteriorate they (people) decided to shoot one and check to see what condition it was in. 19

The elders were not involved in any of this, it was not known if any fish or meat was eaten by the whales. The whale, without people's knowledge, sank and was never retrieved and a few days later all the whales disappeared and to my knowledge nothing was ever found of them. So, what really happened to them no one really knows.