

AKUKITTUKULUIT—THOSE WITH TINY AKUQ (LEAH ARNAUJAQ’S MEMORY)

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“Unganatuinnaq, Akukittukulungmi tujurmiaqaliq-punga!” “My precious one! I have a guest with a very small *akuq*!” a relative of my late aunt Leah Arnaujaq informed her. My aunt replied with a question, “A small child?” The relative replied, “Do you know the size of a caribou tail? That is the size of the *akuq*.” An *akuq* is the back flap of our Aivilingmiut parka design and style in our traditional clothing.

My aunt Arnaujaq was very talkative and not shy to speak her mind. Listening to her stories of meeting these people “with short and small *akuq*” of their parkas still makes me smile. She was a young woman in her early twenties when the Fifth Thule Expedition arrived at our home area near Repulse Bay in Nunavut. Leah was my dad’s first cousin, the daughter of Tukturjiuk; Tukturjiuk was the older brother of my grandfather Makkik, who was my dad’s father. My dad Panniuq was a toddler when the Greenlanders arrived. Either Peter Freuchen or Kaj Birket-Smith described him as “a curly haired adopted son of Makkik, crying and with clothing almost full of amulets.”

As Arnaujaq recalled, more Greenlanders arrived by dog teams once the sea ice was formed. She was told to be kind and welcoming to them. She explains that she met the “boss of the Greenlanders,” I think it was Knud Rasmussen. As a girl, she did not immediately smile at him but had a staring contest, so to speak. He did not smile at her right away but he was the first to crack a smile. And as the Greenlanders started saying “*Nuanneq, nuanneq*,” to Arnaujaq’s understanding she became their favourite maternal niece. Today’s Greenlanders still use this term “*nuanneq*,” which my friend Nuka Møller in Greenland explained would be an equivalent to my dialect “*Quvianaq*!”—“joy” or “happiness.” It is a spoken expression of joy and happiness upon meeting strangers as friends; it speaks of kindness and to be welcoming. I’m

sure there were many smiles but also misunderstanding of dialects spoken when they met each other.

Jonathan King, curator at the British Museum, was once doing a presentation at the Arctic Clothing Conference in London. In his talk he showed a drawing from Rasmussen’s collection of people arriving to Iglulik. King described how he went to Iglulik and was able to interview the artist who drew these pictures for Rasmussen. The artist mentioned that it was of Angutimmarik and Ukpaktuq arriving with the Greenlanders. Angutimmarik was my maternal great-grandfather whom my mother was named after.

I remember opening my copy of Rasmussen’s original report, “The Intellectual Culture of the Iglulik Eskimo.” These were Iglulingmiut, our neighbors, but Rasmussen also wrote about the Aivilingmiut, *my ancestors*. With some apprehension and curiosity, I kept reading Rasmussen’s words about Angutimmarik, “a respected shaman of the Aivilik tribe, whose answers . . . often impressed me.” I remember being in awe of reading about Nanuraq (Nanorak) and Makkik, who were the loving adoptive parents of my dad. Rasmussen tells a story how shaman Angutimmarik purified a sick person, “a woman named Nanorak, the wife of Mákik [Makkik], lay very ill, with pains all over her body.” This was my grandmother *lying down very sick*. There were no cloth diapers or infant formula when my dad Paniyuq (Panniuq) was born—his birth was recorded as of 1920. He told me that his mom fed him with broth from seal, fish, or caribou; how birds and other winged creatures feed their young; and sometimes he sucked on fresh kidneys of animals. My father lived to be almost 94 years; I am in awe of the skill, knowledge, and love that was bestowed on him. The names Nanuraq, Angutimmarik, and Makkik are still carried on in our family and among our relatives today.

Thinking back a hundred years ago, I can only imagine the joy of Rasmussen when he was meeting and staying with my grandparents and great-grandparents. Greenland was already under colonial rule of Denmark for almost two hundred years and they experienced loss of their traditional Greenlandic culture. Rasmussen also came from a biracial family, and like many of today's biracial Inuit, he must have been so determined to preserve the intellectual culture and oral history of those Inuit he encountered. I for one am grateful that the Fifth Thule Expedition happened and that Rasmussen recorded all these stories. I have not read the entire reports as sometimes I found his male macho attitude and perhaps his ignorance when meeting my ancestors for the first time a bit too much for me as a modern bilingual Aivilingmiut woman. And I am sure he had some misunderstanding of my ancestors' dialects and stories because they were not yet tainted by the English language and religion.

But as I listen to the voice of my auntie Arnaujaq on a voice memo in my Apple device, a copy that I keep from the old CBC radio recording from the late 1970s or '80s, I still can feel her joy and curiosity as a young woman meeting strange people "with a very small *akuq* on their parkas." I remember her when I was 12 years old. Inuit had moved into prefabricated public housing just less than a decade before; these public government houses were complete with electricity and oil-burning loud furnaces. My auntie would still cook meals, bannock, and tea



Inuit elder and noted seamstress Rhoda Akpaliapik Karetak from Arviat, Nunavut (left), and Bernadette Miqqusaaq Dean (center) examining caribou fur leggings worn by Siusarnaq (also called Shoofly or Nivisanaaq, a family term of endearment). A black and white portrait of Siusarnaq (Shoofly) wearing a beautifully beaded parka, taken by A. P. Low in 1903–1904, is well known to her descendants. As Bernadette noted, the trip was an opportunity to see Siu-sarnaq's tuilli (woman's parka) in color and "to find tangible evidence of our past and to touch it." This photo was taken in September 1999 at the American Museum of Natural History, New York, with AMNH staff member Laila Williamson (right). This research visit laid the foundation for the documentary Inuit Piqutingit: What Belongs to Inuit, co-directed by Zacharias Kunuk and Bernadette Miqqusaaq Dean, an examination by Inuit elders of Inuit cultural belongings in major museum collections in New York, Philadelphia, Washington DC, Ottawa, and Toronto (Isuma Productions, Kivalliq Inuit Association 2009). Photo by Bernadette Driscoll Engelstad.

on her *qulliq* (oil lamp) which was in her tiny bedroom of a three-bedroom home. I think she did not know how to cook on a stove, or perhaps she did not trust the technology of non-Inuit then. The changes we Inuit have seen have been so immense, but listening to my auntie I still smile at the memories of her and I admire her tenacity, curiosity, and her complete honesty unabashedly.