Stories from the Land

Discussion with Qapik Attagutsiak and Mucktar Akumalik during an on-the-land workshop along the Borden Peninsula, Sirmilik National Park

Accounts from Arctic Bay

Since 2005, Inuit Knowledge Working Groups have been working with Nunavut National Parks and universities to find ways to ensure that Inuit knowledge becomes integral to our understanding of Arctic ecosystems and management decisions.

In a series of podcast, we present the ideas of elders, hunters and youth who participated in this work. The topics range from the contemporary meaning of Inuit knowledge to Inuit observations and responses to environmental changes and perspectives on conservation.

This podcast is a collection of “Stories from the Land”. The first and second story titled “Snow is who we are” and “We had to live in peace so the animals could also live in harmony in their environment” are discussions between Macktaq Akumalik and Qapik Attagutsiak that were recorded during an on-the-ice workshop held in Arctic Bay in May 2008. In these podcasts, Macktaq and Qapik talk about the importance of knowing about the snow and igloo-building for survival in the Arctic, knowing and respecting the dog team and above all, the essence of the Inuit culture. The third story is told by Qapik Attagutsiak and is titled “Finding your way home”. Qapik’s message is also truly an example of survival; it stresses the importance of learning about the environment. This third story was also recorded during the on-the-ice workshop that brought together researchers, Parks Canada employees, and local experts with the goal of sharing information about the environment and places of ecological and cultural significance. As the group travelled together on the land and ice, the importance of knowing the environment was emphasized.

Arctic Bay hunters and elders shared their in-depth knowledge about all aspects of the environment, including the types and features of snow. At the same time, these local experts explained that they have noticed drastic changes in recent years, making the environment harder to read, harder to predict. Nevertheless, the people of Arctic Bay continue to closely monitor and learn from their changing environment since, as elders say in this community, the snow “is part of who we are”.

First story - The snow is who we are

Qapik: It is really unpredictable now, isn’t it?

Macktaq: Yes
Qapik: It seems like we are always wrong when we are trying to predict the weather. These days we can predict the weather accurately only once in a while, it is due to weather and climate change.

Mucktaq: Even the direction of the wind has changed. It is really noticeable that the wind direction has changed. Everything has changed so much. It is because our climate has changed or the weather has changed. Just to give you an example, we used to build igloos for Christmas in Arctic Bay but now, at the same time of year, there isn’t enough snow to build an igloo because the wind blows all the good snow away. It is true we used to build igloos at Christmas, isn’t it?

Qapik: Yes,

Mucktaq: Indeed we used to build igloos to spend Christmas in Arctic Bay, but now there is not enough snow anymore to build one.

Qapik: There is less snow now and the wind blows away whatever snowfall we get. Before, the snow drifts were big enough to practically build a whole igloo, just from one snow drift. Isn’t it true, you can’t even build a shelter now with the snow drifts that we are getting, let alone building a whole igloo?

Mucktaq: Yes

Qapik: The wind blows away what would become good snow. I noticed too there is only crystalised snow now. It does not compact anymore. Compact snow has shimmering little bumps on top where the snow hardened from the previous winds. Let me explain further. We used to get three layers of snow in one season. The top snow is called “aqilluqqaaq”. The middle layer is called “tisilluqqaaq” and “pukayaak” is the bottom and is the first layer you get in the early season.

We no longer have the middle layer used for building snow shelters, even after a good snowfall. And what we get now deteriorates from the bottom. All snow is not for making igloos. Men needed to test the snow by walking and listening to see how it sounds and by using their harpoons to decide if the quality was good enough to build a shelter. The men selected the snow for building igloos. All snow was not for making igloos.

Macktaq: We tested the snow with a harpoon. By slowly pushing the harpoon down and try to feel if it had a middle. Sometimes you can feel soft snow part way then all of a sudden, you hit some hard snow. It was wonderful when you pushed your harpoon in and the snow felt the same all the way and that was when you knew it was perfect and with no new top snow. When you picked snow that had recent snow even though the quality seemed good, it could be very cold.
We called this **ijjajattualuk**. When you picked older layer of snow, it was shimmering and bumpy on the top. That was perfect snow for building igloo. When the igloo was built, you first had to make a hole at the top to let the cold air out. It is when the middle part doesn’t feel so cold anymore that it finally started to warm up.

**Qapik:** Do you understand when he says “**ijjirujuk**”? It is a very cold air in the coldest time of the year. When we say “**ijjaiqpallaktuq**” it means it is warming up. When we say “**ijjialuuliqtuq**” it means there is extreme cold temperature. It is that cold that he is describing. Once that very cold air has escaped then the inside of the igloo will start to warm up.

**Macktaq:** Years ago when in **Tupiqtuut**, it meant people were moving into tents. This was during the month of May. Whenever we went hunting overnight we would build an igloo. We did not have extra tents to take with us. It was so wonderful to go inside a warm igloo.

In the spring the snow blocks were much heavier. Even though you couldn’t really tell the snow was melting yet. When you picked up the blocks, they would be almost too soft. And when you got strong winds, this soft snow eroded very quickly from the outside and left you out in the cold.

**Qapik:** That is why it is so important to know if you’re not picking the latest snow, because it will start to erode from the middle won’t it?

**Macktaq:** Yes, especially when it is getting soft. Even after you test the snow. Some people used the saw the snow in order to test it. They were sawing the snow blocks. I much preferred to assess the quality of the snow with the harpoon, because that was what I grew up with.

I tested the snow by slowly inserting the harpoon in the snow. When the snow felt the same all the way through, you knew it was perfect for building an igloo. When you come across even a small area of good snow, you can build the igloo just from one spot and very quickly too; sometimes in just an hour.

**Qapik:** You built the igloo right from one spot, you didn’t need to get snow blocks from the outside. You used the inside snow to build the igloo.

**Macktaq:** Yes, you build the igloo from the inside out.

**Qapik:** You can’t even see where you cut the snow blocks from outside. There is no evidence of disturbance of the snow anywhere outside the igloo. The snow blocks were called “**qulluagat**”, we used vertical blocks to build the igloo.
Macktaq: When we started sawing the blocks, we made them nice and curved. And that way, the igloo would be nicely curved, all the way, all the way around from the bottom to the top.

Qapik: Men didn’t just cut them into square blocks. The blocks were cut curved. When you have good snow conditions the blocks are just beautiful to work with. They do not shatter when you are picking them up. They first test the snow with the harpoon where they want to build the igloo. Then they tied a rope or a whip to the harpoon and stretched the rope to the size of the igloo they want, and use the end of the rope or whip with the handle to make the circle outline of the igloo.

Of course like anything, some men were very good and others not so good at building igloos. Some men built igloos with big holes in some spots or with many small holes everywhere. The more experienced men made beautiful perfectly connected blocks and you could barely see the edges of the blocks and the join between the blocks looked like a line drawn with a pencil. And yet, some men built igloos with many holes.

Macktaq: It is because they were not taught properly from childhood. It is also because they were not told how Inuit built igloos even though a child will not have to build an igloo yet for many years to come. Explain to them this is how it will be. Tell them how you have to build the igloo when you become an adult. The ones who were not very good at building igloos were simply not told or taught of how to do it, isn’t this true?

Qapik: Yes, it was certainly that way.

Macktaq: Our life was like that we were taught from the time we were growing up and of course like today, some of us were not very fast learners but we learned as we were growing up with experience.

Qapik: When children start to pretend to built igloos, at first the snow blocks would collapse, but as they became more experienced, they would learn to build it properly all the way to the top.

Macktaq: As children, when we were playing outside, we would pretend to build an igloo because that was all we had. The men didn’t teach us how to build igloos because that was how becoming a man was, we imitated the men.

We also had many rules to follow when building igloos. When they were bringing in the snow blocks we would have to put the blocks together from the right all the way to the top. It cannot come from the left and all the way left. We also built the bedding and table snow platforms in using the snow from the inside of the igloo floor.
Qapik: Yes, we would make the bedding platform from left over snow from the inside of the igloo floor.

Maktaq: There were sets of rules we had to follow when building igloos and all those rules were taught from the time we were growing up. Our parents made sure to tell us the rules. It was noticeable when children were properly taught because some were not even old enough to marry yet and they would be able to build igloos just like real men only in moments. Some men build igloos without platforms when they stopped somewhere overnight.

Qapik: Just a shell of the igloo without making any bedding or table platforms. When the men built just a shell of the igloo without any bedding, it was called “Naqqinaq”. It is only lazy people or people who were not taught from an early age. It was fine to build just the shell of the igloo, when used it just for one night.

Maktaq: Yes, when there is not enough snow, it was also okay.

Qapik: We would still build the igloo with proper bedding platforms even if it was just for one night because that was our preference and if you want to follow the rules in providing an igloo, that is how we made it all the time.

When we used the igloo for a while, the interior of the igloo would get all glazed from the heat produced by people and their lamps. No wonder it would start to have holes sometimes from the strong winds before it had time to glaze in. Especially when the blocks had fresh snow, those would be blown away right away and those made from the middle layer of snow would not erode at all. Isn’t it true that the top where the flames were would start to get holes a lot sooner than the rest of the igloo from the heat because it was a soft area?

Maktaq: Yes and that was called “Qakijaujuq” which means snow blocks eroded from the wind from the outside.

Qapik: The snow that is eroding from the outside is called Qakijaujuq. That was why it was very important to test out the snow with the harpoon. Picking the right snow for making the igloo was imperative because you wouldn’t want to have your igloo to start eroding just when you moved in.

Maktaq: It is the snow that has shiny bumps of bonded snow that was perfect for making igloos. It didn’t erode when it was windy outside because it was already bonded properly and it is breaths well. What I mean by breathing well is that it can still ice inside from heat but it will be evenly iced if it breathes well ...as if it is part of you.
Qapik: Yes it would evenly glace the inside of the igloo.

Maktaq: You would know if you picked the proper kind of snow when leaving in the morning....if after plugging the entrance of the igloo the flames didn’t go out at all, you had the right kind of snow. If you picked the wrong kind of snow, the flames will automatically go out especially when the entrance is blocked and your plugged your breathing hole. It is because the snow blocks are too airtight.

Qapik: In the beginning of spring, when snow is starting to melt, the sun can easily shatter your igloo. To prevent the igloo from melting further, we would cover our igloos with our tents. The top would be the tent and at the bottom, you could still see the snow blocks.

Second Story - We had to live in peace so the animals could also live in harmony in their environment

Kataisee: Can you tell me your story from the beginning? Did you have your fox traps set up from KangiqLugaarjuk?

Maktaq: Our fox traps were before Suujaqtalik, just before Suujaqtalik and they ended right into this inlet here. We also had traps set near Qaqulluit. My last trip would be at the second point of Siuraqtujuq. That is where I would return back to the camp.

Qapik: No, that is not the place because Siuraqtujuq is down this end, do you mean Sinaasiurvik.

Maktaq: Yes, I would start returning from the second point of Sinaasiurvik. My older brother would have his traps set up from here to just pass Nuvualuk. We would have as many fox traps as we could set up. That was the only way to get many foxes. Whenever I started to skin the animals, I would freeze their feet. Once they froze, I would separate the bones and use them to pin the fox pelt down to dry them. We did not have any wood at that time to make drying boards for fox pelts.

Qapik: They would put the fox feet straight up to freeze them because there was no wood available to make a skinning board.

Kataisee: Oh my goodness you were so innovative!

Qapik: We had no choice but to improvise.
Kataisee: Did you say you bought two boats?

Qapik: Yes this was when we were living near Iglulik, we got two.

Macktaq: Yes, the other boat had a motor that made tukutuk, tukutuk sound. This was before anyone from Iglulik had any motorized boats.

Qapik: We were the very first ones to get a motorized boat.

Macktaq: We must have been quite well off.

Qapik: We bought the motor from Tununirusiq this area and huge barrels of fuel for the boat. Of course we went to pick them up and brought them back here by dogteam.

Kataisee: Did the whole family trap foxes but combine them to one?

Qapik: Yes, the men would have fox traps.

Macktaq: Yes, we would save them as one pile and then divide them up equally amongst the families.

Qapik: Yes, they would just pile the pelts to one area to be dried and cleaned. When they were ready to be delivered to the trading posts of Pond Inlet, Arctic Bay and Repulse Bay to buy provisions like tea, bullets, and one would come to this area to buy a motor for the boat, and to Repulse Bay to buy the boats. They divided all the fox pelts, there were many fox pelts. There were truly many fox pelts.

Macktaq: Our father was a great leader. He had very good control over his brothers. As soon as he told one of them to go to Pond Inlet, Iglulik or Repulse Bay, they took off right away. He told them where to go. We were in one huge camp, all living in the same camp and all working together.

Kataisee: Wow, it must have been very well organized?

Qapik: It is only when the families were going to their designated destinations that everything was divided. We lived in the same camp; we shared everything, including food, even our sewing materials. We would all share everything as if we were only one. We treated our brothers or sisters in-law as your own siblings in a family.

Kataisee: There must have been great teamwork?

Qapik: Yes.
Macktaq: Yes we would have family gatherings the whole entire family from the camp.

Qapik: Yes.

Macktaq: There would be family meetings where the wives and/or husbands were given time to talk if there were any kinds of problems. In today’s terms, we say to have healing sessions. This was not a religious meeting. This was so we will not encounter hardship with the animals. That is the way it was. Yes, indeed they knew.

Qapik: Yes, it was indeed that way because if there was animosity within the families, the animals would become hard to catch. We had to live in peace including our children had to live in peace so the animals can also live in harmony in their environment and they would be much easier to find. Animals can very much sense animosity within people.

Kataisee: Would this be considered traditional knowledge?

Qapik: Yes.

Macktaq: Yes, from Inuit perspective. It was not only our family, if my father heard about people who were too poor, my father would go an pick them up and make them part of his helpers and would provide them with all the dogs they needed, and make sure they could start hunting for themselves. They didn’t have a boat, otherwise they would not be able to survive the winter so he would make them part of the community and helpers, that is how he was.

Kataisee: He would just go pick up anyone?

Macktaq: No, if he heard about any person or family being ill-treated or struggling to survive then he would go pick up that person or family and make them helpers and provide them with dogs to make a dog team. That was the way he was.

Kataisee: That must have been a great way to ensure survival?

Macktaq: Yes, no person had more than anyone. We were all treated equally; we would all have the same things as everyone else in the camp.

Kataisee: Did everyone look after all possesions?

Macktaq: Yes, and when we went to Arctic Bay before Christmas when we lived over there.

Qapik: When we lived near Iglulik.
Macktaq: My father bought huge bags of flour.

Qapik: 100 pound bag flour, even the sugar was sold only in 100 pound bags!

Macktaq: He bought huge bags of sugar. We had long qamutiks, it would be very full. There would be many cans of tobacco nailed to the qamutik. Those cans of tobacco would be nailed side by side all around the qamutik. That was how it was. The qamutik was just piled with trading goods. Once we arrive back at our camp, my father made sure everything was divided amongst the families, the sugar, the tea and even the bullets. He made sure everything was equally divided amongst the families.

Kataisee: Would these provisions last the whole winter?

Macktaq: From Christmas to...

Kataisee: From spring to Christmas? Was this for all family members?

Qapik: This was all done just with sleds and dogs.

Macktaq: They would add more dogs to our regular dog team. They would select stronger dogs to add to our team. We would have long line of dogs that was how we travelled. That was a lot of dogs to feed!

Kataisee: Wow! Inuit were very ambitious, and certainly not lazy!

Qapik: That was our only way of living.

Macktaq: Yes, especially our eldest brother. He could even travel in the coldest season to the area of Tununirusiq, even during the darkest months.

Kataisee: It must have been wonderful to hear the dogteams arriving?

Qapik: We would go listen for them when it was time for them to come back. We would only recognise their voices, the way they commanded the dogs, how they talked to their dogs, and we would recognised the sound of their voices. When it was time for them to come back, we went outside and listened for their dog teams. It took about four weeks. Two Sundays and another two Sundays. We listened in for them in the dark season. Then finally, we heard someone. We even heard how heavy the load was just by the noise of the sled sliding along the frozen ground, the noise of the dogs. It was most exciting when you heard the musher and the sound of the dog team. It was more exciting once you recognised the musher. It was such a wonderful sound! It meant that they finally made it back!
**Kataisee:** Here we are today – if I just look at you (being an older person), it is hard to image you with a dog team.

**Macktaq:** We didn’t have to mush very loud just enough to control the dogs.

**Qapik:** You can even hear the way the whip snapped and the sound of whimper of the dogs from the whip.

**Macktaq:** It was absolutely forbidden to mistreat your dogs. You used the whip only to keep the dogs going.

**Qapik:** The dogs knew when they were being handled with a whip. Once their master gave command to get going, the dogs would get so excited.

**Macktaq:** As soon as they heard the command, the dogs would start pulling. Then once they got going good, they would get into a pace of galloping.

**Kataisee:** When were you taught to command the dogteam?

**Macktaq:** I would listen to my father command and I didn’t realize I was learning at the same time. When I started mushing the dogs, I would imitate my father the way he commands the dogteam.

**Kataisee:** Was there different way of commanding the dogteam?

**Qapik:** The way they make noise was different.

**Kataisee:** Noise? Was it because the faster they had to go was the way they command the dogs?

**Macktaq:** Yes, and the way you had to discipline the dogs too and when you get upset with the dogs, when they misbehave.

**Qapik:** The dogs had to be disciplined like your own children.

**Macktaq:** Once they knew their master was serious, the dogs would stop wagging their tails right away. They were very smart.

**Qapik:** They even knew when you were mistreating them.

**Macktaq:** You didn’t even need to use a whip to discipline them. They knew instantly.
Qapik: When the master started to talk about hunting, the dogs would get absolutely excited... especially when their master was talking about animals.

Macktaq: Indeed!

Qapik: Especially when talking about polar bears. If anyone mentioned polar bears, the dogs would get so excited.

Kataisee: They would understand? Was this before they left?

Qapik: Yes, here you are crouched down to harness the dogs and untangling the ropes. When you are putting the harness on the dogs you would communicate using sign language about hunting plans otherwise they will start to pull the sled right away from excitement.

Kataisee: It was all because they understood everything?

Qapik: Yes, you don’t want them to start pulling instantly so you whisper and use sign language not let your dogs know but they would still manage to understand.

Macktaq: They would find out right away!

Kataisee: They would start pulling the sled right away?

Kataisee: How did the dogs and people helped each other?

Macktaq: Even in blizzard the dogs were able to bring you home. In blizzard or even in the dark days they were able to bring you back home. Even if you lost consciousness, they knew exactly how to bring their master back home.

Qapik: You didn’t even need to command them anymore. They would automatically bring you home.

Macktaq: They were extremely smart dogs!

Qapik: It was not wonderful though when you were cold and travelling at the coldest time of the year. If you just sat on the sled, you could die from exposure so you were told to run alongside the dogteam. It was not wonderful at all when you are so cold and your clothing was so cold to start running next to the dogteam; especially when the cold felt like it was going right through your clothes. When you have been running for a while and start to warm up again, then it wasn’t so bad to go back on the sled. We had to try hard to protect ourselves from the extreme cold. If you just sat on the sled during your trip, you could die from exposure. It was imperative to be moving all the time and this was part of your discipline when you were growing up.
Kataisee: Was there a specific food you had to eat to keep you warmer while travelling?

Macktaq: You were told to eat as soon as you woke up, even if you didn’t have any appetite. As soon as you put your clothes on, early in the morning. We were told that if we were nice and had a full belly, we would stay warm.

Qapik: Make sure to eat so you will not be cold! This is what we were told. We were even told to hurry up and eat because if you didn’t eat, you may get cold while travelling, and if you are full you will not even notice the cold.

Kataisee: Were you also told not to stay in bed too long?

Qapik: No but, because our sleeping platform was all snow, we had to get up right away. Otherwise if you stayed in bed too long, your bedding would get damp. The sleeping platforms were all snow. We didn’t have anything between the bedding and the snow to prevent it from getting wet.

Kataisee: Because we now have all material clothing that can get wet right way, would they be considered to be more dangerous when you are travelling?

Qapik: Very much so, when we were travelling we had to be very careful about our clothing and to make sure that there was absolutely no snow.

Macktaq: Yes, we had to make sure to shake off all the snow while we were still outside.

Qapik: We made sure to shake off all the snow off our clothing even using a scraping blade or if we didn’t have a scraper then we used a knife but... not the sharp end. The name of the scraper was called tilupajuut that is what you used to scrape off all the snow from your clothing before getting in. It was a wooden scraper that was shaped like a knife or you could also use the blunt end of the knife. It was only after you scraped off all the snow off your clothing that you would finally get in. This is because even if there is a bit of snow hanging on your clothes, it can make your clothes wet. We even made sure that our clothes were left on the frozen floor to prevent them from melting.

Kataisee: What happens if you it gets wet?

Qapik: You can freeze.

Kataisee: You can even freeze even if you have just wet mittens?

Qapik: Yes.
Kataisee: Did men and woman work together?

Macktaq: Yes, when we lived in Iglulik we used to have gauntlets.

Qapik: Yes.

Macktaq: They were up to here (To your elbow) with long string connecting the pair. They were called gauntlets.

Kataisee: Where they made from seal skins?

Macktaq: Yes, it was only for building igloos.

Qapik: They were made from caribou skins.

Kataisee: Was it skin from the caribou legs?

Qapik: Yes, they use them only for building igloos. Then they would put them away back in the grub box.

Macktaq: They would tuck them together first before they put them away.

Kataisee: So you had mittens for specific purpose?

Qapik: Specific to working with snow or hunting.

Kataisee: So you made mittens and knew what purpose those had?

Macktaq: Yes, we even had mittens specifically for smoothing the sled runners to make them slide better. They were made out of seal skins and they didn’t have any liners. The job was just for smoothing the runners. Once you finished the runners then you would put those mittens away again and put them on again when you had to smooth the runners again.

Qapik: We even made waterproof mittens, skinning mittens, igloo building mittens and those three specific mittens we’re just for one person.

Kataisee: And for hunting? How many mittens did hunters have?

Qapik: Yes they would have caribou mittens for travelling made from caribou legs and hunting mittens that were made from seal skins without fur. When they hunted, they would wear the furless sealskin mitts then once he started travelling, he would put on his warmer caribou mitts.
Kataisee: Okay, so they didn’t have just one pair of mitts. One they use also for building igloos but they had quite a few specific mittens?

Qapik: Yes, they didn’t have just a pair of mittens but specific mittens, for building igloos, for travelling, for working and for preparing the meat.

Kataisee: Wow, and did they also have spare mittens when travelling long distance? I mean for a week? Or just in case something happens to bring extra clothing?

Qapik: We would make sure we always have extra clothes just in case they got wet. And if they got wet, you kept them on while you are busy hunting and once you started to travel then you would put on the dry ones. If they got completely wet, you would put them away in the grub box and put on your dry ones and travel back home.

Kataisee: Was this taught to you or advised to you always?

Qapik: Very much so, I can even quote to you the traditional saying:

“Make sure to bring two, if you bring just what you are wearing you will put yourself in danger. When wet clothing becomes frozen, you can freeze your feet or freeze your hands, that is why it is imperative to bring two of everything, when your clothing gets wet you will have extra spare of clothing that are nice and dry”

Kataisee: This still applies to today, doesn’t it?

Qapik: Yes, this still applies today. Even if you bring extra pair of kamiks or boots or just in case something happens to you or someone else, they can put those spare clothes, because when Inuit were nomadics and something happens they were just able to just take the outer layer of caribou parka and give it to another person who may need it, of course this was just in case of emergency.

Macktaq: If us elders die all of this information will be lost.

Third Story - Qapik Attagutsiak - Finding my way home

In 1940, my baby was not yet a year old. He was born in late spring the previous year and he was going to be a year old the coming spring. He was still in my amauti, I had fox traps with an elder. Every time the men left, we would go check up on our traps.
One day a person from Igloolik borrowed one of the elders first layer caribou parka of the two layer caribou parka like I have. It was 10 in the morning when she told me she wanted to go check on the traps. We usually made it back from checking the traps around 2 o’clock in the afternoon.

But when we got near our traps, the weather suddenly turned to blizzard condition. We were still inland where our traps were not on sea ice yet when it became full blizzard; just when we were heading back to our home. She said “Nuakuluuk, I am already cold”. It was because she had only the one layer caribou parka and this was the coldest time of the year around Igloolik.

I kept looking back for her. I regret the fact that I didn’t think to take her hand. I just kept looking back and I tried to hurry back to the camp before she got too cold. Then when I looked back again, she was nowhere to be found. Our footprints were being covered by snow from the blizzard as fast as we made them. Our footprints completely disappeared.

I tried looking for her but I was also putting myself in danger as I was getting disoriented from the blizzard and at that point I made up my mind to head back to the camp and tell them that I lost my companion in the blizzard. I left her behind. I was carrying my baby in my amauti.

I had my baby in my amauti, as I was heading back I remembered that the men always say that the wind can direct your way. When I was walking, I tried to remember to direction of the wind but I also remembered that the wind can mislead you. It is the snow features on land created by the wind that can best lead the way. That is what I had heard when the men talked amongst themselves.

All of the sudden, I remembered so clearly the conversation the men had. I was now following the snow formations made by the wind on the way home. I also used the wind for direction. Then I could see our qarmaq. I made it back ...it was now 6 o’clock when I arrived. It was only us women in the camp since all the men were away to retrieve cached meat.

As soon as I told them, my mother-in-law and Ukipkjuujaq put on their caribou clothing. Tuutaliks mother, no Ukipigjuujaq and my mother-in-law because they were adults went searching for the missing person. Then around 9 o’clock, they came back. They could not find the person. They had given up because they couldn’t find her.

I made up my mind and didn’t care anymore if I got lost. I was no longer scared to look for her ...as long as I found her. I got ready to go and I thought for sure it would just be me, but Tuutaliks mother Qaummangniq also got ready to go. She wanted to go with me. She put on
Ukpiguujaq’s caribou clothing. We had to wear our two layer caribou parkas because it was dead winter.

Just before we headed out we were told to yell out ...“Where are you?”...at the same time because carrying two voices maybe easier for the lost person to hear and in return for her to reply.

When we were heading inland, we used the wind and land to guide us to our destination. We travelled the way men travel. I followed every advice from the men, because I didn’t know what else to do. I didn’t know anything. I totally immersed myself to how men behaved when they travelled.

When we got tired, we would stop on a place with a bit of height. We would pray first before we started walking again, we yelled out ....“Where are you?”... at the same time, waited for a response and then went again. I was getting a back ache. I was getting tired since I had been looking for my companion for a full day.

We did our prayer as usual in the blizzard, all of our footprints were being covered as we were walking. Just when we started walking again we yelled out ....“Where are you?”... we waited for a reply, but there was no reply at all.

Few more steps later, I saw a black spot in the open Arctic land and here we were walking on land. I didn’t realize it was part of her hood just starting to appear on the snow. We just made it in time to see it.

After we found her, she said she didn’t want to move. She had found shelter behind a big rock but she managed to keep going and said to herself that she would give up after the third boulder. She made her final stop when we found her.

When we found her, the only thing that was showing from her body was her hood. We didn’t even see her body yet. We found her while she was still alive. Inside of her hood was full of snow from the blizzard and because she had high caribou socks, all those were also filled with snow from the blizzard. She was now barely wearing her caribou parka.

We started heading home. We propped her up, held her by her side and started walking back. Sometimes we would start dragging her by her arms but we made it back home. It was after midnight. By then, it was more that twelve hours since she had been lost.

She had a terrible frost bite on the side of her face from all the snow inside of her hood, and she also had frost bites in the sides of her legs because the kamiks were filled with snow from the
blizzard. You could see what side had filled up with snow. She was so lucky. Her bones didn’t freeze yet. We found her alive. She died of natural causes much later in life.

This is the first time I ever told the story, I never had the opportunity to tell the story with other witnesses. Both of the people have now long been dead now. I told the whole story... it was Uqaliq’s mother that was lost.

That is why it is so important to hear stories because even if you have ever only heard the story and you don’t seem to be learning anything ... as long you have heard it before... in a real situation you can start to live the stories. I went home using the land snow features and using the wind directions. They say the wind can be more deceiving then the snow because the wind can quickly change directions compared to the features of the land. Those don’t change as fast, the impact from the western and northern winds on the land are most reliable.

Learn the directions of the winds. They say west winds are always the strongest. They usually make the snow formation that look like long tongues and snow drifts; those guided me home twice that day.

I had to start following the directions used by men to guide me back from their stories. I remembered clearly what they talked about and used their advices. That is how I made it home.

We saved her life. We really saved her life. Sometimes we would start dragging her and when she was able to take few steps she would take few steps and when we rested a bit then we started dragging her again holding on to her both sides of her arms. That is how we made it back to the camp.

As soon as we made it back to our sod house, we took off all her clothes. She didn’t get out for a whole week due to having sore muscles and frost bites. We found her alive. She always says that it was going to be the end if she stopped on the third boulder. She would go in front of the boulders and find shelter.

Then when she thought people would worry about her, she would find the courage to move on. When we found her, she was clearly walking away from camp. She would have never made it. She was full of energy even though she was an elderly person. To lose my companion was the scariest time of my life.

That was also the time we heard about Ikirasangmiut who all perished in that blizzard. The whole family got buried by an avalanche where they camped. I lost my companion but we were so fortunate, we found her when she was still alive. I am so grateful Tuutaliks mother
Qaummangniq decided to come with me. She told me later on that she thought of having heard a whistling sound out in the open. She said she had heard something.

**Conclusion:**

The rhythm of the conversation between Macktaq Akumalik and Qapik Attagutsiak transports us to the High Arctic, at a time when people still lived on the land. We really enjoyed learning about their lives, about the snow and the igloo, about the dog team and most importantly about the culture. Those special places at the northern tip of Baffin Island, the ocean and every point of land became alive. We feel very privileged for this special visit, for the passion and the wisdom of two most inspiring elders. We are also thankful to all who participated in this trip.

Finally, the last story was by Qapik Attagutsiak and a classic example of Inuit survival in their environment. This story is clearly about the importance of traditional knowledge. Qapik’s main message: “Even if you have ever only heard the story and you don’t seem to be learning anything from the story, as long as you heard it before being in a real dangerous situation, you can be guided by the story” should be echoed not only to the inhabitants of the Arctic but to all people who are planning to visit the majestic North.

Thank you for listening. Additional podcasts and written material featuring the knowledge of Macktaq Akumalik and Qapik Attagutsiak are available on the following website: www.lecolck.ca