

Before bed that first night, I read to my family from the book that Sister MacQuillan had given me. When I was done, I crawled under the warm hides, gazed at the glow of the embers from my father's pipe, and drifted off to sleep.

My curiosity had led me far away, and now here I was, after two years, satisfied that I now knew what happened to girls who went down rabbit holes.

After THE STORY

THE YEAR FOLLOWING MY return home was one of the happiest of my life. The excitement of hunting with my father, the pleasures of fishing with my mother, and the fun of seeking out goose eggs with my siblings all held new wonder for me. I was certain that I would not go back to the school in Aklavik for anything.

However, my three younger sisters grew curious. After they pestered my father non-stop, and the government made school attendance a condition for



*See photo
on page 101.*

receiving child benefits, he gave in and agreed that they, too, could go and learn to read. I tried to warn them, just as Rosie had tried to warn me. Their hair would be cut, I told them. They would have to do many chores and kneel on their knees to ask for forgiveness. It was no use.

We Inuvialuit are headstrong. Thankfully, we are also resilient. So, reluctantly, I went with them—to make sure that they did not forget that wrens can be just as clever as ravens and owls.

The SCHOOLS

ABORIGINAL CHILDREN LIKE Margaret Pokiak **A** learned many special skills that allowed them to cope with the natural environments they lived in. For example, by the time she was 10, Margaret could command her own dogsled team. As Europeans spread throughout North America, their quest to expand into new territories led them to seek ways to remove the people who already inhabited the land. One way of doing this was to send Aboriginal children to live at church-run schools where their traditional skills

were replaced by those that would equip them to function in menial jobs. Though Margaret's parents knew better, some people believed that the schools would be good places to prepare their children for the rapidly changing world. Most children, however, were forcibly taken, some even kidnapped. The churches that ran the schools were paid a fee for each child attending, so they wanted to keep enrollment high. Just as Margaret had to work at the school in Aklavik, Aboriginal children throughout the North scrubbed floors, hauled water and firewood, made traps, worked traplines, or built furniture for sale. The schools were often overcrowded and dirty, and diseases such as tuberculosis were common. As well, the teachers were often unqualified to educate the children in their care.

At the school in Aklavik, Margaret's clothing was taken away, her hair was cut, and she was not allowed to speak her language. The schools were meant to strip generation after generation of children of their culture and skills. In addition, children returning home were frequently considered outsiders. They

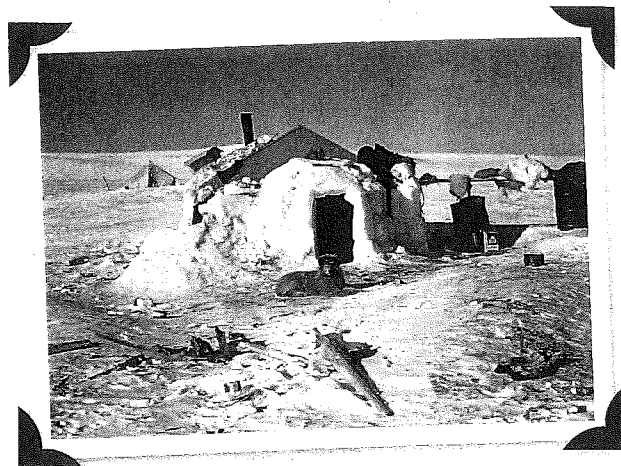
could no longer speak their parents' languages, and they had lost their knowledge of the old ways. Furthermore, many children were abused at school, leaving wounds that could take generations to heal. They were then challenged to parent their own children, without having been parented themselves. In recent years, some residential school survivors have found the courage to speak out about what happened to them.

Today, the healing continues as many survivors, their children, and their children's children struggle to shed the shame of oppression and reclaim pride in their identities. Communities seek peace through healing circles, relearning their languages, participating in cultural celebrations such as traditional athletic games and powwows that showcase traditional dances, drumming, songs, and handicrafts, as well as through sharing their stories, philosophies, and inspirations in all forms of art and media—including books like this one.

Olemaun's SCRAPBOOK



Margaret and her family on the five-day journey to Aklavik. Margaret is second from the right.



Rosie turned, pulled apart the flaps of the tent door, and disappeared through the tunnel in the snow that formed the entrance to our home.

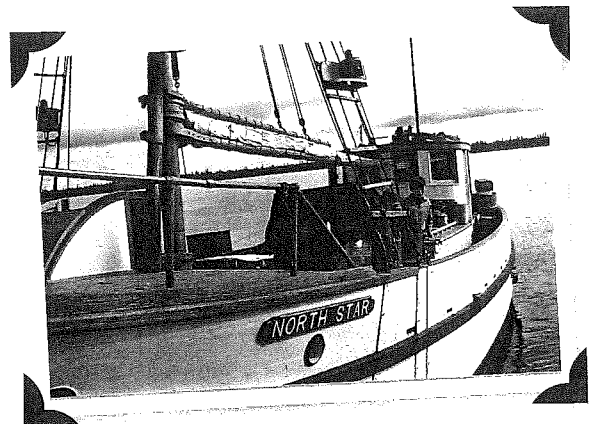


My older half-sister Ayouniq had been plucked before I was born, but we called her Rosie after her return. In this photo, Rosie wears Inuvialuit-style kamiks on her feet.



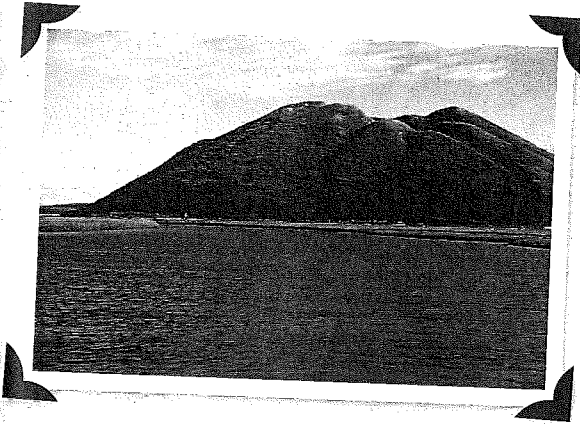
We traveled by dogsled for several hours, until we came to a place where game was plentiful.

Margaret and her father sitting on top of the schooner, the *North Star*.



We traveled with six other schooners, each carrying as many as six or seven families. Our schooner was the *North Star*.

Margaret's mother



Beyond Tuktoyaktuk, the pingos rose out of the ocean like goose eggs with smashed-in tops. Pingos are formed when a large lump of ice pushes soil up to make a temporary mountain.



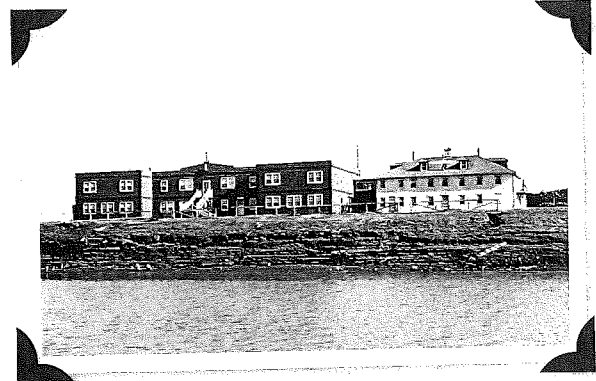
We came to Reindeer Station, a settlement of herders, and excitement consumed me.



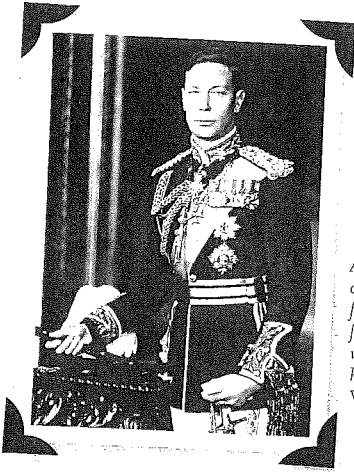
A tractor drives past the Hudson's Bay Company store in Aklavik.



We made our way down the plank and scrambled up the steep muddy slope to the settlement our own great-grandfather, Old Man Pokiak, had founded as a trading post. Margaret's great grandfather poses with his family in Aklavik, 1922. When Margaret went to school, the houses in Aklavik were similar to this one.



Behind them stood two immense wooden buildings, so much larger than our schooner, with rows and rows of windows. I had forgotten how big these buildings were. This photo, taken from the water, shows the school on the left and the hospital on the right. In the school building, the boys' dormitory is on the left wing, while the girls' dormitory is on the right. The classrooms are on the bottom floor.



An enormous photograph hung on one of the clean painted walls. In it, an outsider wore a fancy sash. Medallions like large coins hung from his chest—I would learn later that he was king of all of the outsiders. They told me he was also my king. This king is George VI, who ruled from 1936 to 1952.



The nuns starched the peaks and the place where they shaved their heads underneath was sometimes visible.



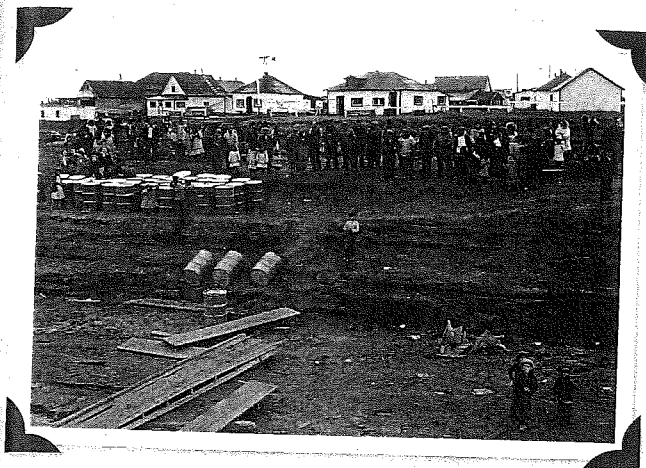
Letters, like those from Rosie's books, decorated the walls of the classroom. I stared at them, trying to decipher what they might mean. This photo shows a classroom in the school that Margaret attended.



An Anglican school room in Hay River, in the Northwest Territories, similar to the one Margaret sat in.



Even an outing like a trip to pick berries was tied to some sort of work. Because Margaret came from a treeless area, the berry bushes scared her.



When the first boats began to appear, I could hardly believe the time had come. It would not be long before my parents arrived. In this photo, the community waits on the banks for the mail boats to arrive.



Here, three of Margaret's sisters and her cousin play outside the hospital.



A nurse and patients in the Anglican hospital in Aklavik. This hospital was similar to the one where Margaret worked.



The Brothers at Margaret's school dressed like the men in this photo.



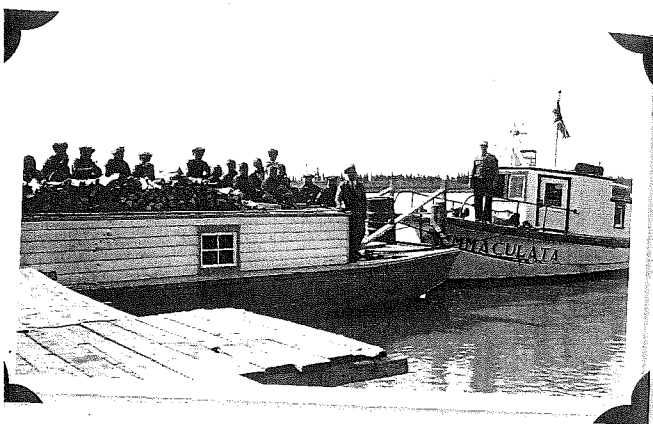
A radio station similar to the one where Margaret refused to speak.



Margaret and other school kids hauling wood.



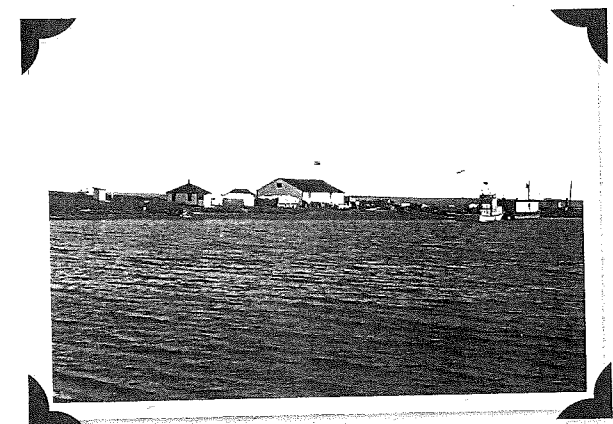
As soon as the Raven was gone, I pulled my favorite book from underneath my pillow and imagined the Raven in the role of the Queen of Hearts. Alice meets the Queen of Hearts.



The trip to Tuktoyaktuk aboard the Roman Catholic boat, the Immaculata, was crowded.



Margaret's brother Ernest, her father and mother, and her sister Millie in front.



We made our way across the bay to Tuktoyaktuk, and there was the North Star, anchored in the harbor.



Here is a typical winter scene in Aklavik at the time Margaret was a child.

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Many Aboriginal children were sent to church-run schools. The girls in this picture boarded at an Aklavik school in the 1940s, the same time that Margaret went to school.



Margaret at 16, in an outfit she made herself.

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CHRISTY JORDAN-FENTON has been an infantry soldier, a pipeline laborer, a survival instructor, and a bareback bronco rider. Christy has also worked with street children. She

was born just outside of Rimbey, Alberta, and has lived in Australia, South Africa, and the United States. Christy now lives on a farm near Fort St. John, British Columbia, where she and her husband are raising three small children, a few chickens, three dogs, a llama, two rabbits, and enough horses to outfit an entire town. Christy worked with her mother-in-law, Margaret Pokiak-Fenton, to write this story.



MARGARET POKIAK-FENTON was born on a tiny island far north of the Arctic Circle. She spent her early years on Banks Island; when she was eight years old she traveled to the mainland to attend the Catholic residential school in Aklavik, Northwest Territories. In her early twenties,