

INUK

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I grew up between two worlds, both geographically and culturally. I divided my time between Eastern Quebec and the northern tip of Baffin Island, Nunavut.

In addition to that divide, you have to know that my first language is Inuktitut. I didn't know any English or French when I started school, but it didn't matter, because play is a universal language.

Friendship, connection, and community have always been a part of my life, in many more ways than one. It crosses cultures, languages, and age.

The friends I've made over the years include some that come and go but there are those who remain to this day.

My successes are built on all the people who have come into my life; each interaction—both positive and negative—has created a lasting impact on the person I've grown to be today.

The adventures, mistakes, growth, and setbacks have become the foundation on which I've built my life.

As an Inuk, I have been directly affected by residential schools, suicide, tuberculosis, and forced relocation. As a result, I have lost many family members and friends over the years.

This forced reality has had a profound impact on my life; it has shaped the decisions and choices available to me.

I've always looked toward my late great-grandmother for guidance and wisdom. I feel like my culture and my ancestors continue to play a role in my perseverance.

As I grow and work on myself, my community and friends may shift and change, but my culture will always be a pillar, something that I reach out to. It is a cornerstone in my life.

Over the years, I have had the opportunity to travel and live across Canada. Being able to create new experiences and build lasting connections has continued to drive my curiosity toward life.

Throughout the communities I've had a chance to be a part of, I've met some amazing mentors who have helped me navigate the many challenges in my life.

To this day, I rely on a handful of people in my corner of the world. While they're not family by blood, they're the family I've been fortunate enough to have gained.

Consequently, there is no monetary value that could ever compare to my gratitude toward the people who have guided me throughout my life.

A mainstay in my life has been an overwhelming urge to continue to move forward. As a young person, I've often felt helpless to change my environment.

More than ever, collective mental health is imperative in moving forward. And it has continued to be an overarching goal in my life.

While a part of my southern upbringing meant *no elbows on the table, rules, structure, and consequences*, my traditional northern upbringing meant *learning by example, on-the-land survival, and building community through acts of service*.

Two worlds, with a contrast so stark I would never truly be able to fit into either.

But still. I will keep forging my own path forward as a modern day explorer. Inuk, Qallunaq, urban, remote, and rural.