

Avattimik Kamattiarniq Stories

Shortly after I was married, my family and my new husband's family went fishing to a summer camp. My husband grew up watching his father and family. They had different, set ways of doing things. I stayed up all night with my husband fishing and we gutted the fish as we were catching them. I thought the world of my new, handsome husband, and so, of course, when he said, "Just put the guts back into the river", without any second thoughts I did exactly that. When we finally awoke in the morning, I saw my father hooking the guts back out of the lake and pulling them onto the dry ground. Later he said, "You don't want the lake to have fish, or you don't want the fish to come to you, that's the reason why you threw the guts back into the lake?" My husband's actions that day made me realize that not all men are as careful as they should be. I knew my husband thought he was doing the proper thing. He said, "The seagulls would have come to clean the lake any way". My father quickly replied, "When you see seagulls flying around, it's a sign that someone is being very careless. It is the sign of a dirty camp and a reason we see more and more of seagulls today". This is all part of taking care of the environment around you.

- Joanna Nutaraq

How does this story apply to life today?

What role does a "capable" person have in terms of environmental stewardship?

I was born in the spring. After giving birth, my mother was prohibited from drinking water. She was allowed to drink only from the small pools of water that formed on rock. This must have been a hardship for her, but she obeyed this rule. It was set out for her to follow so that I would become strong and be able to hunt well and endure physical hardship through her sacrifice. Later in life, it turned out that I did not require a lot of water or suffer from a lack of water in my life. There was definitely a benefit for me.

Also, later in life, when I discussed this experience with others, it was made known to me that the water in rivers and creeks in the springtime is often not healthy. Water that was pooled on rocks would have become distilled in the sun. Sometimes our cultural practices seem only to be grounded in a belief, but many times the belief is grounded in scientific principles understood over generations.

- Mariano Aupilaarjuk

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Inuit were always prohibited from camping in the same place more than a couple of years in a row. This was to allow the land to heal from our presence there. Even though we were supposed to leave a place so that it looked like we had not been there, the land itself feels the burden of our stay. We would return to an area seasonally, but not to the same campsite. We were always told that when we respect and care for the land it will provide healing for us when we need it. Many Inuit speak of the healing effects of the land and I know this to be true. When Inuit were forced to give up a nomadic lifestyle and placed into settlements, I often think about what this is doing to the land. It is never allowed to heal. What does being disrespectful in this way do to us as a people?

- Rhoda Karetak

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When my father was walking on the land and he came upon some old bones of an animal, he would say to the bones, "You must be tired of lying on one side like that. Let me help to turn you over." Then he would gently reposition the bones. He said this was the way to show respect to the animal and also to the land. We need both to provide for life so in return, we need to honour what is given for our sakes. If we show this kind of reverence and respect, we will find that our hunting becomes more successful and our lives will be better. If we neglect to care for the environment, then life can become very hard.

-Mariano Aupilaarjuk

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