

Commentary on Kangiqsujuaq film

By Bernard Saladin d'Anglure

In the early 1960s, Inuit life was very much dependent on their means of transport, especially in the Kangiqsujuaq region. The Inuit in that area lived a nomadic life in a vast and extremely varied territory composed of coastal islands and shorelines with sheer cliffs, and so they traveled mainly on foot, by dog sled, with porter dogs carrying packs, or by kayak. In earlier times, and up until the 1930s, they had also had the *umiaq* – a large boat made of skins. *Umiat* were used in summer and could transport thirty or forty people, along with their dogs and sleds. Later, they acquired wooden boats that resembled lifeboats somewhat. There was a period between the two World Wars when fox skins sold for incredible prices, and so a few heads of families were able to acquire Peterhead boats – much larger boats – but that period was followed by an economic crisis and so they returned to traditional ways, to the kayaks, the dog sleds and the porter dogs. And then in the space of a few years, all that disappeared. I would say that in the space of 10 years, with the coming of settlement, the dogs disappeared, and they only reappeared in the last twenty years with the dog sled races, when the Inuit started raising dogs again.

I mention dogs because they played such a big role. Each family member owned one or more dogs, and so when a hunter hitched up his sled with, say, a dozen dogs for a heavier move, the team was made up of dogs belonging to all the members of his family. The dog team was a sort of family gathering. Each dog had a name, and the children often owned their dogs starting as infants, with the dog given a name that was the reverse of its owner's name. So for example if someone was called Innaarulik like the island that 'has a cliff' – the name of an Inuit I knew who is still alive – then the dog was named the reverse, 'it has flat ground.' So this was done with humour, but also everyone knew that when they called the dog, it was the owner that was being addressed, through the dog. And often these very young dogs were permitted to enter the igloos or the tents along with their owners, whereas otherwise this was forbidden; the dogs had to wait to be fed outside.

And then there were the kayaks, valuable tools that in the spring were tied to the dogsleds when the people set out hunting for marine mammals, ringed seals and bearded seals, at the edge of the icepack.

1



360 - 4150, Ste-Catherine O. Westmount QC H3Z 2Y5 Tél : 514 989 9031 Tél : 1 800 361 5029 Fax : 514 989 8789



So this is a moving day. We can see the sled is heavily loaded, with a dozen dogs to pull it. And this was the usual speed on the pack ice, not very fast, but they could cover hundreds of kilometers like that when they had to. These tents are made of canvas, they had already abandoned the skin tents, but the canvas tents were almost the same design, just not as heavy. They secured them with some rocks around the bottom for attaching turnbuckles, and a few stakes. And when they were ready to move on, the tent could be taken down within thirty minutes, and another half hour for packing up everything and tying it to the sled, with everyone pitching in. The dogs stayed close, ready to be harnessed if they were not already harnessed, and the kids were having fun, whether they were helping or just hoping to help, like this little fellow.

Once they arrived at camp and were waiting to head out to stalk game, the hunters would occupy their downtime carving, like this hunter we see here; I acquired that very sculpture he is carving, they came to me to suggest it, and what is interesting is that several members of the family took part in carving it. It wasn't the man we see here who offered it to me, it was his uncle, and they had to share the small sum I gave him.

And so they watched out for marine mammals in these places along the shore that stood a little higher. At that time, belugas were their main prey. Belugas migrate in the spring when the ice has melted, and come very close to the shore and into the bays; they tend to follow the coastline to some well-placed locations. Here, a beluga has been fatally wounded, and they had to put the kayaks in to go retrieve it. These long sea kayaks were typical of Kangiqsujuaq, and could reach up to 24 feet (7-8 metres) in length. It took two people to carry one, and they were covered with bearded sealskin, three very large skins from this great valuable seal, which has thicker skin than the ringed seal. They could also make kayak covers from ringed seals, but then it took seven or eight skins to cover such a kayak. So here one of the hunters is being helped into his kayak to go retrieve the wounded animal from this little observation point where the group of hunters were.

Here he is approaching the wounded beluga. Belugas were very valuable because they had a lot of really good fat, there could be up to ten centimetres of fat under the edible skin, the *mattaq*, and this fat was used to fuel the oil lamps for winter. And then there was the *mattaq*, the edible skin, which was very rich in vitamins, and which they ate dried, or fresh

Bureau de Montréal 360 - 4150, Ste-Catherine O. Westmount QC H3Z 2Y5 Tél : 514 989 9031 Tél : 1800 361 5029

Fax: 514 989 8789



and raw. Along the way they might kill a ringed seal like this one. And this is an adult beluga. The older they are, the whiter. When they are younger, they are bluish, a bluish white. The beluga was also a source of food; they ate it, they dried the fillets running along the spine, which were very tender, and they kept the sinews for use as sewing thread, because at that time caribou were unavailable, they had almost disappeared from northern Nunavik.

Kayaks like these needed ongoing maintenance. They recovered them with new skins every two years, on average. When they took off the old skins, they recycled them to make all sorts of things: containers, water buckets, soles for boots. The women worked collectively, inside the tents; here we see old Angaiorpak who was the oldest of the group, the 'doyenne,' helping assemble three bearded sealskins. To keep the sealskins fresh and raw, so they could be sewn, they had to be kept in urine in a sort of big pouch made of a piece of old kayak covering.

Once the three skins were sewn together they were attached to the frame, and then the women had to stretch it over the frame before doing the final stitching to make watertight seams using a waterproof stitch, a job that required the participation of seven or eight women to get it done in a day. So it took about a day to assemble the skins into one piece, and another day to attach the piece to the frame, which the owner had carefully repaired to replace any parts, making sure they were smooth so as not to tear the skins when they were stretched. They made sort of small buttonholes and stretched the skins with cords made of braided sinew; the skins had to be stretched taut to hold well, tightening them to the maximum because as the skins dry, they will stretch even more and become harder, almost like wood. So they have to be stretched to be effective and so that the women can make the final stitches to close up the covering and ensure that water cannot penetrate. It's quite a job. They used beluga sinew, dried on the rocks and them separated into fibers and braided together, and they had to prepare tens of metres of braided sinew. And everyone applied themselves, the skins have to be sewn, they had to prepare the spots where they make the buttonholes and do the stitching; everyone pitched in to finish it all in one day.

The wife of the kayak's owner had a special privilege; she was the one who sewed the section covering the bow of the kayak, which resembles a penis and is called *usuujaq* in Inuktitut. Because in addition to its practical use, the kayak is the principal tool of the male.

Bureau de Montréal 360 - 4150, Ste-Catherine O. Westmount QC H3Z 2Y5 Tél : 514 989 9031 Tél : 1 800 361 5029 Fax : 514 989 8789



A man was not allowed to marry, the Inuit said, until he had a kayak. And so we can understand that this tool is sort of a symbolic penis, meaning that it can reproduce, produce game, reproduce life, it was considered as part of the social reproduction of the group: providing sustenance and ensuring that each generation would live to produce the next.

These were extremely important moments of spring when collective life was in full swing: people sewed together, prepared the skins together, ate together, and when someone killed a large game animal like a bearded seal, they organized a collective celebration to eat it. Along the coast, the women consumed one part of the spinal vertebrae and the men ate a different part. Not the same sections. The women ate them together, and when someone shouted *kujapiguna*, *kujapik*, which referred to these particular vertebrae of the animal, all the women came running with their *ulu* to eat, each woman took a vertebra, and then they ate the delicious meat that was attached. Or *kutsiniruna*, which was the term for the part the men ate. And meanwhile the children had to be fed too.

So some people were busy stone carving, as we saw earlier, while others were preparing the carcass and others were watching for game – a whole collective life punctuated by moments of rest when they might finish up some stitching, moistening the thread well with oil or even a little *pujaq*, the oil residue from the lamp, coating the seams to make them even more waterproof.

To protect themselves from the raw skins, they used old caribou skins, which they had anyway, to use as bedding, and which protected them and allowed them to lean on the kayak so they could sew properly. And here is the finished kayak.

So, they brought the kayaks by sea to Kangiqsujuaq, to the village. They had to be good kayakers to do that, which they did frequently, paddling around the immense peninsula of Kangiqsujuaq to meet up with those who had made the journey on foot. There was a sort of shortcut that took on foot or with pack dogs, or in winter with the dog sleds, there was a route a few kilometres long between the Urqumiut and Kangiqsujuaq Bay. Often, a hunter would go out to sea at sunset and spend an hour or two looking for seals coming up to breathe. The seals were easy to spot, a small black dot would appear and the hunter would approach by kayak and try to wound the animal, which would dive at that point and then

Bureau de Montréal 360 - 4150, Ste-Catherine O. Westmount QC H3Z 2Y5 Tél : 514 989 9031 Tél : 1 800 361 5029 Fax : 514 989 8789



reappear when it was out of air, and little by little, the hunter would get closer until he could harpoon it and not lose it.

In summer, there were arctic char, the lake fish that travel upstream in the autumn to spawn, and then come down to the sea in the spring, down certain streams. So the Inuit had nets, which they could buy in exchange for furs. They bought nets and they also knew how to make them or repair them, because the nets needed maintenance. Here we see a man with his little boat, repairing or remaking bits of his net which he has spread out around him, or maybe he is cleaning it, because when it's pulled out of the water, it has algae on it.

I was talking about sewing thread earlier. They stored this thread in sewing kits made out of bird skin, from any kind of bird, although the preferred skin was from the common loon, a migratory aquatic bird which breeds in the north and has colourful plumage. There was a myth the Inuit used to tell in the old days, that the loon and the gull were white but they loved to paint. So these two white aquatic birds painted each other, and the gull painted the loon first, and when the loon wanted to reciprocate, he did the job badly and spilled his whole container of paint so the result was the crow, entirely black, while here he was, with this beautiful pattern that was made into a sewing kit. Except that the feathers were on the inside. So to see the beauty of the bird, we have to look at him as he is in the wild, with his feathers on the outside.

The loon has a long beak and extraordinary eyesight, and for the Inuit it served as an intermediary between the spirits, the game animals, and humans. When a loon appeared and spotted a hunter heading inland, travelling some distance, the loon would use one of his webbed feet to point to the direction where the hunter would find caribou. So obviously this was a belief, but according to many hunters it seemed that it was true. So they treated the loon with respect. It could not be killed for just any reason, killed for fun or as food. It played an important role, it accompanied the women, and it was a woman who worked the skins, cleaning it of fat, turning it inside out and chewing it so that it would dry well and fulfill its role as a sewing kit. So that when they put the sinews inside it, preferably caribou sinews, or beluga, they were protected from mildew because they were kept in a dry environment.

Fax: (819) 254-8148

360 - 4150, Ste-Catherine O. Westmount QC H3Z 2Y5 Tél : 514 989 9031 Tél : 1 800 361 5029 Fax : 514 989 8789



Here, she is asking her daughter to chew the skin. The daughter does not much want to do it but she will do it, we will see, a little reluctantly, but this was part of women's work. We saw in the Sanikiluaq film where the inhabitants had clothes made of bird skins, chewing to get rid of any trace of fat was an important role of the women, for the young women. Next, the skin will dry for several days before it will be used.

Here we have my friend Asivak. One might think this is a little boy, but no, it's a girl, a niece of Qalli, who adopted her as her little adopted daughter from her brother Pakarti. Of Asivak's five names, four of them were men's names, including the name of her grandfather, Nuvvuka, her grandfather and one of the four Urgumiut hunters, who had tattoos on their noses. And so from birth, for all the children and grandchildren, this girl was the deceased grandfather, and was raised as a boy. She was addressed as if she was the grandfather or as anyone related to one of her men's names, but meanwhile she also bore the name of a great Aunt, Asivak, who was one of the old women we saw sewing earlier. And and that time, for the teachers who taught these children when they were in school, transvestism was astonishing, and the teachers were completely unable to understand and thought that they were boys, and meanwhile there were boys dressed as girls, some with braids, and it was a complete shock for the teachers, and a challenge to try to make the boy's bathroom and the girls go to the girls', because the children followed the rules of their assigned genders, which they kept only as long as they were still children, until the boy killed his first game animal and the girl menstruated for the first time. But there was a significant percentage of transvestism then; on average, in the villages where I could do a count, it could represent 15% of the children.

So, the pack dogs. Part of the population would go back on foot, lacking other means of transport: the men, the young people and some of the women with babies on their backs or holding a child by the hand, and the dogs, which had been readied with a bag on each side of their backs, packs that were sometimes quite heavily loaded. The trip took some hours, and they enjoyed short halts every hour or so along the way, due to fatigue, a short break when they might gather some heather, some small dried lichens. They would make a small fire and make tea, perhaps *tiirluk* or Labrador tea -- a local plant, and eat strips of dried meat like old Ilisituk here or his son, dried beluga meat, which is very nourishing, or even dried *mattaq*. These they also carried in their provisions for the journey.

Fax: (819) 254-8148

Westmount QC H3Z 2Y5 Tél: 514 989 9031 Tél: 1 800 361 5029 Fax: 514 989 8789

360 - 4150, Ste-Catherine O.



For these people, walking was a big part of life. They walked to go hunting, to go fishing, to change campsites or to head to the village when there was a Hudsons Bay Company there, although earlier there was also a Revillon Frères post.

So here, they are eating some beluga *mattaq*.

Meanwhile, the dogs were able to quench their thirst. They had removed the dogs' packs, and then put them back on to get back underway. These dogs were very well trained, they could not use just any dogs. And this was useful, because when they headed inland, they could attach the tent poles to the dogs' flanks so the dogs could drag them along. And they could use the dogs to carry game, fish, dried meat. It was always good to have a gun along, because someone might flush out an Arctic hare or startle a ptarmigan, and if they shot it, it would add a little variety to the evening meal.

This man has come back by sea into Kangiqsijuaq Bay, where we were at the time, not far from the village. You can see how he uses his double-bladed paddle to stabilize the kayak while he gets out so he doesn't fall in the water. And when a kayak arrived, anyone who was nearby came to help pull the kayak onto shore and carry it into the village, or the camp, if they were at a hunting camp. They were careful to remove the cartridges from the gun, in case a child was tempted to use it. There were often hunting accidents due to a youngster trying to take aim without knowing the gun was loaded.

At the time, there were high tides in the area every 15 days at the full moon and the new moon, and when it was the equinox, the tides were even higher, like we see in other areas further south. So when the tides were low, they would collect mussels and fish for sculpins - *kanajuq* or *kanajuit* – which were eaten with pleasure; here is a small *kanajuq*. They would boil them, they have lots of bones, and you can see its large head, but they really enjoyed eating the flesh. They would put a piece in their mouth and spit the bones out the side and then eat the white flesh, different from the flesh of Arctic trout, which is pink, a little like salmon.

And this was an opportunity for the young people, the young men and women, young adults, to go for a little stroll and come back with a harvest that would vary their diet a little, as it was based on marine mammals.

7



Fax: 514 989 8789



They made some very well designed toys, and the relationship with the dogs... you see, often a child had a dog, which it fed, but also sometimes the child would shake the dog and toss it on the ground, as sort of as a game. However, after the settlement of the Inuit, problems quickly arose, including the high concentration of dogs. There were often more dogs than people in the villages and camps. So this was a danger, with this concentration, and no one foresaw that the dogs would be hungry and there would be nothing to feed them, unlike in the hunting camps, where every time the hunters returned, the dogs could be sure of a share of the meat. And these hungry dogs could attack children and young people, and women were told to be careful if they were menstruating and always carry a stick, because the dogs, which obviously have a good sense of smell, might follow them or attack them. And even recently, in Igloolik, when there were some dog sled races during the Easter holidays, a young child was nearly disfigured by dogs he got a little too close to, the child had to be sent South for cosmetic surgery. And there were adults killed. All this led at one point to the killing of dogs. At first they wanted to require that dogs be tied, but when a tied and hungry dog manages to break free, it's dangerous. And eventually the police authorized anyone who saw a loose dog to kill it. So this created conflicts - you killed my dog so I'm going to kill yours - and this is how dogs ended up eliminated and were replaced by snowmobiles and motorboats.

So when they were heading off like that into the tundra, there was still a little work to finish. Here they are making waterproof boots, using a special seam on the boots, which have had the hair removed. They would soak the boots, often in urine, so that the hair would come off well, and they made this kind of seam, a special stitch that made the boots completely watertight precisely for this time of year. If they could afford rubber boots they bought them, but otherwise, and even today, the hunters and the people heading out to the camps were very happy to have these waterproof boots.

In the village they would set up the summer tents for as long as possible, although they also had houses, and they had dogs like these ones here, which are not tied. Sometimes fights would break out among the dogs, who were hungry for scraps of meat when a tent was being moved, big fights between the dominant dogs, and the humans would often have to intervene to make sure that the dogs did not inflict too great an injury on each other.



360 - 4150, Ste-Catherine O. Westmount QC H3Z 2Y5 Tél: 514 989 9031 Tél: 1800 361 5029 Fax: 514 989 8789



When people were gathered in the village it was also the time for fun and games. There were more people available than in the small camps, and daily activities were perhaps less demanding. So in the evening before the sun went down, they liked to play ball games.

The Catholic mission had for a long time been the place where the Inuit could come to play cards, group games, and just get together.

So after the harvest of mussels and *kanajuit*, the season progressed until the first frosts arrived, and the vegetation quickly turned hues of pink and brown; then the first berries ripened and were ready for picking.

This is the missionary's boat, which went with a crew of Inuit, four or six Inuit sailors and hunters, all the way to Kuujjuaq, several hundred kilometres, to get materials and food from the trading post there. And this is the missionary, Father Mascaret, who stayed up there many years, and who captained his own boat, the *Sainte-Marie*. He was also a great hunter and fisherman. And here is his boat hauled out. I traveled on his boat from Quaqtaq to Kangiqsujuaq and Salluit. He was a very good captain who knew how to choose the appropriate sailors to make a voyage over several hundred kilometres in Hudson Strait, where the currents can sometimes be very strong. Once like that, in a storm, the captain decided to enter a small bay, and an hour later, we were in a lake. He knew that the sea would transform that part of the bay into a lake, and so provide protection from the storm. He had extensive knowledge of the environment.

Here we can see two ice-breakers. This was autumn, when the ice-breakers appeared, and you can see the contrast between the kayaks and the ships. The kayakers were often tempted to try to trade a sculpture or a piece of Inuit handicraft in exchange for food or metal cans they could use to fabricate or repair their equipment.

This is a Baffin Inuit leaving for the South with his wife, who was not an Inuk, and their two children. These ice-breakers also carried passengers, they had cabins for transporting patients on their way to the hospital, or people who wanted to go to another village, because these ships often traveled routes to carry the supplies to a number of villages. And obviously they had to make these trips before the bays froze over, so the visit from the ice-breaker was often the last big moment in the life of the villages, where the Inuit had by this

9



Westmount QC H3Z 2Y5 Tél: 514 989 9031 Tél: 1 800 361 5029 Fax: 514 989 8789

Bureau de Montréal

360 - 4150, Ste-Catherine O.



point settled. The ships brought in construction materials for building the school and the health centre, and then winter would begin, and would last for months. So this was a new way of life, but also a stage in the historical evolution of the Inuit of the North, and Kangiqsujuaq in particular.

10

Westmount QC H3Z 2Y5 Tél : 514 989 9031 Tél : 1 800 361 5029 Fax: 514 989 8789



Fax: (819) 254-8148