

## Marion Tuu'luq 1910–2004

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### INUIT

Marion Tuu'luq, born in Chantrey Inlet, Northwest Territories, lived a traditional nomadic life before she moved to Baker Lake in 1961. She married twice and had sixteen children. Beginning with small scenes sewn on fabric, she became part of the burst of development in Inuit art at Baker Lake in the early seventies.

Tuu'luq's achievements as an artist—a creator of wall hangings, drawings, and prints—were remarkable. She had various two-person shows with her artist husband, Luke Anguhadluq, and participated in group shows of Inuit art in Winnipeg, Ottawa, Vancouver, and New York. Her work was included in the Inuit Masterworks exhibit at the McMichael Canadian Collection in Kleinburg, Ontario, in 1983 and in the show 'Contemporary Indian

and Inuit Art of Canada' at the United Nations in New York in 1983. One of her wall hangings was included in the 1974 World Crafts Council show 'In Praise of Hands'. She was elected a member of the Royal Academy of Arts in 1978, and the University of Alberta awarded her an Honorary Doctorate of Laws in 1990.

'A Story of Starvation', which first appeared in *Inuit Today* in 1977, is a true and not unusual story, notable for its strong sense of pacing and of what might be called a narrator's feel for the order of things. The diction is subtle and appropriate, particularly in the brief dialogue included. Recorded by Susan Tagoona as orature, not literature, it shows the creativity possible in what folklorists call the 'personal-experience narrative'.

### A Story of Starvation

*As told to Susan Tagoona*

I am going to recount a story that I am sure I have told over and over again in the past. It is not a happy story. At the time it took place, it looked as though we weren't going to survive. I will tell you some of those terrible events.

My name is Marion Tuu'luq, and my story goes back to the time when my father couldn't walk. My father was lame for as far back as I can remember into my childhood. We used to carry him on our backs when we travelled during the summer. In the winter, we pulled him on the qamutik.

One time, while we were at Tipyalik, there were no caribou to be found, and we became very hungry. Being just a young girl at the time, it didn't occur to me that the people I was with were very concerned and afraid.

While my brother Angutituaq and Oonark's husband were out searching for game, they came upon several traps, which brought them to some people. But they soon discovered that these people with the traps had been reduced to killing one of their dogs, since there was no game whatsoever in the area.

They skinned the dog, and when it was cooked, they told me to eat some of the meat. But I was so repelled by the meat of the dog that I was unable to eat. I really meant it with my whole heart when I said I didn't want to eat it, and they couldn't make me change my mind. I remember someone saying that the meat tasted just like a wolf.

When everyone was eating the dog meat, I too was given a piece. I tried to smell it, but I couldn't smell anything. Then, I put the piece in my mouth and I took it out again. I did this several times. I remember clearly how much I was repelled that day at the thought of eating a dog.

While the eating was going on, my father was lying down on the bed as usual. He was scarcely breathing. I didn't know then that the following day he would strangle himself with a rope, and we would have to leave him behind. When he was asked to eat, on that final day of his life, he refused. He didn't want to take even a sip of broth.

The next day, my brother Quenungnat and I were directed to go a little distance away from the igloo. We were told to stay there until someone called for us and we were ready to leave our camp. Of course, we wondered at the reason for this command. But we stayed as we were told until Nattaq, Quenungnat's mother, waved at us, signalling that it was now okay for us to return. It was then that I learned that my father had died and that I would not be seeing him again. I cried, for I loved my father very much. His name was Ekinilik.

Innakatsik, who was just a kid, even younger than myself, was asked to lead the way, but he didn't want to. So then, I was asked to lead and was told to follow the tracks on the snow.

While I was walking in the lead, I spotted a rock that was barely showing in the snow ahead of me. It indicated that a sled had passed by that spot only the day before. As I started to approach the rock, I heard the voice of my father say to me, 'It is a cache, it is a cache.' And here he had just died a short while before!

I started kicking at the rock, shouting 'It's a cache! It's food!' And I would not leave the rock.

'There can't be anything around here. You wouldn't know of any caches around here, you are not able to know!' answered my brother Angutituaq in a scolding voice. But I just kept on kicking at the rock and shouting, 'It's food! It's a cache!' For some reason, I just couldn't leave the rock alone.

'It's nothing. It can't be anything!' Angutituaq kept answering back at me.

Then the others started shovelling at the rock, and, true to my words, they uncovered—a cache! As we loaded it on to our sled, it seemed as though we were stealing someone else's cache. But we didn't know of anyone who would have a cache, and we were threatened with starvation. We had sighted some fox traps the previous day, which probably belonged to the Akiliningmiut, and maybe the cache was theirs.

When we had loaded the meat on our sled, my father's voice again spoke to me: 'Daughter, I don't want you to eat the liver and the heart of this caribou.' I told him that I would do as he said.

After the men had made an igloo, I was allowed to feast on the meat which I had discovered. The men told me to eat all that I wanted. They fed me everything—the heart, the liver—everything! They told me that there would have been nothing to eat if it hadn't been for me.

The next day, when I woke up, I was unable to open my eyes.

'What is the matter with her now? Look at her, she can't even open her eyes! Did somebody hurt you?' Nattaq shouted at me. It must have been because I had eaten the

meat after my father had told me not to. Again, I heard the voice of my father warning me, 'Daughter, do not eat the heart and the liver of the caribou.'

'I forgot,' I answered. No sooner had I said this than my eyes were opened.

When I try to tell this part of the story, I am not confused about the details. It is something I will never forget.

Later, there were no caribou at all. We didn't even see any caribou tracks. We were forced to live on dog meat. Killing and eating our dogs was the only way we could survive. As we travelled, we came across scraps of dried meat and the bones of caribou left over from the winter before, but they did not satisfy our hunger.

One day, Innakatsik went off on his own to search a nearby igloo for food. When he returned, he said he had discovered that it was full of dried meat. We all went straight to the igloo he had found. When we entered it, the people there just kept looking down and did not raise their heads. We were deeply disappointed, for there was no food there—nothing to eat at all. 'Is there food?' asked my brother Angutituaq. But no one had the heart to answer him.

As we no longer had any dogs, we packed all our belongings on our backs, and we started to walk. Along the way, we caught a rabbit and ate it, and that was all we had to eat.

For a time, we kept on walking, but it was not long before we realized that we weren't going to run into any people. Instead, we decided to search for igloos. We came across two—one large, one small—and we looked for tracks around them, but there were none. It was bitterly cold by now, and there were frequent blizzards and storms, so we decided to return to the shelter of our old igloo. There was just a small group of us together at that time—Angutituaq, Tamalik, and myself. Weak from starvation, we were forced to leave clothes, blankets, and other belongings behind. I took only a blanket with me, and I wrapped it around my shivering body. When we lay down to sleep, I made sure that all my body was covered, and I had no trouble going to sleep.

Each time we awoke, we would force ourselves to start walking again. Angutituaq was close to starvation. We were just beginning to give up ourselves because of him, when we finally reached our old igloo.

Before we could enter the welcome shelter of the igloo, we had to dig a hole through the side to make a door. After our last stay there, we had sealed the door with snow to protect some skins we had left inside. Finally, we succeeded in digging ourselves an entrance way, but it was very narrow. Then, my brother said, 'I think Tuu'luq should be able to squeeze in through.' 'It's too small!' I shouted back at him. But I tried to pass through the narrow hole, and at last I succeeded. Angutituaq followed behind me.

I don't know how many days we had wandered and nights we had slept before we reached our igloo. We had not had anything to eat for a long time, and we were very thin and nearly starved to death.

'I smell hide!' we all shouted out as we reached the inside of the igloo, for we found skins there that were to have been used for whips. We cut the skins in pieces and devoured them hungrily. Then we scraped up and ate some blood that we discovered on a block of snow. White people use plates to eat off—we used snow. There was a lot of blood on the snow plate, so we ate from that, and that was the way we survived.

Whenever Angutituaq came across little pieces of meat, he offered them to me, even though I begged him to eat them himself instead. But he wanted so badly for me to eat.

It was a while before we felt we had gathered enough strength to leave the igloo again. We decided from then on that, if we wanted to eat, we would have to look for left-over caribou stomachs in abandoned caches. So that is what we did. Sometimes we were lucky enough to come across caribou stomachs in old caches and we would eat their contents. Other times, we would find nothing and would return to our igloo and empty stomachs.

One time, Angutituaq and Oonark's husband decided to go out hunting for game. So Quenungnat and his brother went to look for a cache to provide the hunters with some food to take on their way. But the two men returned after just a short while to say that there were no caches left.

Angutituaq, however, said he knew of a place close by that he wanted to check. So we went to that place and discovered there what appeared to be a cache. Again, I started shouting—as I used to be very outspoken at that time—'It's a cache! It's a cache! It's a whole caribou!' One of the men answered me: 'Your brother and I tried to find food, but we returned empty-handed because it had been moved to a different area. You know that. There couldn't be anything in here.'

Still, we spent the whole day trying to shovel off the snow with a pana (Eskimo snow knife). 'I smell a cache. It is a cache, and I know it hasn't been touched,' I continued to insist. I think, by that time, the others were almost ready to give up. But I never used to think of how I was feeling. And the thing turned out to be a cache, after all.

We each loaded pieces of meat on our backs and prepared to return to the igloo. But we had scarcely moved more than a few feet away when we decided to stop right there and eat our fill. And did we ever eat! We chopped at the meat, pounded it, chipped and cracked it in halves with our snow knife. We had tried to walk with the meat on our backs, but we were so skinny by then, that we had no strength left for walking with such a weight to carry. So we ate the whole caribou, leaving only the neck and the head, which we took back with us.

After we reached our igloo, the men made plans to set out again to search for caribou stomachs on top of a hill. So we did, wandering further and further away. We walked the whole afternoon and didn't find a thing, so we decided to return home. All we had with us were the gun and the pana. We had left everything else we owned behind for we were too weak to carry anything with us. It was very hard for us. Every time I offered to carry the gun, my brother said no. I felt that, since I was the one with the most strength left, I should be the one to carry the gun.

Sometime later, we neared the igloo where we had been making our home. As we approached, we suddenly became aware of a group of people standing there. Oh, how frightened we were! We had finished off all their hides that were to have been used for making whips, and now they had come back for them.

'They've caught some caribou and they're bringing it back here!' Quenungnat was running and shouting at the same time. He was also trying to eat and getting scolded for his behaviour. I was still so afraid of what the men might do!

As it turned out, these hunters had caught some caribou and were returning to their overnight camp. They started to make themselves an igloo and I tried to help by cutting out blocks for them. My brother Angutituaq was still too weak from lack of food.

After the igloo was completed, Oonark's husband started to work on the porch. But the men told him not to bother as they would be on their way again by the next day. Then, one of them said, 'These people are not helping themselves to food. Get them something to eat.'

That night, after all of us had eaten our fill, we started to tell stories. As usual, I found lots to laugh at. In those days, I used to laugh often and was very talkative. Now, everything seemed so funny.

Some of our group told how, each time they approached an igloo, they would yell through the ice window, 'Is there anyone in there? Anyone in there?'

Nattaq said that, upon reaching our old igloo, they had spotted our fresh tracks in the snow, but there had been no one around. And Talluq had started to imagine that our dead bodies were in the porch. They had all looked around, then entered the igloo and found it empty. When they came out of the igloo, they saw us coming towards them, and they were so happy to see that we were all still together.

When Nattaq started to talk again about how she thought I might be dead and how she had searched the igloo looking for me, I started to laugh.

'This girl never runs out of laughs,' Angutituaq said.

## Alexander Wolfe b. 1927

### SAÛLTEAUX

Alexander Wolfe was born on the Sakimay Reserve in south central Saskatchewan during the Depression. His early education took place at a boarding school operated by the United Church of Canada. In 1950, he moved to the Turtle Mountains of North Dakota, where his family had originated. In 1964, he participated in President Johnson's Great Society Community Action Program and earned his high school diploma and a teacher's aide certificate in pre-school education.

Wolfe explains the importance of maintaining the tradition of oral storytelling:

To be responsible for retelling the stories of the grandfathers today, the *Anishmaybay* must renew their commitment to the oral tradition. At the same time, we must turn to

a written tradition and use it to support, not destroy, our oral tradition. The structure of our society in the days when the grandfathers were still with us was very different from what we have today. Information and instruction were transmitted to us orally, in story form, by our old people. Listening and absorbing what was told required great lengths of time. The use of the mind and memory were important; this is why the stories were told over and over again. The environment of that time held nothing to distract the listener and storyteller.

Today many things distract the listener and disrupt the storytelling. Radio, television, video, and printed material take precedence in the everyday lives of many children, and even the adults, in our

*A Story of Starvation*

As told by Marion Tuu'luq

1. Discuss the importance of this kind of story and its role in recording First Nations history.
2. Comment on the voice of the storyteller and the sense of veracity and authority it conveys.
3. Is the word "story" appropriate or inappropriate in describing this text?
4. What are some key elements of the oral story that are present in this text?