

## The story of Nuliajuk (Inuit)

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Nuliajuk. Nuliajuk is a spirit. A spirit, known by Inuit as a Sea Spirit. Nuliajuk is someone that I knew, ever since I was a little boy. My father a Netsilik man, who came from Talurjuaq, in Netsilingmiut, the people who live among the seals. I came from that region and they used to tell that legend, Nuliajuk, as a story, and as a spirit and as someone that has, that had a lot of power.

Nuliajuk, originally was Uinigumasuittuq. Uinigumasuittuq translates to “one that never wanted to marry,” wanted to remain a spinster for all her life. There’s a real story in that, because as mother and father, they wanted a son-in-law. They wanted their daughter to be married, so that the son-in-law could also contribute to hunting and provide food for the family. That is an extremely important aspect in Inuit culture, Inuit customs and Inuit traditions; which is how we grew up as Inuit, since thousands of years ago.

Nuliajuk is a very ancient story, very ancient legend passed on from generation to generation, since time immemorial. Uinigumasuittuq, the one who never wanted to marry. So her father wanted her to be married, but she didn’t want to be married. And one day, the father said: “I’m going to take you down to the island.” So he took his daughter to an island, some distance away, with a dog or with dogs... Inuit dogs. And she started living with the dogs at this island. In Iglulingmiut legend, this island is called Pitektaryuk – Small Island, Pitektaryuk – Small Island. So she started to live with the dogs and she fell... she’s falling in love with one of the dogs, so she had sex with one of the dogs and fell in love with that particular dog and she eventually got pregnant, and she had babies. Because she had sex with the dog, and she eventually became pregnant and she had babies. She had many babies.

When she had the babies, babies came out different nationalities: some became Qablunaat – the White people, some became Qarnuktut – the black people, some became Inuit, some became Itqilik – Itqilik, Chipewyan Indians. Some became Chinese and some became Japanese. Some became something else.

So she had those babies who became different nationalities and sometime later on, all these people left, out in the ocean. They left all over the place and they went to all over the place, all over the world.

So one day, his father... her father, Nuliajuk’s father decided to go back to the island and pick her up. And wanted to bring her back to the, to the outpost camp. He went, they went on the kayak, it would have been next year. He went on the kayak and he put her in front of the kayak. Along the way, father decided, because he’s angry at the daughter that she never wanted to be married, she fell in love with the dog and then he decide to push her out of the kayak. And she fell in the water. She started to sink, but before she sank, she grabbed a hold of the kayak, on each side of the kayak. In the meantime, her father took a knife, a snow knife and cut off all of her fingers. And she sank, she sank all the way to the bottom of the sea. And when she sank to the bottom of the sea, she established a tupiq, a tent and she has a big dog that guides her, in front of her tent. Because, she is after all the boss of all the animals under the sea. So she is a very powerful, powerful lady.

But also in the meantime, all the fingers that were cut off; the thumb, the forefinger, the middle finger, – this finger, – the last little finger, they became all kinds of sea mammals, seals and ugyuk, the bearded

seal, belugas and narwhales, and walrus and killer whale and bowhead and all the other living things in the sea. So she became, she is the boss of all the living animals in the sea.

Nuliajuk is the boss of all animals, is in charge of the animals under the sea, or in the sea.

When I was very young, maybe about 5 or 6 years old, we used to live on the land quite a lot, and also we used to live out on the sea. We would be out seal hunting. My father and mother and all the other Inuit, at that particular period of time, knew all the laws of the sea, they knew all the laws of the land. So when we were out seal hunting, our purpose in the winter time was to make sure that we had oil from the fat of the seal. Your qulliq -Inuit oil lamp - is only lit as long as you have seal fat. If you don't have seal fat, your qulliq is out of light.

And I remember when I was young, we couldn't catch any more seals, my parents could not catch any more seals. My father and my brother-in-law and my sister would be out seal hunting, but they could no longer catch seals. And our qulliq ran out of seal fat, so we no longer had light. We no longer had light, and nothing to boil the water anymore, nothing to boil meat anymore, because we no longer had light. So my brother-in-law being a shaman and my father being a shaman also angakkuq. And my father said in Inuktitut, and I'll translate it to: "I wonder what we did to make Nuliajuk angry, that she no longer provides seals for us anymore."

You know, I remember at the earliest time, when I was a little boy, my father would catch a seal, and pulls in the seal into the igloo. And it was my mother's responsibility to skin and butcher the animal. Just before she did that, she used to take a freshwater, or fresh ice, take freshwater or ice and put it into her mouth and open the mouth of the seal and put the ice into the mouth of the seal, and says in Inuktitut, and I'll translate it to you, it's something like: "This is to make sure that all seals and other animals are not thirsty under the sea." That was kind of respect for the animal and all the other animals under the sea as well, within the environment.

So my father said: "I wonder what we did to make Nuliajuk angry that she is no longer providing us with any seals." So it was my brother-in-law's responsibility to find out, through his own light, through his spirits. And find out what would make Nuliajuk angry and that she was no longer providing the seals. And, when he found out that maybe we did not exactly follow the rules of Nuliajuk, maybe we had forgot, maybe they forgot to put the piece of ice in the mouth of a seal, that she got angry, that she no longer provided seals for the hunters. And if that was the case, and they found out it was the case, so we made peace with Nuliajuk. I promise to make sure we follow her rules and laws when we go out seal hunting. Then she was happy again. And, you know, sure enough, there were seals again when the peace was made with Nuliajuk. And we would have light in the qulliq, Inuit oil lamp, again. And we would have water and we would have boiled meat and things like that.

My brother-in-law... you know was a human being, as ordinary human beings, we don't see Nuliajuk. We just know and respect the powers of Nuliajuk and her authority. My brother-in-law is a shaman and he once talked to me about having seen Nuliajuk basking on the ice. And he said that she was on the ice combing her hair. Remember, her father cut off her fingers but she knew how to manage to comb her hair. And when she was combing her hair (...) he said she has very long hair. And all the animals that came out from combing her hair were all kinds of seals and belugas and bearded seals and animals like that.

So that to me, you have to be a quite strong, powerful shaman to be able to see a spirit of Nuliajuk.

Nuliajuk is very respected by Inuit, since time immemorial. Many people, Inuit, from, particularly from Netsilingmiut, where there are seals, people who live among the seals, name their children after Nuliajuk, since time immemorial, since thousands and thousands of years ago. So Nuliajuk is a very common name among Inuit, in that part of the region. Nuliajuk is still used as a proper name today. It is used as a respected name. Nuliajuk is also used as strength and as a spirit for naming our children after Nuliajuk.

Other Inuit in different regions call her different names. Slightly, slightly different versions also from different places. It has to be because we're not from the same community. But it's the same idea of Nuliajuk. Among Qikiqtaaluk people of Cape Dorset, they call her Taluliyuk it comes from the word Tuluk, arm. Inuit in Kinngait in Cape Dorset say when they see Nuliajuk in the open water, the only thing they see is her arm. That's why they call her Taluliyuk, one arm person, one arm spirit.

Some, other regions call her Arnapkapfaaluk, Takanaaluk, Big Woman Down There. So in different parts of Nunavut, in different parts of Inuit homelands, some Inuit are named Aknaluk, the big woman, after the same person. There's a lady... there's also some other people call her Arnapkapfaaluk, the woman, this woman. Some people are named Arnapkapfaaluk also, to respect the other names of Nuliajuk. I think in Greenland, I have to correct this, I think they call her Takánakapsâluk, Takánakapsâluk, The Bad One Down There. So that's what they call her. The Bad One Down There, I guess, also refers to when she gets angry, she no longer provides animals for you. From that point of view, she is known as Bad One Down There.

Maybe that's why. Nuliajuk is a very respected legend by Inuit. For me, I believe in Nuliajuk. I truly believe in Nuliajuk. Because, since thousands and thousands of years, she has provided livelihood for Inuit who went out seal hunting, hunting other animals to survive from the animals from the sea. And it shows to me also that as Inuit and as people around the world... all the people who became Qablunaat and who became black people and Chinese and other people, they also have to respect all the environmental laws, because if we don't we'll make Nuliajuk angry. And if we do follow all of her laws, then she will be happy. It means to me, as an Inuk, that we should not be damaging the Earth as much as what different regions of the world are doing today. Look at what's happened to climate change and global warming. We have broken Nuliajuk laws that things are quite different now than they were fifty years ago. In just a matter of fifty years, things have changed to the point where we have climate change and global warming. And ah, so it means, it tells me that as people we have to respect environmental laws, environmental rules, and treat the world, treat the Earth with respect, and Nuliajuk as much as we can.