

# SAMPLER

*The Structure of Days Out*

ALSO BY TOM LOWENSTEIN:

POETRY

*Filibustering in Samsara*, The Many Press, 1987

*Ancestors and Species*, Shearsman Books, 2005

Conversation with Murasaki, Shearsman Books, 2009

*From Culbone Wood – in Xanadu*, Shearsman Books, 2013

ON TIKIQAQ HISTORY

*The Things That Were Said of Them*, University of California Press, 1992

*Ancient Land: Sacred Whale*, Bloomsbury, Farrar Strauss and Giroux, 1993

*Ultimate Americans*, University of Alaska Press, 2008

*Tikiqaq, an Early History*, North Slope Borough, 2018

Tom Lowenstein

# The Structure of Days Out

SAMPLER

*With storytellers, hunters and their descendants  
in a Native Alaskan Community, 1973–1981*

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All quotations from “Rainey” are from Froelich G. Rainey, *The Whale Hunters  
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from Rainey’s unpublished field notes, made available to me by  
John Bockstoce in 1977. A copy of these notes is now in the  
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## PEOPLE AND PLACES IN THE TEXT

*Pseudonyms are in italics*

Aġniin	Born ca. 1900, married to <i>Qiligniq</i> , the first Tikigaq cleric.
Arlott, John	English cricket commentator
Asatchaq	storyteller, born 1891.
<i>Daisy</i>	a teenaged girl.
<i>Elizabeth</i>	High Priest's wife, based in Fairbanks
Kunak	born ca. 1950
Mrs Charlotte	born ca. 1880; Elizabeth's mother
<i>Aniqsuaq</i>	born ca. 1940 friend to <i>Sarah</i> and Umik
<i>Inupiaq</i>	north Alaskan 'Eskimo' people and their language
<i>Ipiutak</i>	pre-Tikigaq peninsula culture
<i>Patsy</i> and <i>Laura</i>	teenaged girls.
<i>Margaret</i>	born ca. 1950
<i>Kayuktug</i>	born ca. 1930, a whale boat owner
Q	born ca. 1930.
Rainey	Froelich Rainey, archaeologist of Ipiutak; conducted ethnographic field work in 1940.
<i>Sarah</i>	born ca. 1930, skinboat owner
Tikigaq	northwest Alaskan Inupiaq village
Tukummiq	born ca. 1920, translator and interpreter.
<i>Tulugaq</i>	a teenaged boy.
<i>Umik</i>	born ca. 1930 skinboat owner, married to <i>Sarah</i>
Umigluk	born ca. 1900, dancer, storyteller, historian
Uqpik	born ca. 1920

### *Peninsula history:*

0– ca. 800 AD	Peninsula residence of pre-Inupiaq Ipiutak people
1000– AD	Peninsula residence of whale-hunting Tikigaq people
1860	Commercial whaler/trader presence
1870	Major inter-ethnic contact leading to epidemics and game depletion
1880	Summer coast guard visits north and northwest coast
1887	Jabbertown, cosmopolitan whaler-trader station established on south beach five miles from Tikigaq

1889	Death of shaman Ataṇauraq
1890	Missionary Driggs arrives in Tikigaq
1891	Birth of Asatchaq
1890s	Revs Edson and Knapp substitute for Driggs on furlough
1908	Driggs deposed
1908–1919	Missionary Augustus Hoare in Tikigaq
1908	Hoare's village census
1909	Hoare's cemetery removal

*Personal chronology:*

Summer 1973	Three week Tikigaq visit, recording stories for Alaska State Museum
March–June 1975	Four month Tikigaq visit
Autumn 1975	Inupiaq studies; meeting with Asatchaq in Fairbanks
September 1975	Meeting with Mrs Charlotte.
Dec. 1975–July 1976	Residence in Tikigaq.
August–Dec. 1976	Residence in San Francisco.
January–July 1977	Return to Tikigaq
1977–1980	Intermittent work with Asatchaq
1980	Death of Asatchaq
1998	Tikigaq visit to research social history
2009	Final visit to Tikigaq

TERMINOLOGY AND MYTH NAMES

<i>aana</i>	grandmother
Aliṇnaq	moon spirit or <i>tatqim inua</i>
<i>aṇatkuq</i>	shaman
<i>arrii</i>	exclamation of pain
<i>ataata</i>	grandfather
<i>atiq</i>	name or namesake
<i>inua</i>	spirit presence, literally, 'its owner'
Inupiaq	north Alaskan Eskimo. Plural Inupiat
jokes	local English from <i>saglu-</i> 'to lie', spoken casually
kiligvak	woolly mammoth, semi-Anglicised in 1891 to create Asatchaq's surname, Killigivuk
<i>kuyak-</i>	sexual intercourse

<i>maktak</i>	whale skin and blubber
<i>nigrun</i>	'the animal', myth-based local name for Tikigaq
<i>qaaq-</i>	to use marijuana, get stoned, from the verb 'explode'
<i>qalgi</i>	ceremonial house. Six in pre-contact Tikigaq
<i>qan̄a</i>	stoned
<i>siqinnim inua</i>	sun spirit
skidoo, snowgo	motorized sled
<i>tatqim inua</i>	moon spirit
Tikigaq	Point Hope, Alaska
<i>tirragiik</i>	fresh, boiled whale skin
Tulunigraq	Raven Man of primordial time who harpooned the sea monster whose body became the Tikigaq peninsula
Ukuṇ̄niq	mythological boy shaman who travelled the south beach
<i>ulu</i>	semi-lunar women's knife, originally slate
<i>umiaq</i>	skinboat
<i>umialik</i>	skinboat owner, female or male
<i>usuk</i>	penis
<i>utchuk</i>	vagina
<i>uiluagtaq</i>	woman who won't marry, separatist female shaman

#### INUPIAQ PRONUNCIATION

The dotted g ( ġ ) resembles the French r

The engma ( ŋ ) resembles an -ng, as in 'king'

-au is spoken as in the English o

-q lies deep in the throat and draws the preceding vowel with it

-k is spoken as in English



## Part 1

### *Night Visitors and Telling Stories*

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He knows I know his name is Tulugaq, but still I call this mighty individual Sharva, who visits me these late spring evenings. A specialist in *kung-fu* manoeuvres reproduced from Bruce Lee movies, small hours, visionary conversation, Sharva's passage through the village keeps the girls awake and some in terror as he guns his machine to the edge of my storm-shed and opens the throttle in a final bellow. Then in the after-blast, he strides through the snow, my outer door groans and his glove smacks the lintel.

The reasons for his visits I slowly start to fathom. Drunk on night's daylight, Sharva seeks shade, and my house is full of shade. And while his path through Tikiġaq is ribald and sublime, what I offer is a margin of banality in which to convalesce from serial intensity. To mark this dull edge to his business, Sharva brings me curiosities because he knows I'll give him supper. His diet is eccentric. Abjuring *real meat* – whale, seal, caribou, walrus, fish and wild fowl – what he eats is tuna, corned beef and sardines. So in return for these, he lifts hunks of Kobuk River jade and Anchorage whiskey from his showsuit zipper. And while I cache these, he gorges on crackers, swigs coffee, lights a Marlboro, exhales through his harmonica and crashes on my trestle.

The young god also comes to reenact his work on enemies: their legs, teeth, genitals and noses. He fought *Itqiliks* (Indians) at school in Oregon and now he's home to instruct younger brothers. Up swings an elbow caked with blood, salt, motor oil and fish fluids. A boot crashes on the lino. Hands, blackened from a leaky carburettor, sweep the light bulb. Parka nylon whistles. Typescripts, notes and carbon paper all go flying. Researched from movies, Sharva executes a high-kick and flourishing a *chako* stick, smashes my light bulb. The god transforms to housemaid, crouches on the floor, apologises, wipes glass from floor boards and then striding through the storm shed, rubs the glass-dust in the snow outside and dropping ice crusts on the lino, stamps in again for pilot crackers.

'Come! My gloves! Dry! You gonna blood 'em soon!' he cries reverting to heroic posture. He bangs his mittens and a shower of glass and ice crusts join the scabs of snow his boots drop.

Since Sharva's first visit, it helps to diagnose his mood from the sound of his approach. There's the rapid stride of a marijuana high, the heavy, agrieved drinker's gait, the depressive approach, in which his movement's drained of purpose. Finally, the quick walk of a self-possessed young man with curiosity about the world intent on intellectual conversation.

It's been this latter mood of interest marked our conversations, when Sharva sits at my table and riffles through my folders, fingering the typescripts with rightful self-possession.

'How many stories you got here? You got stories about *anatkus*?

What's this story on a brown bear?

How come you never tell me about my *atig*?

'Everything I know is secondhand', I tell him. 'I don't tell stories. All I know is what Asatchaq records. And these are just streaks of patterns fading on a background I can never visualise.'

'That's all anybody knows,' says Sharva. 'I see my life like that too. In lines across the snow. And what is snow? *What is it?* I don't know. I don't know where I'm going. Who were my ancestors? Hunters, *anatkus* who took journeys to the moon man. And here's me tripping round on my skiddoos. People say I'm crazy. I guess they're maybe right. But how's them different?'

I address him by mistake as Sharva.

'How come you say that name?' he asks, and I apologise.

'I know you're Tulugaq. And you have powerful *atigs*. I called you that other because you remind me of someone. It's a god from India called Shiva.'

'You said *Sharva*. Not that other.'

'I know. It's complicated. Shiva has a thousand-and-eight names. Sharva means lucky. The god's names are amulets.'

'You shouldn't bother with it,' Tulugaq said. 'We're not India.'

I risked developing the conversation.

'It's not just a thousand names. He's got that many *usuks*.'

Tulugaq had a fit of coughing.

'Man, a thousand *usuks*...' For a moment he was lost in speculation.

Then,

'That would be some *kuyak*-. Where does he keep 'em?'

'He was crazy for the daughter of a mountain. Parvati. She was a *uiluaqtaq*. But they married finally. And spent years in one *kuyak*.'

'What happened after?'

‘One of their babies got punished. Had his head changed to an elephant’s. Some kind of *kiligvak*... Fat bellied. Loved candy. One tusk broken.’

‘One *tuugaq* broken. Crazy story. That many *usuks*.’

\*

## Tulugaq and Patsy

The teenaged Tulugaq brings a girl round. ‘This is Patsy,’ he says briefly. Then after some talk about their fathers’ whale-boats, ‘Let’s go in there,’ Tulugaq gestures to my alcove and they walk through the curtain.

I’m jealous of their privacy and subliminate with Heidegger, his essay on Hölderlin’s *Homecoming* poem. This I’d excavated from a cache of books a teacher had abandoned in the summer: *Leaves of Grass* and *Walden*, pacifist writings of Tolstoy and Gandhi and Hesse’s *Steppenwolf*: radical texts that young Americans were reading in the 1960s. These lay in a snow heap on a table in the school house built in 1900 for the traders’ children, dragged five miles west to Tikiġaq and intermittently abandoned.

I’d wandered in one Sunday. A preschool programme used the east end of the building. There were toys and cushions in strawberry and banana patterns. Like a mouth jammed open to swallow a whale’s head, the west end held the cockpit severed from a plane that came down in the village. Cords, dials and connectors poked out in the twilight, a telephone switchboard crammed in beside it. Some kids had set a fire here and the back wall was charred, the window frames twisted.

Back at the house, as Tulugaq and Patsy consummate their moment, I make a stab at Heidegger. The cover’s pitted by an ice pick left still vertically transfixing *Steppenwolf* and I’d copied out the words the pick had skewered.

The scars to Heidegger are superficial, his essay profound and hard to fathom. More important, in Hölderlin’s poem, I recognize the ice and light of Alpine Europe and an inflection of its contrasts at this Arctic moment, at once spiritually hot and deadly freezing: stanzas that illuminate the winter in an expectation of unbroken summer. The poet evokes village people in their valley ‘workshops’ exalted by the peaks around them which rained sacred glamour.

I shared Hölderlin’s vision of community, industrious inhabitants, the encounter between communal existence and a sacred *fiat*. It expresses

an Edenic anthropology of ordinary people, their lives hallowed by imperatives, blessed and expressed by divine generosity. Such people are autonomous but submissive to participation in the workings of authority, content in their share of its operations. There's eternity to this condition: where everyone *is*. Just *there* they belong with pine trees and glaciers.

This of Hölderlin, as taken up by Heidegger, musing in his peasant cabin – perhaps already having joined the Nazi Party and refusing to abandon home in Baden-Württemberg – is *Heimat*, or home's meaning, but which also demands of people that they make the effort to achieve belonging. Thus Heidegger proclaimed as excavated from the snow heap:

Home is difficult to win.  
They're not yet ready for home's inmost essence.  
It's near, what you seek. In the end you'll find it.

How far such a venture is joyous or forbidding is difficult to measure.

\*

### Asatchaq

By virtue of his years and learning, Asatchaq is sage and patriarch. And yet, because he's also feared, he lives in semi-exile on the village fringes. Still, like a Buddha at the bull's eye of a *mandala*, he's also at the centre, father, village consciousness and history. *It's near, what you seek*, as Heidegger tells us, perhaps with a glance at Grimm's tale of the soldier who found gold in the kitchen he returned to.

What Asatchaq doesn't need to seek is what we can't approach without him. This, because he lives largely in the realm of fiction: in half-submerged ancestral teachings, myths, legends, narratives of ancestors, dance songs, taboo regulations, shamanistic medicine, spirit visions, sun and moon lore, supernatural histories, celebrated gestes of skinboat owners, sacred geography that maps ghost dwellings, subterranean *iglus* – birth and death rites, laws of mutuality with animals, how to butcher and ingest the soul-infused meat of whale and caribou, theories of the human spirit, its origin in previous namesakes, networks of a century's kinship, chronicles of families going back two centuries that were engaged in patterns of behaviour no-one born since 1940 follows.

He, on the other hand, living on the fringe in a cabin loaned him by a teacher and kept alive by intermittent visits by a few relations from

the New Town Site two miles away and an Englishman who writes him cheques for songs and stories.

Asatchaq's cabin lies due north of mine, while my interpreter/translator Tukummiq's ex-US army quonset hut with its fence of frozen seals her son has hunted standing upright on their noses, lies roughly in the middle. The trail that Tukummiq and I negotiate each evening forms a line from my south side cabin to the north of the peninsula. Here Asatchaq has settled fifty yards from his sister Uyatauna who also lives in isolation.

'I like it better here in old Tikigaq,' Tukummiq confesses. The half mile we walk, occasionally backwards if a north wind's blowing, is deserted. We stop to look east to New Town Site: a blur on the horizon: tract dwellings, durable and sanctioned by contemporary authority. Old post-contact Tikigaq, improvised through nine decades of ingenuity. Autonomous, self-made, fragile, crafted out of planks and insulating paper.

North wind ('Good for polar bears' as Asatchaq remarks) is part of the landscape. It blows from Cape Lisburne, hits the Point side-on and crosses to the south shore as though connecting the two coastlines. The north wind is male, the south wind female. Like the sun and the moon, the two strive against each other and help define the Point's self-fructifying energy.

'New Town is all right,' Tukummiq continues. She is widowed, just turned fifty. 'But it's not the old village. I'd like a new home but I'll be dead before I get it.'

The identity of Tikigaq or 'index finger', derives from its position, pointing deep into the ocean. New Town Site lies two miles inland and its geologic form has less particularity. It's part of inland. The Point, with its plunging momentum of harpoon and bird's bill, is sharper and more complex in its fabrication.

We glance round at abandoned cabins, *iglu* mounds and caches, whale bone uprights, animal bones and skins on drying racks, ruts sunk by tractors that dragged half the village east last summer, the slough and tundra hummocks where the bunting and the longspur build in April.

And we're in ghostly company. Human bones lie scattered on the tundra. Tukummiq clicks her tongue, contemplatively self-divided. It's both home and a wasteland, beautiful/ugly, things almost as they were twelve months ago but overlaid by human absence.

The New Town Site is two miles east, connected to us by the roar of snowmachines: hunters come to fetch meat from underground caches.

Sometimes I walk to New Town Site to buy goods from the store and look round Tikigaq's reformulation. The shingle on which New Town Site is built is grey, the houses uniform. The North Slope Borough rents planes to bring in prefabs: they're tightly insulated and identical, unweathered as yet, unmarked by history.

'Hard to walk on New Town's stones till freeze up,' old people mutter. Your feet turn sideways. It's painful on the knees and hips. The feeling's precarious. Strange to remember that this stony surface pushed by dozers from the south shore is an aggregation of the old south beach: the same stones shamans trod on vision quests and where people still hunt for seal. But heaped to a pad to support new houses, New Town is the answer to impending flooding that could overwhelm the old site. The move, a rational solution, is nonetheless traumatic. The new site's also built atop pre-Eskimo remains, Ipiutak's cemetery, part excavated between 1939 and '40.

### Kunak's Dream

It's the end of an era though no-one talks apocalyptically. Moves have happened since after the Ice Age. And like much history, it soon gets forgotten. Bicentennial celebrations start up in the lower States this summer. The US has withdrawn from southeast Asia and Vietnam has now invaded Cambodia. Two Tikigaq men, conscripted to the jungle ('They pay Natives to kill Natives,' as Kunak told me) are home in the village.

The impact of both these factors has afflicted Kunak. Since seeing him last, as young, beautiful and powerful, his face is refined by thought and suffering. He shows me drawings in which he's tried to realize a vision of his people and wonders if Ipiutak which ca. 800 is blended (his word) with early Inupiaq. He also worries that the New Town Site lies atop Ipiutak ruins.

Given the unknowable extent of the Ipiutak settlement, there's truth to his anxiety and I share it. K has kept a small house in old Tikigaq. But he lives now on the New Town Site. He's been disturbed by dreams since last summer's move. In one dream he's in an old *iglu*:

'A man came in through the tunnel. He's wearing a mask. At the centre, at the nose, there's a bird revolving.'



He told me about two other dreams, but the details are blurred. The mask dream derived from the photo of an Ipiutak mask he had been studying.

The village move involved a large adjustment. But similar places are worse affected. Kivalina, a hundred miles south and sited between sea, lagoon and river is in peril and there's nowhere local that's not threatened. Tikigaq is fortunate. Two miles east there's higher ground. The move had to happen, but compared to the old site's history, New Town's different:

'It's a new world here. It's left you behind, man,' a boy just arrived on a skidoo tells me. Still, no separating rivalry splits the village. Everyone's involved. It's serious and painful.

'Which-way-you-always-kick-then?' I'm tempted to ask him but am glad I didn't.

I rarely indulge in ethnographic banter. This would have been unfair and arrogant. I have, after all, the luxury of books and archives. My bitten-back rejoinder concerned an ancient rivalry. Before the white man came, the village divided into parties. One group kicked towards the Point, the other team kicked from the Point, inland.

### Inupiaq Migrations

As we cross to visit Asatiguk, I think of the migrations that brought people to Alaska. Specifically to Tikigaq some two thousand years back, first the pre-Eskimo Ipiutak people. Then early Inupiat around 1000.

In addition to Tlingit and Athabaskan Indians and Inupiat of the interior, the Inuit have moved everywhere along the north shores of Alaska's sixteen hundred miles of coastline adapting to propitious hunting places.

Besides Tikigaq which holds the latest wave of the late Thule people, there were, among the northern people, the flint knappers of Denbigh, Choris, Norton, Okvik, Punuk, Birnirk, Old Bering Sea, Ipiutak and Thule whale hunting people. The first migrants arrived from southeast Siberia. When the sea ice started melting about ten thousand years back, the continents separated. One story describes two distant points that once were united: here, on Tikigaq's north coastline and somewhere near East Cape, Siberia.

\*

## *Kiligvak, the Woolly Mammoth*

In conversation about names and namesakes, we shuttle the old man's surname back and forth between us. Tukummiq laughs. The old man's birth is inscribed in a ledger as James Asecak Killigivuk. Thus missionary Driggs baptized Niguvana's baby.

Asatchaq's father's name was Kiligvak, 'woolly mammoth'. And because he was little, people called him *kiligvauraq*, 'little *kiligvak*.' This echoed, I imagined wrongly, the presence of the Pleistocene: the beasts and early people that migrated from Siberia.<sup>1</sup>

Still, like ancient hunters that pursued it, the mammoth migrated from northeastern Europe and when it died out it left its presence. Ten miles north, there's beached mammoth ivory. And whole tusks tumble out of river banks. I was with Kunak's brother when he hauled into the village a set of tusks he'd recovered from the Kuukpak River. More modestly, I kicked up some gravel for a fish net and unearthed a molar.

'How old you think that tooth is?' asked one of my companions.

'Maybe ten thousand years,' I suggested, picking up, on which to place the molar for a photo, a small wooden lid from a driftwood tangle. Inscribed on the wood in magic marker was the number 10,000.

## Time

The emptiness prompts me to imagine I feel time's passage. Like Tikigaq's beaches, time comes and goes in oscillating repetitions. But time's always the same thing and it has no movement. We and the mammoth inhabit one medium.

## Asatchaq's World View

The Ancient Mastodon, as I wrongly call him, whom we're crossing Tikigaq to visit, lives within a gyroscope of incompatible cosmologies. Or rather, the world views coinciding in him – Inupiaq, Episcopalian, American materialist – are interchangeable, adjacent. A prayer to Jesus at the whale hunt's followed by an old charm for the harpoon float.

---

<sup>1</sup> People believed the *kiligvak* to have been a giant rodent. It was timid and ran underground when disturbed.

## The Peninsula's Geology

People have lived here since about 0 AD and the Point has existed for millennia. Created by detritus from Cape Thompson thrown up on the south beach every summer, a new beach ridge is created every hundred years or so and thus the Point is built of mounds and troughs that stripe the peninsula, east-west, parallel: the most recent on the south side, the more ancient to the north before they're ripped off by storm waves. Cape Thompson is the endpoint of the Rocky Mountain cordillera.

Just as the peninsula enlarges from the south shore, so the north side is eroded. But while build-up from the south is gradual, the north shore collapses, summer and autumn, though there's also growth here. The same water that carries off the bluffs, deposits silt from Kuukpak River. These opposite forces both created the peninsula and render life dangerous.

## The Storm of 1893

The most detailed account of a flood comes in a letter of John Driggs, Tikigaq missionary. In October 1893, a violent storm blew across from Siberia and in Driggs' letter, we witness the storm's impact:

On the 13th of October 1893 during a very severe blizzard, the sea came breaking on the land, driving the Natives out of the village and forcing me to desert the mission...

Out of doors everything looked desolate. Along the ocean front the land had been cut away... and all the snow had been thoroughly saturated by the ocean water and spray... On the night of my return another big storm arose and the following evening I thought it best to desert the house before I was again forced to repeat my former experience of dodging waves and wading through ice water and slush, an operation I did not care to repeat...

That night I slept alongside a dog sled, with a few clumps of snow thrown up as a wind break and then continued my trip back to the mountains... By the first of November... I again

returned home and opened school for the second time...A young woman who had been a pupil at the mission was overtaken by these blizzards [and] is supposed to have been blown off into the ocean... Driggs letter, June 1894

In July 1894, Driggs took Rev. Edson, who'd arrived to enable Driggs's vacation, to view the north shore and they devised a plan to relocate the Mission. In 1895, Edson wrote:

During the last four years autumn storms have driven heavy seas diagonally along this side of the point with terrific boring force, cutting off fully fifty feet of the shore in front of the house. [Driggs] believes it is only a question of a short time when, if it is not moved back, it will be washed off.

The Mission House, which Driggs had built a mile east of the village, was at the time the only Tikiġaq frame building.

Here follows a summary of a Survey Report of Tikiġaq Beach Erosion, conducted by the Alaska Corps of Engineers, January 1972. The conclusion reads:

'If problems increase, as undoubtedly they will, the desirability of remaining at the present site will diminish.'

Despite local objections outlined by the surveyor, people did agree to move two miles east. This began in summer 1975 and by 1977 most of the community had relocated.

The work I did with Asatchaq took place on the old site, which had been reduced to about a quarter of the population. The house where I spent 1976 was isolated. And when forced to move, I decamped to Asatchaq's cabin floor. I was, however, woken one morning when the cabin started shaking. Assuming this to be an earthquake, I naively welcomed this recrudescence of the geological time. But when I stumbled to the door I found affable Willie Omnik on a tractor driving a forklift platform under the cabin.

'Hey, what are you doing?' I shouted, 'we haven't finished work.'

'Oh, OK,' said Willie, and he turned away to move another cabin.

\*

## Secular and Sacred: The Phenomenon of Removal

'It happened here,' said Asatchaq after his first recording. It was January 1976 and he had just recited Tikigaq's creation story. 'In the spring I'll show you the wound hole where Tulunigraq harpooned the animal.'

The wound, he told me, was the made by a harpoon after which the sea beast transformed to earth.

That summer I took Asatchaq to the spot he'd identified. This was the first of two excursions that we made. It was bumpy for his wheel chair and we didn't get far. 'Stop here,' he shouted at the place he intended. There was long grass and bird bone. But the wound hole had disappeared into the ocean.

### Tikigaq's *inua*

The nature of the Ur-beast was ambiguous. It was sacred, dangerous and belonged to a class of spirits that inhabited the myth world.

These beings were a species of *inua* or resident spirit, a word modified from *inuk*, 'person', meaning 'its person'. The most powerful of these was *tatqim inua*: 'the spirit owner of the moon'. Originally, this had been Aliṇṇaq, a human become god and anti-hero. Having raped his sister, he ascended to the moon where he presided over a tub containing the sea mammals. His abused sister went to the sun, becoming its presiding spirit.

*Inuas* continued to exist. A giant flounder brooded in the waters of the inlet. The sea north of the Kuukpak river held an omnivorous mollusc. This, in summer 1899, sucked down a boat full of coal and murre's eggs that the Irishman O'Hare had gathered near Uivvaq. There were also ghostly 'families': three Itivyaaq spirits east of Tikigaq and the Nuvuk 'people' whose support was enjoined before whaling. Dangerous spirits inhabited places where babies had died. At the cliffs were resident giants. The task of mythic humans was to visit and destroy *inuas*, thereby rendering the region safe.

Since settling on the peninsula, the people of the Point had hunted whale and Tulunigraq's whale *inua* was remade into the sacralising species central to subsistence.

The whale Tulunigraq harpooned is seldom named as such. The story takes place in the sphere of Ur-time. Things existed in transition. The earth was soft. Humans walked on their hands. Gender was uncertain.

Early creation was topsy-turvy. Caribou and seal fat existed in opposition. People wandered in darkness until the Raven man tore light from the container where it had been hoarded. Like Aliṇṇaq, his mythic coeval, he ripped through taboo in order to break into creation.

Continuing with Tulunigraq: the animal was implicitly perceived as a whale. Asatchaq called the creature *nigrun*, 'animal'. And *nigrun* was a nickname for the peninsula. People standing on Cape Thompson looking west would say, 'There's *nigrun*.' the animal Tulunigraq killed.

Likewise, when the Raven struck, he sang to make the harpoon and its drag float stay in place to tether the animal. Later harpooners used the same song when they struck a bowhead: '*Uivvaluk, uivvaluk!*' ('around, around!')

This convergence of belief and actuality was concretised in *iglu* architecture: the *iglu* dome being made from whale bone, while stories evoked magical events in which whales come up through dry land to an animated *iglu*.

The notion that the Point's an animal, harmonized with the rhythm of its build and decay. Tikigaq is made of the whale's body and people lived inside it. The whale hunt is conducted by a partnership of male and female skinboat owners. While the husband hunts, the wife sits in the *iglu*, as though in the whale's head, countering at heightened moments, a whale rising in the *iglu*.

### The Sacred and the Secular continued

When in 1904, the priest E.J. Knapp described Tikigaq's graveyard as 'weird', he was suggesting the place was strange, uncanny and with supernatural properties.

Tikigaq's graveyard covered a large area of the Point and was integrated with the village, where life and death were therefore coexistent. *Weird* likewise would describe the dancing, singing and drumming which filled the ceremonial houses each October.

The anthropologist Marcel Mauss described how Eskimo spirituality was generally a winter phenomenon, summer being a more secular time when people half-forgot the spirits and taboos dominating the dark season. So in July 1909, the new missionary Hoare ordered the able bodied population to remove the relics of ancestors which lay round the village.

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## Hoare's Cemetery Removal

In July 1909, when Asatchaq was eighteen, the Rev. Hoare ordained the removal of Tikiġaq's cemetery to a space he'd consecrated a mile west of the village. Apart from the atomic threat outlined later, his action was perhaps the most drastic in contact history wherein old Tikigaq was assimilated into Christian regulation.

To early white visitors, the village was difficult to describe in terms of original belief. The first European here was the English naval officer Frederick Beechey who noted in August 1826 that the whalebone uprights in the village looked like a 'forest of stakes', suggesting organic but uncivilised disorder.

Similarly, to Charles Brower in 1884, Tikiġaq 'looked like a forest of small trees with the tops cut off. There were thousands of these whale jaw bones'. E.J. Knapp in 1904, found this 'weird Eskimo graveyard two miles and more in length resembled trunks of blasted trees... the bodies... dissolved. Many of these graves have fallen into utter ruin and the bones and clothes that shrouded the dead lie scattered on the ground.'

Thus in 1909, the landscape of the Point changed for ever. The transformation was described by Hoare in a 1909 *Spirit of Missions*:

One of the first duties... is the seemingly... burial of the dead.... I am sending you a picture of our new graveyard [which] was completed in one day. Every person of working age on the Point assisted. While some were building, others were patrolling up and down, collecting the skulls and bones of those who...have been laid on the surface of the ground to await decay. In one common grave we buried over 1,200 skulls, and about three cartloads of bones.... This marks the passing of a superstition... The people have accepted Christianity...

Hoare's was an enactment of the doctrine that Alaska's Education Commissioner Sheldon Jackson had learned from Alexander Duff whose motto proclaimed 'While we throw down, we also rebuild...'

'The white man was *pukiq*, clever. He was clean and powerful,' Umigluk told me in 1977. Some old timers held the belief that time was anyway coming to an end. This partly had to do with a self-disrespect deriving from idealized ancestral superiority. The balance between modesty and survival energy marked people with a particular character.

To minimize public expression of what you know is in part a survival stratagem. To boast is to invite nemesis.

In comparing the 1909 cemetery removal and the 1975 transfer to the New Town Site, there lies one ironic contrast. Hoare's relocation of ancestral relics to a newly plotted environment represented the removal from one sacred place to another. There is no record of what people said about the event. The cemetery removal engaged a reduced population of about 130 who were emerging from three decades of epidemics and were in the process of abandoning the shamanistic religion disparaged by the missionaries.

Hoare regarded the cemetery removal as an act of purging. Missionary language contained frequent reference, to cleaning and rebuilding. Driggs's temporary replacement, Elijah Edson, was preoccupied by a relationship between physical and religious purity: 'For God's sake,' he wrote in 1895, 'send us towels.' Hoare's new cemetery was an orderly, contained space. Birth, death and resurrection could now proceed along a coherent trajectory.

The 1975 site-move was predicated on a similar imperative. This time it was federal government not the priesthood that initiated the transition. And Tikigaq by now had moved further into the modern world. And while the 1975 move was agreed in coordination with the village council and the North Slope Borough, cemetery relocation had been the act of a church autocrat.

The two events nonetheless shared one key element. Both constituted removal from a sacralised environment. And the 1975 move took the living population to a secular environment with modernizing potential.

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## **The Shaman Ataŋauraq and Disease**

For almost ten years until his murder in February 1889, the shaman and self-proclaimed chief Ataŋauraq created a goods exchange monopoly

The commercial whale hunters who penetrated the Bering Sea in 1848 not only carried these diseases, but through the use of repeating rifles and exploding bomb harpoons, reduced the whale and caribou populations, leading Native communities to an increasing commercial dependence.

The inflow of manufactured goods continued and Frohlich Rainey's notes of 1940 enumerate many non-local articles that circulated.



Many imported goods acquired Inupiaq terminology and these neologisms entered the linguistic repertoire. Much of this was inventive. It wasn't, however, for entertainment that mustard became *iligam ananya*, 'baby shit' or the word for sausage was built from *usuk*, 'penis'. Such words, along with terms for different kinds of imported oil, household equipment, nails, string, hammers, firearms and their components, became assimilated into the language. People might comprehend the English terms but many of these didn't fit Inupiaq phonology. There is, for example, no Inupiaq phonological matrix which fits words like 'rifle' or 'stove oil'. Some English phonemes could be harmonized into polysynthetic compounds: 'seal,' 'sea,' 'tea,' 'coffee,' 'cup','get', 'go' and a number of others could be slipped into Inupiaq.

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### The Village Council and Social Order

In 1920, partly with Church intervention, Tikigaaq elected a village council. As Vanstone wrote in 1960, 'The council is surprisingly effective as an enforcement agency. The pressures of public opinion, together with the prestige of council members, are important factors in encouraging compliance with village rules and regulations. The United States Marshall at Nome has jurisdiction over the [Tikigaaq] area and he may come to the village to arrest individuals who have committed crimes against the American legal system. Cases of this kind, which are relatively few, are handled with the cooperation of the village council.' (Vanstone 1962: 103).

Social control during the traditional period had been exerted by older people and behaviour was regulated by example. With suffering that followed epidemics and the dissolution, by ca. 1900, of the last ceremonial house, the formation of a village council was a major initiative.

The first council consisted of seven survivors of the epidemic period. These were men from ceremonial houses who had close connection with the old dispensation but who also lived effectively in the modern period. Samaruna and Peter Kunuyaq, two of the remembered council members exemplified this self-assured identity. These were hardy individuals whose dictat was reinforced by example.

Asatchaq grew up during this transitional period and successfully negotiated bicultural loyalties. Educated in Tikigaaq lore, he comprehended and assimilated pre-contact tradition, while also taking advantage

of manufactured goods that helped support life. By the mid-1970s his insistence on the centrality of Inupiaq order and his disdain for what he perceived as mid-century disorder, was therefore in reaction both to a semi-idealized culture which preceded his birth and also to the 'golden' period of Inupiaq/American cultural coexistence as realized by his own elders.<sup>2</sup>

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## Wasteland — School Ruins

Asatchaq inhabited a wasteland on the edge of school house residue abandoned on the north side when the classroom portacabins were transported to the New Town site. These light prefabs were made for inexpensive transportation and were deposited into urbanizing New Town culture until they were replaced by an up-to-date school building in the 1980s.

To reach Asatchaq's cabin you must first pick your way across wrecked bits of piping which had fed stove oil and drinking water into the school buildings. There was also wreckage from a pumping shed, a ruined workshop and rectangular patches from where buildings had been lifted.

The white man, like this architecture of impermanence, was himself a migrant. While Native people had long settled in their territories, white men were, as the U.S. 1976 Bicentennial attested, modern visitors. Tikigaq's school teachers in the 1970s came mostly from the mid- and southwestern states, and lured by generous salaries, most stayed only so long as they could stand the cold and isolation.<sup>3</sup>

The detritus round Asatchaq's cabin differed from other signs of village removal. Walking back to Tikigaq from New Town Site, I saw how the airstrip cut the slough that fills with water every summer.

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<sup>2</sup> Ivruklik Rock, a Tikigaq elder in a Fairbanks shelter became so Christianised that he wanted nothing to do with pre-contact history. In 1933, he worked, with Asatchaq, as an extra in W.S. Van Dyke's MGM movie *Eskimo*, some of which was shot on Tikigaq's south shore. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eskimo\\_%28film%29](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eskimo_%28film%29). Both Ivruklik and Asatchaq had a vivid time when they were briefly transported to Hollywood. Ivruklik commented on Jean Harlow: 'Jeanie... she sure made good hotcakes.'

<sup>3</sup> I understand this because I'm one of them. But as a teenager once put it, 'Taam's not a *naluaḡmiu*. He's an *Inglagmiu* (English). He's a Native from his own country.' Another boy added, 'You lived in England? They taken away your culture too?'

‘There were thousands of skeletons’, one man told me. ‘What do you do with them? And next to each grave would be hunting gear, sewing kit or cooking equipment. Their old things. Whose is it when they’re dead?’

I walked round in the gloom. A mist had come in, the cloud was low. The remains of overlapping cultures strewed the village: earth and gravel churned up by removal machinery is rutted, gouged, humped, ditched, scarred by Kat tracks, and the contours of the Point with its troughs, ridges and old *iglus*, grasses, wild flowers, are dislocated and shapeless, scattered with abandoned house bits, hunting gear and imported manufacture.

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### Daisy’s Narrative

I watched, in diagram, the overture to Daisy’s tragedy. This started on the north side, next to Asatchaq’s cabin, at Nanny Uyatauna’s.

Uyatauna is Asatchaq’s younger sister. Pale-skinned and emaciated, she stretches painfully to sit up in bed but can only just cry out and wave her arms and speak in abbreviated Inupiaq that three years ago I’d heard her talking briskly. Nanny lives with her daughter Rose-Marie. They were Tikigaq’s last *iglu* dwellers and vacated their earth house in August ’73.

Nanny inhabits a nineteenth century trader’s cabin which was hauled into Tikigaq from Jabber town around 1920. It’s a tight little building insulated with black tarp and has an attic, originally a storage space for bear skins, ivory and baleen. Accessible by ladder, the attic also functioned as a social annexe.

The transition for Nanny from her *iglu* to a cabin, repeated the experience her elders witnessed. Her parents, Kiligvak and Niguvana, were in the vanguard of these changes. Selling whalebone with trader John Backland, Kiligvak took delivery in autumn 1912 of lumber from Seattle and the following summer built the first native frame house. It survives to the far west by Samaruna’s *iglu* ruins, the furthest northwest building on the continent.

Asatchaq and Uyatauna moved into this house in their twenties and while Asatchaq continued to live there until about 1974, Nanny joined her husband in an *iglu*.

Rose-Marie, who’s fifty, small and hunchbacked, runs Nanny’s household. In Dickens’s phrase in *Our Mutual Friend* for Jenny Wren, she’s

‘the person of the house’.<sup>4</sup> And Rose would agree, though she’d never complain, as Jenny Wren did: ‘My back’s bad and my legs are queer.’

But while Jenny’s sharp and critical (‘I can’t bear children. I know their tricks and their manners’), Rose-Marie is cheerful, friendly, non-judgemental, her movements neat and animated. Once when I had eaten what she’d shared, she ran to the stove, swept up trash with a gull’s wing and ran outside to throw this in the snow, returning to feed Nanny. Like Jenny Wren, she makes her living as a seamstress and wears a snowshirt she’s embroidered, flitting between tasks around the house as though she’s sewing things together.

I asked, in my hunger for Inupiaq, ‘What you call these?’ and pointed to the moons and stars and flowers she’d stitched into calico. I knew words for lunar phases, the guttural and liquid word for star, and excitedly anticipated a term for the branching flowers she’d stitched into her shirt hem.

‘We call that kind forget-me-nots,’ said Rose-Marie shyly. For the next few minutes she composed a sentence and I wrote this from dictation: ‘I-sewed-moon-stars-and-flowers on my *atigiluk*.’

‘Good Eskimo language,’ said Rose-Marie, ‘but I never spell it.’ The long, single compound with its inner transformations was a string of complex balances and harmonies as though created for a concert aria, while to the speaker it remained a simple sentence, one of millions spoken daily.

I thought of the engravings that Tikigaaq people once did on snow knives and bow drill handles: beautiful and ordinary, scratched on bone and ivory and highlighted with lamp soot.

Later I told Asatchaq I knew of a girl called Jenny who reminded me of Rose-Marie.

‘Ya, Jenny. *Yiniiraq*, Little Jenny. I call her *Qupaluuraq*, “little long-spur”. Lays eggs in old *iglus*.’ And he fluttered his lips with a song-like trilling.

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<sup>4</sup> There’s a coincidence between Dickens’s locution and an Inupiaq idiom. *Inua* ‘its person, spirit’, is used for two phenomena. Animals revealed their *inua*, ‘it’s person’, represented by a human face emerging from a non-human countenance (*tuttum inua*, ‘the caribou, its person’). Someone could also be the *inua* of the place over which they presided. Dickens’s locution thus homologises the personalities of Rose-Marie and Jenny Wren.