

Part One

Tununirmiut
Elders
(North Baffin)

Sick Body: Diagnoses and Treatments

Cuts and wounds

When a seal was caught, was the blubber saved so that it could be used for medicinal purposes, such as for covering wounds?

Ilisapi: When we caught a seal, we did not just think of cuts and wounds. What we thought of first was oil for the *qulliq*, the lamp, as that was our only source of heat. The thin layer beneath the blubber would be saved for the dogs. The blubber around the flippers was saved entirely for the lamp. Oil would also be used as ear drops for children with earaches to help them feel better. If a wound was too dry, oil would be applied to keep it moist. I do not know how this was done as I was born after *qallunaat* were already present. Sometimes, when new skin was being formed over a wound and it cracked, oil was applied. It was also applied to skin that had been sunburnt. We would not put much on; just enough to keep the skin from cracking. We grew up around the R.C.M.P. base so we had ointment. If it was packed away in the sled, then we would use seal oil to protect our skin from cracking while we were travelling.

Did you have to boil it first?

Ilisapi: No. When you touch blubber it is quite oily. We would use it like that.

Tirisi: You just rub it on. Just make sure you do not apply too much.

Ilisapi: You have not asked about this, but bearded seal oil was the best oil to apply to wounds or infected areas that took a long time to heal. Part of the blubber, the *tangiq*, would be used as a bandaid on the infected area. We know that ringed seals eat krill and cod but the bearded seal has a different diet. Because animals have different diets there is a difference in the oil made from their blubber. Some oils used in the *qulliq* had a brighter flame than others. Some flames were red. Some oils produced higher flames. The difference in the oils was based on the food the animal had eaten.

Tirisi: We learned this because we used oil constantly.

*When in the year was the oil at its best, in the winter or in the spring?
Was the oil basically the same all year round?*

Iisapi: It was basically the same all year round though we seemed to use more of it in the spring when we applied it to dry skin. The other basic use for oil was for earaches in the winter. There were fewer children back then compared to today. There weren't very many children with earaches.

Tirisi: Nowadays, it seems like children have earaches all the time.

How did you use oil to treat an earache?

Iisapi: You used the tip of a feather to apply the drops. We would get unused oil from the lamp, apply two drops in the ear and let it sit for a while. We could probably still use that remedy today if the Health Centre happened to be closed.

Tirisi: Earaches often occurred in the middle of the night.

Iisapi: They tended to happen during the night.

Tirisi: These days you can also use store-bought oil for ear drops if a child is crying from an earache.

Iisapi: The blubber was pounded and some oil was saved to be used for *palauqaq*¹, not for the lamp. It was good clean oil that had not been aged at all. We used seal oil in our *palauqaq* too.

Was whale oil used for similar purposes?

Iisapi: They tried not to use whale oil. We children did not know why but our mothers did. When a whale was freshly caught, it would be cut up and we would eat. If we got a cut while eating it, the cut tended to swell up and get itchy. I think that whale oil is quite strong so it was never used for earaches. We did not use it on our faces as it had a powerful stench. When it was used for the lamp, the flame tended to be higher and it really heated up our dwelling. It really brightened it up. After we used up the whale oil, we would use seal oil. It would be a lot darker and the flame was really red. Our dwelling would not be as warm.

Tirisi: The flame would be really low.

They didn't use whale oil to treat wounds?

Ilisapi: If it was too fresh, it could cause swelling. It didn't cause a lot of swelling, but there was some swelling nevertheless. The edge of the wound also tended to be itchy. We didn't exactly have a means to test this, but we could see the effects on the wound.

Tirisi: We knew it had side effects so it was not used on wounds.

Was it applied to infected areas?

Ilisapi: Bearded seal blubber would be applied. The blubber would be applied as a bandaid once the oil from the blubber had been removed.

Tirisi: The blubber would be scraped so that the oil was removed completely. Then it would be applied. It did not have to be dry when applied as long as it was flat.

What do you mean by nilamingajuq?

Ilisapi: *Nilamingajuq* is when something is laid out completely flat. Some of our words differ because of our dialects.

Tirisi: Yes, even though we know of other terms, we tend to use the ones from our own dialect.

That is fine. We will learn more that way. What was better for medicinal purposes, bearded seal oil or whale oil?

Ilisapi: Even today bearded seal oil is preferred. Whale oil is not used at all for wounds. Back then, before we had snowmobiles and firearms, we could not travel as far or as quickly as we do today, and it was not every day that a bearded seal was caught. There were times when we needed bearded seal oil and we didn't have any. Some people lived in areas where bearded seal was rarely caught, even though they might catch ringed seal regularly. Even though we did not have to pay for it, sometimes it was hard to get bearded seal oil.

Was polar bear fat used as well?

Ilisapi: It was mostly used to oil men's black *kamiik* in our area.

The kamiik that are waterproof?

Ilisapi: Polar bear fat was applied to the stitching and to the rest of the *kamiik*. They tended to be waterproof if the fat was applied. The stitches also did not stiffen up as much.

Tirisi: The fat softened them up.

Ilisapi: They would soften up anyway with regular use. You turned them inside out when you put them out to dry. Because they were constantly being put outside to dry they would soften up naturally. It was said that polar bear fat was not as oily as yellow oil.

What do you mean by yellow oil?

Ilisapi: If you get seal oil on clothing it tends to turn it yellow. Polar bear fat does not turn clothing as yellow.

Was polar bear fat used for the lamp too?

Ilisapi: That was possible. If oil was needed it could be used too.

Was it ever used on wounds?

Ilisapi: Yes.

Tirisi: If it was the only oil available, it was probably used on dry skin. I do not know if it was used very often.

There was a time down south, when women used fat from a brown bear on their hair.

Ilisapi: That was not our custom. We did not apply oil on our hair. We didn't want oil on our hair at all. I have heard of people washing their hair with caribou blood. Have you ever heard of that?

Tirisi: Yes. After it dried it was nice and clean.

Did the hair turn a shade of red?

Tirisi: It would at first. After the blood dried, it was rinsed out. It looked as if there had never been any blood on it.

Ilisapi: Do you know the term *ittikpaktumik*?

Does it mean someone who is dirty?

Ilisapi: Maybe you do not really know how dirty hair could get back then. People used to have really dirty hair back then, some more than others. When they were combing their hair it was not smooth, it would feel very sticky. If women had long hair it would brush into things. Because people didn't wash very often, their hair looked like they had been sweating.

They would take caribou blood and lather it into the hair. Once the blood was dry and had peeled, the dirt was removed with it. In our area there weren't many caribou, so our hair was often dirty.

Did they check to see if a seal was male or female before they used the oil for ear drops?

Ilisapi: No. No one ever even thought about that, unless the seals were in rut because they are very stinky then.

Does a seal in rut, a tiggaq, smell bad?

Ilisapi: Some seals that are rutting have this stench about them. Some do not. We did not use rutting seals if we had a choice. We didn't really want to use them for oil because they had an awful stench, even though the flame was fine.

Was bearded seal oil used on infected skin?

Ilisapi: We didn't have skin infections very often. Once in a while someone would get an infection from a large wound. Sometimes you could tell if a wound was likely to become infected. That was when oil was used. It has been only recently that infections have become part of everyday life. Around 1940, almost everyone got skin infections.

Tirisi: Basically everyone had a skin infection.

Ilisapi: People became itchy all over the place, even us. I wonder what it was.

Tirisi: I don't know. This happened all over.

Did people treat it with seal oil?

Ilisapi: We did not try treating it with seal oil. We were given medication from the Anglican Mission and the R.C.M.P. They were the ones that took care of our medical

needs. The medication looked like pills. The pills were dissolved in water. We were told to wash ourselves with this water as a lotion. This solution was not used to heal the infection, but to ease the pain.

Tirisi: We tried to keep the infected skin from cracking.

Ilisapi: Yes. We eventually healed and so we are okay today.

Did everyone have skin infections at the same time?

Tirisi: Even though people lived in different camps, everyone had the skin infection at the same time.

Even though you hadn't had visitors from another area, you all had a skin infection at the same time?

Ilisapi: It didn't seem to have come from other people.

It didn't appear as though you were infecting each other?

Ilisapi: People thought it was from the air. After the war was over some people thought that this might have been caused by a bomb blast. It was some time later that people thought that it may have been from a bomb blast.

Back then did young girls reaching adolescence have pimples?

Ilisapi: We did not have pimples; our skin was flawless.

Tirisi: It is different today. Young girls' skin is different. Maybe they wash it too much?

Ilisapi: Maybe it's from the air. We did not go out of our way to make ourselves pretty. We did not apply oil to ourselves. Are pimples a sign of reaching puberty?

I am not sure what pimples are from. Young girls who are reaching puberty have pimples.

Tirisi: I didn't know that either.

When their breasts start forming, young girls start getting pimples.

Elders: Really?

When we were studying the uses for seal, we learned that eating seal can help the body to stay warm. Was eating seal meat used as a way of retaining heat?

Ilisapi: It is not only seal meat, although seal is the best. Although we might get just as full eating animals that graze, they don't generate as much body warmth. When you eat animals from the sea you can start sweating, even when you are not exerting yourself.

Tirisi: Probably eating the blubber generates heat as well.

Are the animals from the sea called puijiit?

Ilisapi: It is because they come up for air from the sea that they are called *puijiit*.

Was oil from seal pups used as well?

Ilisapi: Absolutely. It was used too. The Anglican minister would take the blubber from seal pups and cut it up into little pieces and boil it to get oil. When you do this, this is called *iktitaq*. He would collect the oil and make it into soap. The minister had something he added to the oil himself to make soap.

It never became gummy?

Ilisapi: I don't think it became gummy. I think the minister experimented until he found which oil was best to use.

Tirisi: It is just oil. After the blubber is cooked, no water is added.

Ilisapi: If tallow was made from caribou fat, this was called *igittitaq*.

After you scraped the fat off the blubber, was anything done with what was left over?

Ilisapi: This was called *kiliuq*. We scraped it with a *saliguut*, a scraper that did not have a sharp edge. When all the oil had been removed then it was dried. Because of the potential for food to become scarce, we learned to eat everything and anything we could.

Tirisi: We enjoyed the taste even when it was uncooked.

Did you make sure a person was well fed with seal meat before they left on a journey, so that they would stay warm?

Ilisapi: We always ate a lot of meat. We did not have *qallunaat* food. The only foreign foods we had were tea, sugar and bannock. We would only depart after we had eaten. Even a child, if he was going along on a hunt, would be fed, even if he didn't feel like eating because he had just woken up.

Tirisi: They would make the child eat so he would be warm for the day.

Ilisapi: When people were out hunting they would not eat all day if they did not have a Coleman stove. Even if they had a stove, if they were serious about hunting, they would not take a break as food was not on their mind while there was daylight. If you had meat in your stomach, you did not get hungry as easily.

Did little boys have large appetites?

Ilisapi: Yes. Even we adults would work up an appetite when we were outside all day, especially if we hadn't eaten since morning. When we got home and there was an aroma of boiled meat, it smelled so good.

Were there any overweight people back then?

Ilisapi: There were not really any overweight people. It seemed everyone was of average weight. Men were never overweight, I guess from constantly being busy. Today it is entirely different.

Were people advised not to eat too much seal meat when they had diarrhea?

Ilisapi: They would try and think of ways to help them. The flippers of the seal would be boiled until they softened. You would eat the flippers including the fur. That is how they would stop diarrhea.

Tirisi: The furry part is what would harden the stool.

If someone had a deep cut, did you soak it in oil before you stitched it up?

Tirisi: Yes. After the bleeding stopped we stitched it up.

Ilisapi: You didn't soak it in oil, you just applied a little on the cut.

Tirisi: Either that, or a bandaid made from caribou skin would be stitched on. A little piece of blubber was put in it to keep the wound from drying up.

Was it alright to use a piece of seal blubber that wasn't fresh?

Tirisi: As long as it was not rancid it could be used. As long as the bandaid that was made stayed in place it healed well.

Iisapi: If the cut was on the finger tips they made a casing for it. You would sew a softened piece of caribou skin without the fur, and put it on and bind it with sinew.

Tirisi: Usually blubber would be put at the tip of the bandaid, but this was not always the case.

If a person got a big cut, did they stitch it up?

Tirisi: You did not actually stitch it up, but you made sure that the wound was closed so that it would heal properly.

Was the bandaid quite tight? Was oil applied once or did you apply it often?

Tirisi: Oil was only applied if it started to dry out.

Iisapi: One would attempt to remove the excess liquid from the wound by soaking it in oil first, before reapplying the bandaid.

Was bearded seal oil used on wounds?

Iisapi: We found bearded seal oil to be the best.

Does bearded seal oil heal faster than ringed seal oil?

Iisapi: If a cut is infected, we know that it can be healed with bearded seal oil. Although this was used in the past, it can still be useful today. We tried different things. If a cut wasn't healing properly, bearded seal oil would help it heal faster.

My son has a rash. Maybe bearded seal oil would help it heal faster?

Iisapi: You should apply it on the rash without using soap first and if that doesn't work apply it after using soap to see what works better.

Maybe my son would smell like puja, gummy seal oil. When someone was pregnant, did they have to refrain from eating raw seal meat in the days of pittailiniq?

Ilisapi: Yes, that is what our ancestors did.

The blood and nutrition

Nowadays when one's hemoglobin is low, eating raw meat is recommended in the diet.

Ilisapi: One could not tell if the hemoglobin was low back then as there was no means of determining that. In the past a pregnant woman was not allowed to eat raw meat. She was only allowed to eat boiled meat, but it didn't have to be well done. She was not allowed to eat animals from the land and animals from the sea on the same day. It had to be decided at the beginning of the day whether it was going to be a land animal or a sea animal that was going to be eaten.

Tirisi: That must have been bothersome.

Ilisapi: Yes, but they had to abide by the rules. My mother did not practice that, but my grandmother had to. Maybe Tirisi's mother had to practice that. When ministers arrived, this practice was stopped. Thanks to that, we can now eat anything.

Have you heard that eating seal meat can lessen a headache?

Ilisapi: No. We only know that one does not have an appetite when one feels sick. The sick person would be fed small bites of either caribou or seal so that they might get better. When they wanted something specific such as a ptarmigan or a rabbit, they would be fed that and they would recover faster. Even those who were sick for a long time would be fed what they wanted to eat.

Tirisi: Even today they are still fed what they ask for.

Ilisapi: For example, if a sick person desired aged meat or fish, even if they didn't have any personally, the family would seek what the person wanted to eat from neighbours. Once they ate what they wanted, they would start getting better slowly. Today it seems that once people get sick, they seem to die all the time.

Tirisi: Yes. That is how it is.

Ilisapi: Back in the old days, even when people were really ill, they often recovered.

Tirisi: Yes. Even though they had no strength for a while they would get better.

Ilisapi: They were so weak they had to be cared for by others. When they started eating what they wanted, they slowly started to recover. Even if it took days, they eventually got better. My father's nose bled for approximately one week and nobody could stop it. He would put pieces of blubber in his nostrils way deep inside.

Were both nostrils bleeding or just one?

Ilisapi: Both nostrils were bleeding. He was so weak that my mother had to assist him when he went to the bathroom. He eventually started to do things on his own and he completely recovered. It seemed as if he lost most of his blood. When his nose started to bleed at first, it was red. Then it became clear because he had lost so much blood. Then he started to recover.

When a person was losing a lot of blood, did they give them food to eat?

Ilisapi: When a person had lost a lot of blood, they lost their appetites just like a sick person. If they were tasting so much blood that they did not want to eat, they were given a lot of water.

Did the water have to be lukewarm?

Ilisapi: Yes. When I had my third child I lost a lot of blood. We were living in an outpost camp quite far from the community. I lost a lot of blood to the point that I passed out. I thought that I was dying. I would pass out, and when I would come to, a wet cloth would be applied. Then I would see nothing but blackness again. Even my tongue turned white as there was no blood left. I slept for a while. I would wake up and I would feel a bit better. I would attempt to sit up and when I sat up, my heart beat really fast.

I do not understand the term qaulluqtuq?

Ilisapi: *Qaulluqtuq*, means white. It is the same as *qakuqtuq*. I recovered from my loss of blood. People can recover even though they are not in a hospital. I do not know what makes us recover. I am not the only one that has recovered from this.

Some experiences are awful.

Ilisapi: Yes.

Did you have to drink a lot of water when you lost a lot of blood?

Ilisapi: Yes. My mother-in-law would give me plenty of water as she wanted me to have some breast milk as well.

All you had was water?

Ilisapi: I eventually was able to eat, even though I had no appetite. I felt really sick. I ate little pieces, even though the food tasted awful. Blood is an essential part of the human body.

Even though you had lost a lot of blood, were you still breastfeeding?

Ilisapi: Yes.

Your face must have been really pale.

Ilisapi: Yes, I heard that it was. I was quite pale. Even the upper part of my body was pale. It was different from the rest. We have to look for alternatives if the Health Centre is closed. If we are out where there is no Health Centre, we have to do things the way we used to. If someone is losing a lot of blood, you have to remember that they can recover. You shouldn't assume the person is going to die.

If the person was drinking warm water they would survive?

Ilisapi: Yes.

Lice

I have heard that bearded seal oil was used to prevent people from getting lice.

Tirisi: I have never heard this.

Ilisapi: It seemed as if the lice came on their own, not from anywhere in particular. If we had a boarder that had a lot of lice, they could certainly be passed on. Even though we had our own share of lice, we could still catch more from a boarder.

Tirisi: Yes, we were all different. Even though I too had lice, someone else could have even more lice.

Ilisapi: Those who had good homes and were well taken care of by their parents and who didn't go hungry had less lice than others. That is how we were. My father hated lice. Even though we had lice, others seemed to have more than we did. Some were less

fortunate and tried their best to have a warm place. They had a lot more lice than we did. My father would advise us not to visit places where there were a lot of lice so that we would not catch more, even though we had our own share of lice.

Were the lice eggs broken with the teeth?

Ilisapi: Yes. They were also squashed with the fingernails.

That is what was done to lice from seals. Was that done to human lice as well?

Ilisapi: We were not really like that. Some children did not want to touch lice at all. They did not want to touch anything that had blood in it. Myself, that did not really bother me at all. I used to squash lice with my teeth.

You must have had a lot of fun with lice.

Ilisapi: It was fun to hear them pop!

Did you eat them?

Ilisapi: We would spit them out. My older sister used to tell my parents that I ate lice. My older sister and I were completely different. My sister was really squeamish about lice. Myself, I did not really care.

How do you think they managed to get rid of lice?

Ilisapi: I have no idea.

Was there really a lot of lice?

Ilisapi: Not all the time. Sometimes the lice would go away temporarily.

When the lice fell, did they live in your clothing?

Ilisapi: They did not fall off. Head lice and clothing lice are not the same; head lice are black and clothing lice are white. Well, they were somewhat whiter.

Did clothing have lice too?

Ilisapi: We didn't have them all over. Maybe they tended to live where it was warmer.

Did lice have nits?

Ilisapi: They must have nits in order to have descendants.

Did you crack the nits too?

Ilisapi: Yes. It was often our mothers who took care of that. My mother would wash my hair. My mother used to take more care of my sister and I than other mothers did. We had less lice than others.

Tirisi: Some people had a lot of lice. Some even used to have their hair cut right at the nape of the neck.

Ilisapi: Even girls used to be given hair cuts to try and reduce the number of lice in their hair.

The use of seal oil for medicinal purposes

Let me go back to the subject of seals. I am getting kind of itchy! If people were vomiting a lot, did they refrain from eating seal meat?

Ilisapi: It was not very often that people became quite ill. Sometimes when a woman was pregnant, she would not feel like eating.

Tirisi: Some were quick to vomit when they were sick.

Ilisapi: Yes. When women were in the early stages of pregnancy, some would tend to vomit right away. Pregnant women tended to vomit, even though they would eat regularly, even though they were not sick.

How was heartburn treated?

Ilisapi: It seemed that people would only get heartburn from eating *palaugaq*. People did not seem to get heartburn from eating meat.

Some pregnant women seem to have a lot of heartburn.

Ilisapi: I don't know why some people have heartburn a lot. Back then women were not pregnant very often; maybe they did not have sex as frequently.

Tirisi: Some children were quite big by the time they had a younger sibling.

Ilisapi: I was one of the first to start to have children quite frequently. Now there are so many children.

Was seal blubber used for medicinal purposes? I know you mentioned the flippers earlier, but was the oil used as well?

Ilisapi: Yes, I think so. Some would use plants such as the moss we used for the lamp. It would be used by those who were having heartburn even if they were not pregnant. The ones who had heartburn would attempt to use the moss to help them. Puffballs would also be used as bandaids. When the wound or the cut tended to be wet, puffballs would be applied on the wound. Eventually the wound would dry up and heal.

Was this done without applying oil?

Ilisapi: Yes. You would apply the puffball without adding oil.

Does seal oil sting the skin when it is applied to a wound?

Ilisapi: It can soothe the stinging sensations. Some people used to apply urine to the wound if it was bleeding a lot.

Tirisi: Some people used to do this.

Ilisapi: I guess mostly men did this. If a man got a cut, he would urinate on a wound if it was bleeding excessively.

Tirisi: This would probably cause the wound to sting.

Ilisapi: If the urine was warm, the bleeding would stop.

It must be hard to try to urinate on a wound. I recall someone dipping his wound into some urine.

Ilisapi: Some would dip the wound into urine and some would urinate directly on the wound. One would urinate into a clean container, not the container that was used regularly to urinate in. It is amazing how this would really slow down the bleeding.

I wonder if seal oil is still used from time to time to heal wounds?

Ilisapi: I don't think so. Since we have started to live like *qallunaat*, I think we turn our noses up at seal oil. It does not take very much for us to notice an aroma we do not like, especially if it is not an aroma connected to *qallunaat*.

Did wounds ever get infected?

Ilisapi: Wounds would be well tended to so that they would heal properly.

When seal oil was applied, did the wound tend to heal faster?

Ilisapi: If the wound took a long time to heal, the scar tended to be large. If the wound healed quickly, it would be really thin. Oil would be applied regularly so the scar would not be as big.

Did a wound take a long time to heal in the past, or was it the same as today?

Ilisapi: It tended to heal faster if it didn't get infected. If the wound got infected, it could take a long time to heal. They did not require trips to the hospital in Iqaluit. If a leg was broken this did not require a trip to the hospital either.

Tirisi: Yes. When a leg was broken, the person was not required to leave the community. Some type of splint would be applied to hold it in place. I know a person who had a broken arm. He was a male adult. A piece of wood was applied and bound with a belt which was not too narrow, and he waited for it to heal. He was injured in April. A bowhead whale was caught before June, and he was strong enough to hold a knife and help to butcher it.

Is the term for broken bone navittuq?

Ilisapi: Yes, but nowadays we hear people saying *nakattuq*, as though it had come off.

Would it be bound?

Ilisapi: The broken arm would be bound. Fingers would not be bound if they could be moved.

Could they pull the bone back into place without doing any more damage?

Ilisapi: They would put it into place by pulling on it.

Tirisi: You had to make sure it was in place.

Ilisapi: That is the type of thing we used to do. We also fixed dislocated joints.

How did you deal with a person who was in great pain while working on their injury? What were they given to ease the pain?

Tirisi: We would not give them anything to ease the pain. Once we had dealt with the injury, we gave the person something to eat.

Ilisapi: If the person had suffered a dislocation, they would be in great pain. The person would be in even more pain while the injury was being worked on. Once it was in place, all the person could do was wait for the pain to subside, as the pain could not get any worse than it was already. When someone is sent out to Iqaluit, the person is in a lot of pain. If the injury cannot be dealt with in Iqaluit, then the person has to fly further to Montreal. He has to be given medication to ease the pain. The person would not be in as much pain if the joint was put in place the same evening. If a bone breaks, it tends to have jagged points. When it is put in place, a person would be in pain, but the pain would not get any worse. We can deal with difficult cases like that.

Is this how you worked on injuries like that?

Tirisi: Yes.

Ilisapi: Even at the Health Centre, Tirisi is often called upon for assistance.

When there is an injury in the leg, what do you do?

Tirisi: You have to pull on it. You have to determine where the dislocation is and pull on it while trying to put it back into place. It is really hard.

Does it require a lot of strength?

Tirisi: Yes. When you try and put it in place it is very painful.

What would be done if the ribs were broken?

Tirisi: We didn't know how to deal with that. They would heal on their own.

Ilisapi: I once broke two ribs. You can feel the lump here.

Tirisi: You cannot fix ribs from the outside. It is really hard to deal with those.

Ilisapi: I was pregnant and when I coughed suddenly, I would be in a lot of pain. There was nothing my parents could do to help me but each day the pain would lessen. I was not in constant pain. It was only when I was in a certain position. I would be in a lot of pain when I turned my body.

How did it feel?

Ilisapi: It felt as if I was being poked with needles.

Midwifery and childbirth

Back then, were certain people called if someone broke a bone or was in labour?

Ilisapi: Back then, they would call certain people who were experienced in a particular field in an emergency. These would be people who could deal with a situation and did not easily faint. I would personally be called if a woman was in labour. If they wanted to call someone else who they felt more comfortable with, then that person would be called. Midwives would have expertise in dealing with women in labour. They would take really good care of them. Some nurses are like that and some are not. Women who were in labour were well taken care of by midwives. Some women tried to stay in the same position but if their contractions lessened the midwife would tell them to change their position. If the woman in labour was uncomfortable, the midwife would advise her to stay in that position if the contractions remained strong.

The midwife would try and keep her in pain?

Ilisapi: This was done so the delivery would be faster. The woman would be positioned so that she was uncomfortable so the baby would come sooner. It was not very often that labour would carry on to the next day. Some would deliver their babies quite quickly.

A woman in labour was not allowed to be comfortable?

Ilisapi: She was not allowed to be comfortable, but the midwife would keep a close eye on the woman in labour. She would make sure her legs were positioned properly. She would make sure her legs were not spread too wide. The midwife would keep the position of the spine in mind, as well as the tail bone. The spine is connected to the pelvic area so they paid attention to this.

Someone would be positioned behind the woman in labour. If she arched her back, the woman behind her would straighten her back. She would be in so much pain she would not be thinking of what position her body was in. Likewise, if she bent over too much the woman behind her would also straighten her back. They would keep her body

straight so she would not damage her bones. We didn't worry about the baby that was going to be delivered. All we did was wait for it to come out. Our attentions were on the mother in labour. After having delivered a number of times, you tend to pay more attention to the position of your body with each passing labour.

I was aware of the position of my own body without being advised about it. I could make sure that I was not bent over too much. Once the baby was out, only then was attention paid to it. I could not deal with the baby myself, as I tended to faint at the sight of blood. Even when I cut myself, I tended to faint. When my son was a little boy he was like that too. Did that ever happen to you?

You weren't like that, were you?

Tirisi: I was not like that, although there are some people who do faint when they see the sight of blood.

Ilisapi: I have delivered eleven children, two in the hospital, and nine in the traditional way. I have delivered my children either lying down or in a squatting position. During my first delivery I did not know what to expect. I delivered lying down even though my mother wanted me to be in a squatting position, because I was so tired. The second time I delivered, I was in a squatting position, as I was with the one after that and the one after that. I have delivered twice lying down. When the nurse in Mittimatalik found out that I was in labour, she came to see me. I was so embarrassed I stayed in the same position, so I was in labour for a long time. My labour started in the morning and when evening came I was still in the same position. I was afraid that she might come back. What was wrong with me! I was afraid she was going to come back and tell me I should be in this position or that position instead. Therefore, I was in labour for a long time with my ninth delivery. Someone came to visit me with my mother. She pressed a wooden tobacco container against my back. It was so painful it made me arch backwards. She put a chair behind me, sat down, pressed my back and spread my legs. Even though this was my ninth delivery, I kept my eyes closed. Once that woman was behind me, the baby came out right away. I was so grateful that woman came.

It seemed as if when the baby was about to come out it would go back in. When that woman came, it did not take very long for her to help me deliver the baby. I was happy. I was in a squatting position. Something was placed under my knees so that my hips remained level. There was a woman positioned behind me. There was something for me to rest my hands on. I am not sure how high the hand rest was.

When we were about to deliver, we would spread our legs just enough for the baby to come out. If we spread our legs too much, it might cause tearing. The midwives would make sure our hips were even. We were given something to hold on to. Our spine had to be straight so the cervix would be aligned for the baby to come out smoothly. The

umbilical cord would be tied and cut and once that was done the placenta would follow after. If a woman delivered lying down, she would have to change position and squat down for the placenta to come out. I do not like lying in a bloody spot. When you are squatting you do not have to change position for the placenta to come out. Once the placenta is out, you can move to a clean area.

I found that it is much better to give birth lying down. The baby comes out smoothly. When I delivered in the hospital, I thought it would be better if the nurses were not around constantly. I tended to close up when they were too near. The foot stirrups are painful too. It seems as if your *kuuttinnaak*, your pelvis, is positioned the wrong way.

Tirisi: No wonder! The feet are positioned outward.

Ilisapi: Your *uppatiik*, buttocks, are supposed to be level while delivering. If you ever deliver without medical personnel around, make sure you deliver lying down. It is the best position for the muscles. When your spine is on a hard surface and your buttocks area is slightly lower, I think this is the best position you can deliver in. Have all of you only delivered in the hospital?

The first time I delivered was in a tent.

Ilisapi: Were you lying down on your side?

Yes.

Ilisapi: Who put you in that position?

My mother and my aunt. It was very painful. I was crying and I was really scared. I went into labour when I was six months pregnant while out on the land. We were picking berries while out caribou hunting when my labour pains started. Maybe I over-exerted myself; it was very scary.

Ilisapi: Is that the only child you have? Do you have any other children?

The child I delivered died when he was ten months old. I was picked up by helicopter and brought here to the hospital. I delivered after the medical people arrived at our tent. My mother and others assisted in the delivery.

Ilisapi: My mother-in-law was the only one who assisted me during my deliveries. I used to tell her, “Do not tell anybody else that I am in labour unless I get really scared. I am not scared right now.” I find it uncomfortable to be in labour when there are people around.

I was exactly like that. When I was in the tent, it was very uncomfortable listening to people talking outside.

Ilisapi to Tirisi: How many deliveries have you had?

Tirisi: Twelve.

Ilisapi: Did you give birth in an *iglu*? Myself, I never gave birth in an *iglu* as I tended to give birth in the spring. I often gave birth in a tent. One time my husband and I were out traveling with my father-in-law and I knew I was going to give birth soon. It wasn't scary. We didn't worry about how we were going to handle it.

Tirisi: That's true. We didn't even think about it.

Ilisapi: There was a time that my mother-in-law and I were both pregnant. I gave birth in February and she gave birth in April. I did not assist her at all, even though she was in labour in the same dwelling that I was.

Did she deliver the baby on her own?

Ilisapi: Her husband assisted her. I only went to her side after she gave birth. Her husband cut the umbilical cord and tied it. She took care of herself as she was aware that I fainted at the sight of blood back then. I helped deliver a baby at the Nursing Station in Mittimatalik some time later. I do not recall if I was asked to come and assist. I did not like the position the nurses had placed the woman in. They did not even consider how the woman's spine, or hips or legs were positioned. All that mattered to them seemed to be the baby. Here the mother was in pain. Whether her hips and her tail bone were aligned was not even considered. Some women had difficulty walking after a delivery if their hips and tail bone were not aligned properly.

I was unable to walk afterwards because I had moved around too much. I was fortunate to be able to walk again. I could not walk for a while.

Ilisapi: Did you damage a bone?

No, but I still feel pain. Whenever I get pregnant, I feel a lot of pain in my back.

Ilisapi: Maybe some damage occurred in that area.

When a woman is in labour, she shouldn't move around too much.

Ilisapi: You do not really have to stay still. It is very painful to be in labour but you should not stand up and jump around. Young women tend to move too much because they find it very painful. The people who were assisting a woman did all they could to help her deliver.

I do not think my mother and my aunt had any experience in delivering a baby. I was given advice by someone over the radio.

Ilisapi: Even though we were not nurses or doctors, we made sure that the woman in labour was comfortable. The positions of the bones were closely monitored as well as the woman's insides. The woman would be advised to check herself to see if she has any tears after the delivery. If she happened to have a tear, it would be cleaned so that it would not get infected. Even if you can't see it yourself you could tell if you had torn by feeling with your hands. The woman would be advised to check for any tears. She was well monitored as women looked after each other. On occasion, there were some women whose well-being was ignored as long as the baby was fine. Those women ended up in a lot of discomfort if they had a tear.

Tirisi: That's true.

Ilisapi: The delivery seemed to be completed satisfactorily if the woman was well taken care of once the baby was delivered. There was one woman who had a tear. I guess we did not take enough care of her and she got a pelvic infection which caused swelling. We did not take the time to check her when we should have, so we had to deal with the consequences after she got an infection. Cuts and sores in the vaginal area are different from wounds we see on exposed skin. If you have an infection in this area it tends to get really swollen; therefore you need to be very careful.

How did you prevent this from happening?

Ilisapi: We would make sure that there wasn't any blood or blood clots in the area. We weren't that concerned about the tear but we made sure we did what we could to prevent infection.

What did women have to do when they got pregnant?

Ilisapi: We were advised to take naps during the day if we felt like sleeping. They didn't want us to be really tired. Otherwise, we would be too sleepy when we went into labour. By the time our bellies were big, we were advised to keep busy as opposed to just sitting around.

Tirisi: We were advised not to be idle.

Ilisapi: We were advised to do what we were able to. We could either go out visiting or find some work to do that we enjoyed. We were also advised not to *numaasuk* for the sake of our baby.

What do you mean by numaasuktuq?

Ilisapi: Pregnant women should not *numaasuktuq*, be depressed. You shouldn't let things bother you. You need to realize you are feeling differently because you are pregnant. We were advised to be happy, so that our baby-to-be would have a good life. There were no doctors that we could rely on. Some of us did not always listen to the advice we were given. We would go and get ice and here we were with really big bellies. When our elders found out we were getting ice, we would be advised against this, but when they were not looking we would do it again.

You would do that behind their backs?

Tirisi: It wasn't that tiring carrying ice if we used our belly as a support.

Ilisapi: We weren't doing it to be sly. Back then, we were a lot more shy than girls are today. I am not sure why. Maybe because we got tied down when we were a lot younger. I started living with my husband when I was only fifteen years old and I had my first child at sixteen. We would attempt to hide our bellies when we were pregnant, unlike girls who get pregnant today. Even young girls today are not shy about being pregnant. I was away having a baby and I noticed how girls today are not even embarrassed to show how big their tummies are. They even expose their tummies. Maybe it is easier when there are only women around, but life was so different in the past. Young girls today are not shy at all, to the point where they even rub their tummies in public.

Tirisi: If you are not used to seeing this, it is really noticeable.

Ilisapi: In the past when you were pregnant, you tended to rub your tummy only when no one was looking. Today, girls do not even care if there are people watching.

What did you do when the belly hardened?

Ilisapi: I was advised by my mother and grandmother that I should move the baby around in my tummy if it started to harden. I would do that when no one was watching because I was shy. My in-laws came to our camp to live with us and my mother-in-law told me not to move the baby around as it was very embarrassing. I asked her, "Isn't it going to stick?" She told me that it would not get stuck. It was the womb that hardened not the baby. If I moved it around, I would be moving the baby's intestines. I guess, even though the belly hardens, the baby does not get stuck. Ever since then, I have not bothered to move my babies around. We were advised not to be idle though, so the baby would be in a good position.

These days it may be dangerous for us because we just sit around all day in a classroom.

Ilisapi: Probably. This isn't good for you.

Were pregnant women advised not to just sit around even before they were showing?

Ilisapi: Yes. It was impossible to just sit around anyway. We had to tend to our *qulliq*, we had to get ice, we always had something to do. We had to assist our husbands if they were going out hunting. There was never any time just to sit around. After they had departed, then we could rest and take it easy. There were times we used to travel by dog team, even when we were far into our pregnancy. In the spring, it was not hard to travel so we didn't have to worry about a premature delivery.

Ilisapi to Tirisi: Would you also *nunaqpaqtuq*, go inland from the coast to caribou hunt, while you were pregnant?

Tirisi to Ilisapi: Yes. We must have had a lot of stamina.

Ilisapi to Tirisi: Have you ever delivered while you were inland?

Tirisi to Ilisapi: I never delivered while I was inland.

*I have heard the word *ataaqtuq* being used. What does it mean?*

Ilisapi: It means travelling back to the coast, after having been inland. This is called *ataaqtuq*.

It is a wonderful experience having a baby.

Tirisi: It is like you are refreshed all of a sudden.

After the delivery you feel like you have a tiny belly!

Ilisapi: One feels like a beautiful woman. It is as if everything is perfect.

Have you heard about a newborn surviving and the mother dying?

Ilisapi: That happened more than once in our community. The baby survived but the mother started bleeding heavily and she died.

Did that only happen to women who had rough deliveries?

Ilisapi: It seemed to be that way. When one woman's baby was born it wasn't breathing and she said to let the child be. Maybe she wanted to be the one to live. Once they helped the baby to start breathing, the mother stopped breathing instead.

Do you think the mother would have survived if they hadn't done this?

Ilisapi: Probably she would have lived. Newborns were not considered as important as the mother. If they were both fine, then that was excellent.

Tipuula: I was told that if a baby's umbilical cord came off without me noticing it, I was not to look for it. If it fell off while I was carrying the baby I wasn't to look for it, for if I did, it would make the child hyperactive in the future.

Ilisapi: I would look for them. I would feel squeamish if I found them after they had dried up.

Tipuula: They would only be attached for three days. I guess touching our bare backs all the time, made them come off sooner. Feeling the warmth of our body made them come off more quickly.

Weren't newborn babies wrapped in something before you put them on your backs?

Tipuula: The only thing they wore were shirts.

Ilisapi: They would also wear a hat.

Tipuula: Yes. We made sure they had a hat right away. That was all they wore.

Was the hat made of caribou skin?

Ilisapi: Yes. Either that or the hat would be made of cloth. Newborns always had hats made for them.

Tipuula: Some women would even make a hat before the baby was born, to protect their ears. We went to Naujaat shortly after my daughter was born. Two or three women came up to me and I noticed that the babies had no hats or clothing. Maybe they were getting them used to the cold right away. That was their way of life. Our customs differ from others depending on where we live.

Ilisapi: Some things were done differently. She mentioned that we were not to look for the dried umbilical cord.

Tipuula: We still carry on some of our customs.

Preparing oil for the *qulliq*

What other ways was ringed seal oil used when it was boiled or pounded?

Ilisapi: We would use it for the lamp. We would use it to oil sealskin boots, *kamiik*. It would be used to oil the *qajaq* as it is used in water. It would be applied over stitches. The word for oil is *ingnauti*. When we were trying to extract the oil from the blubber we would either boil it or pound it. We could also cut it into thin strips which we placed in the *qulliq* and let the oil seep out.

If you were going to boil it, did you have to cut it up first?

Ilisapi: Yes, we would cut it up into really small pieces before boiling it. It was time-consuming to cut it up. We also had small children to tend to as well as other chores we had to do.

Were the small pieces you had cut edible once they were cooked?

Ilisapi: If we wanted to eat them, we would squeeze out the oil first. We would only give small amounts to children because if they ate too much they would get sick. If it was over-cooked, it was not as tasty. Bowhead whale blubber is very tasty; the blubber tastes like meat.

How was beluga whale blubber and bearded seal blubber used?

Ilisapi: You can do the same thing with them; pound them, and cut them up. Bearded seal blubber makes very good *iktitaq*. When you made *iktitaq* out of bearded seal blubber you didn't have to squeeze it out as much and it is a lot easier to eat.

Was the blubber pounded only in the winter?

Ilisapi: Yes, because it was easier to pound the blubber if it was frozen. If we tried pounding it when it was thawed, we would splatter oil all over. It does not splatter when it is frozen.

How did you do this in the spring?

Tirisi: We would do this after the sun had set.

Ilisapi: When it rained and the heather was too wet, we would scrape off the oil from the blubber, or we would place it in a sealskin and we would pound it. When it became *ingnauti* we would use it for the lamp. There were different ways to make oil for the lamp. If the blubber was partly frozen, we would pound it and cut it up. Although it might look as if it had been pounded properly, if the *tangiq* had not been pounded enough then the oil would not seep out. It worked best when the blubber was frozen. There was a certain way to pound it. If we pounded it the wrong way, there would be small pieces floating around in the lamp. We women worked with blubber every day even though we had children to tend to. We worked with oil every single day. Our hands were always oily. We were forever connected to our lamps. We would always tend to the lamp and the flame, and make sure it was properly lit so we would be able to put it to use when we needed it.

Which was the best, the oil that was pounded or the oil that was boiled?

Ilisapi: They were both good.

Did they seem the same?

Ilisapi: During the summer, we would put it in a *qattaujaq*, a barrel. They would fill wooden barrels with blubber. Later on they used 45-gallon drums. The blubber would be placed in there, and it would be covered with a lid. The oil which seeped out of the blubber as it lay in the barrels was ready for use in the fall. The *tangiq* would be afloat on the top. There would be a lot of oil in the barrel. When we used oil that had been prepared in this manner the smell was very strong.

Tirisi: It had a certain odor which we called the smell of *uqsuuti*, which was the name of this particular method of preparation.

Ilisapi: If it was the only oil available, we used it readily. If we did not save the blubber in this manner in the spring, and there were a lot of stormy windy days in the fall so people couldn't go seal hunting, then we wouldn't have any oil for our *qulliq*. Therefore, we didn't worry about the way it smelled. They would also store blubber in sealskins that had been cut a certain way to gather the blubber. We could use oil even if it was rancid as long as it had not been sitting in the sun. If the blubber had been out in the sun, the oil from it tended to snuff out the flame.

Tirisi: The flame tended to go out.

Ilisapi: Sometimes the oil did not agree with the flame, if the blubber had been left out in the sun. If you tasted oil that had been sitting out in the sun it would sting your tongue. We either learned about these things through experience, or we would be advised by our elders about them. Blubber would be aged in the shade so that the oil would agree with the flame of the lamp. Just as you young people gain experience in daily life, that is how we gained our experience too. We learned through experience what was good and what was not.

Ilisapi to Tirisi: Is walrus blubber thinner than seal blubber?

Tirisi: Yes. When you use it as oil for the *qulliq*, you tend to use it up faster.

Ilisapi: The oil really agrees with the lamp.

Tirisi: Polar bear fat also burns very well.

Ilisapi: Whale oil, polar bear fat, caribou fat, and walrus oil burn very well, but they also burn very quickly. The flame tends to burn really high whereas seal oil tends to have a really low flame. It tends to burn longer, but it doesn't create as much heat, which is good for the *iglu*, but it's not the best.

Was seal oil often used at night-time?

Ilisapi: It can keep burning through the night. If the lamp is quite large and there is a sufficient amount of oil, it can last the whole night. I mentioned earlier that certain types of oil tend to agree with the flame of the lamp. When that happens, the oil does not last

very long. If the oil disagreed with the flame, while we were asleep, the lamp would go out. We would fill the lamp up when we went to bed. It would still be on when we woke up even though the flame would not be as high. After we tended it, the flame would be as it was before.

When you woke up would you brew tea on the qulliq?

Ilisapi: Yes, we would start brewing tea, and then get dressed.

Tirisi: We would also cook with the *qulliq*.

Did it take a long time to cook something on the qulliq?

Ilisapi: We never thought that it took a long time. We would start cooking while the men were out hunting. The food would be cooked by the time they returned.

Was caribou fat used for oil too?

Ilisapi: Yes, it was used for oil by those who did not live on the coast. We didn't use it, but people who lived inland did. They had more caribou than we did.

Does it have an odor to it?

Tirisi: No. It doesn't have much of an odor but the oil tends to burn faster. It does have an odor, but not like seal oil does.

Ilisapi: It seemed to have a better odor than seal oil.

Tirisi: Meat seemed to cook better when you used caribou fat.

How was the caribou fat prepared?

Tirisi: It was prepared the same way as other oil. Either you boiled it to make tallow, or you chewed it to break it up. If you chewed the fat, the oil tended to last longer.

Ilisapi: The only difference is that it tended to be harder. When I used caribou fat in a small lamp, the flame tended to go out. Being from the coast, I did not have experience in using caribou fat for oil.

How much caribou fat did you have to use? Did it have to be from both sides of the backbone?

Tirisi: The lamp would be small. You would fill it up with fat. As the flame melted the fat you would add more.

Ilisapi: When you are inland living in a tent you don't need to use a large lamp. Even though the lamp was small you were still able to dry out clothing and cook meat. You weren't able to make water for washing though. In Iglulik and Mittimatalik, it was never the custom to spend the winter inland. Only those in the Kivalliq area, the Paallirmiut, lived inland in the winter and depended on caribou fat for oil. Sometimes they would not have oil for their lamps. That is how it was over there. There was never a time where we did not have heat; our lamps always had oil.

Skin diseases

Did you use rabbit skins to help heal people?

Ilisapi: We would use the thin parts of the skin, such as from the armpit area. They would be used to create an opening in a boil.

Tirisi: The thin parts of the skin would be used.

Ilisapi: I mentioned earlier that people didn't often get sick, but having boils was a lot more common than it is now. First, there would be a hardening under the skin and then eventually an opening would form. If it got infected it got really large. If the pus did not drain out, it became even more infected. It would have to be treated before it could heal.

Did people get boils all over the body?

Ilisapi: Most often they were on the buttocks or on the back.

I wonder why boils are not as common today?

Tirisi: It is only recently that boils have become uncommon.

Ilisapi: I don't know why they are less common today.

Did people also use lemming skins for boils?

Ilisapi: Yes. They would be used in the same way as rabbit fur. They would be used to cover the boil to keep it from healing over, so that the pus could drain.

Was the furry side applied to the boil?

Ilisapi: The side without the fur would be wetted and applied to the boil. The furry side would be on top.

How long did this have to be left on the boil?

Ilisapi: We would want it to drain completely. We would check it regularly to ensure the pus was coming out.

Did both adults and children get boils?

Ilisapi: Children did not get boils. We would not have boils all the time. It was only once in a while that we would get them.

Tirisi: If an opening did not form on a boil it had to be cut open.

Ilisapi: Yes. Otherwise the boil would swell up and get bigger. The boil would be cut open with a sharp knife that was made especially for this purpose.

They didn't use a regular knife?

Ilisapi: No. It was a knife made especially for this purpose. It could be made from a pocket knife. It would have a handle, and it would be filed down and made really sharp.

Would they cut open the boil to get the pus to start draining?

Ilisapi: The surface of the boil was not painful. The boil would be licked to see where it was best to cut it open. It tasted kind of sweet where the pus was located. Even though the boil was swollen all over, one could tell where to cut it open by licking it and finding the area that tasted sweet. Another way you could tell where to cut it open was by pressing on it. Some areas felt soft and other areas felt solid.

Would they try to cut it at the centre?

Ilisapi: Yes. Then it would start to drain heavily. Once the draining started, it did not take very long to heal afterwards.

Did you make sure you did not touch the pus that was coming out?

Ilisapi: People did not touch it as it was bloody and not something you would want to touch.

Did the area that was cut bleed?

Iisapi: It would bleed a little after the pus drained. The boil would be repeatedly drained until it eventually started to heal.

Was a bandaid applied?

Iisapi: Lemming skin or rabbit fur would be applied to keep the wound from healing over. If it healed over, it would have to be cut open again. They made sure it did not heal over before it had completely drained. The lemming skin would be wetted and then applied.

Was the skin wetted with plain water or with oil?

Iisapi: You licked the lemming skin and wet it with your saliva. A lemming skin could become wet from a single lick. Then you applied it.

Were there any other uses for lemming skins?

Iisapi: Yes. They were excellent playthings. They were used as pretend bedding for dolls.

When lemming skins were going to be used to treat boils, did you remove the fur?

Iisapi: If the skin was furry the fur would be removed. If you used the thin part of the skin, you didn't have to do anything to it.

Did you ever use ptarmigan skins?

Iisapi: Those could be used as well, if there was no rabbit or lemming skin available. If you didn't have any, you could get them from your neighbours.

We heard that the skin from the red part of the loon's neck had many uses in Nunavik. Was this used around here?

Iisapi: Not at all. Those people had different ways of doing things than we did. I heard that when they would catch a ptarmigan on a hill they would leave the tail feathers behind and they would say "Come again, Come again," so they would be able to catch more ptarmigan. We did not do this, as our parents did not have that custom.

Were fox skins also used on boils?

Ilisapi: They could be used but fox skins were very valuable. We didn't want to damage them because the H.B.C. would buy the skins. We used ones that still had their summer fur as trim. We did not waste the skins as they were a source of income. We could use them to buy even expensive items such as boats and firearms.

Because you could use lemming skins on boils and for other things, did you try and catch a lot of lemmings?

Ilisapi: Yes. Children, especially boys, were always hunting for lemmings and birds. Even girls went after lemmings as they used them for dolls' blankets. We would clean the skins and when an adult needed some, they would say, "Give me some of your lemming skin." Then they would cut a piece off and it would be used as a bandaid.

Did you also use snow bunting skins?

Ilisapi: I do not think we even thought about those. If my brother caught a snow bunting, we would play with the skin and the wings. We even used to play with fish skin.

Were the little white lemmings which were said to be star feces used?

Tirisi: They were used like other lemming skins.

Ilisapi: White lemmings do not come from the stars. These ones, which are called *amiq&ait*, don't seem to stay in one place. We call the lemmings that turn white in the winter *amiq&ait*. The claws are not on top of each other either.

Tirisi: For sure, they are shaped like human nails.

Ilisapi: Yes. The longer claws seem to be on top of each other in the winter, but not in the summer. I guess when they burrowed through the snow, they wore them down.

Were the skins of the tiriati, ermines, used for boils as well?

Ilisapi: They could be used, but the skin is really thin. I have never known of anyone using them for that. We did not catch very many ermines as they were too fast for us.

They make you squirm!

Ilisapi: There is an abundance of ermines in the fall. They also don't stay in the same place. Even adults enjoy going after them.

Have you ever heard that an ermine can kill a person by biting them on the neck?

Ilisapi: I have never heard that. I have heard that they run around and around their victim until their victim gets so dizzy they drop. Some people say they then go up the anus, even though we know that they do not do that. However, they can occasionally go into a dog's mouth, and go down into its stomach and then come back out. Once out, they would run around again.

Ermines make me squirm!

Ilisapi: They make me squirm too. I have heard that they can enter muskox anuses. They are quite ferocious hunters too. They say that muskoxen form a circle with their behinds inside to prevent ermines from entering their anuses! This is not really true, but it seems like a good explanation. I told you about ermines going down into dogs' stomachs. We had a dog that went to bite a young ermine but it ended up going in the dog's mouth. We lost the dog as it ran far away.

Tirisi: It probably went such a distance it couldn't find its way back.

Ilisapi: It probably kept vomiting and could not do anything for itself anymore.

I have heard that ermines bite humans on the neck. Maybe we were told that so we would stay away from them.

Ilisapi: We used to be told stories when we were little children. We would be told that we would be captured by a *qallupilluk* if we hung around the beach, yet we were never actually told that there were really *qallupilluit*. They used to scare us by telling us that if we were outside without our hoods up, the *aqsarniit*, the northern lights, would cut our heads off. We now know that this is not true. They did not mean to terrify us. They just told us those stories to help ensure we were doing what we were supposed to. Of the things that we were not supposed to do, it seems that the least important of them are still being carried on today.

Tirisi: Absolutely!

Ilisapi: In our area, women who were pregnant were advised not to chew gum so they would not give birth to a baby covered with *uquk*, vernix, the white substance covering a newborn. No two deliveries are exactly the same. Some newborns are covered with *uquk* which makes them more difficult to deliver than other babies that are more lubricated. Do not chew gum. That is one of the minor *pittailiniit* that has been carried on. Even though the minor *pittailiniit* are not that significant, the reasons for following them still apply.

Tirisi: They didn't want the woman who was delivering to have difficulty because of lack of lubrication.

Ilisapi: We would be told not to make our *kamiik* laces too long or else the baby's umbilical cord would be really long. I do not believe that. We should be saying, "Make sure your laces are not too long so you will not trip over them!"

Diagnosing sickness in the body

How were you able to tell where a person was sick? For example, if someone was feeling pain around the liver, how did you know what was wrong?

Ilisapi: We would guess that he had a bad liver if the person tended to feel full all the time. Even though he had not eaten, or just ate small bits, he would feel full very quickly and he would feel discomfort in that area. The area would also be swollen. Even though we had no way of testing back then, there were things that we knew that helped us to determine what was wrong. When a person tended to vomit a lot and when their stomach was sensitive, it was assumed there were problems in that area.

Would you know this because the person was vomiting?

Ilisapi: Not just vomiting, but also feeling uncomfortable around the stomach area. Whenever they ate hard food such as *maktaaq*, they were *sillinngujijut* in a lot of pain. *Sillinngujijut* is when what you have eaten feels like a hard knot in your stomach. The *quqqaq* is the place where the esophagus connects with the stomach. We would think that they were having a problem with their *quqqaq* even though we were not absolutely sure. We knew about human anatomy by comparing it with animal anatomy.

Tirisi: The person would not feel a blockage at the back of his throat. They would feel it deep inside at the *quqqaq*.

Ilisapi: If someone coughed a lot and tired easily, we knew that they may be having problems with their lungs. If the pulse tended to fluctuate a lot and they felt discomfort and tired easily, then it was assumed that the person had a bad heart if these symptoms persisted. If the person did not feel comfortable lying on their back, and the pulse increased when they ate, you could tell they had a bad heart. If a person was having pain around the kidneys, and the urine was a very deep yellow and had a bad odor, it was assumed that the person was having problems with their kidneys. There was really nothing anybody could do. A person with this problem was not to hold their urine for too long. If someone was going baby seal hunting and they would be jumping up and down on the den on the ice, they would be advised to have an empty bladder or they might get a kidney infection.

If they had a problem with their bladder, was this called nakattuaq?

Ilisapi: *Nakattuaqtuq* is when the bladder ruptures. Pregnant women are advised to urinate regularly and not to hold their urine. They are *nakattijut* if they urinate and some of the urine tends to stay in the bladder. Part of the bladder is pressed against the baby inside the womb so not all of the urine is eliminated. Some women tend to urinate frequently while in labour and this causes the labour to take longer than necessary. For that reason, one was advised not to hold the urine in for too long and to make sure to completely drain the bladder. Those who held their urine in while they were pregnant tended to have problems. Urine was one of the ways one could tell if there were problems.

Did a person have to stop eating if they had problems with their kidneys?

Ilisapi: I do not think they did that, but we were only children when there were no doctors. The adults spoke with each other, but I have not really heard about that.

Tirisi: We were always told never to eavesdrop, so we do not really know.

Ilisapi: My mother would know that if she were still alive. She would be able to give you more information. When the *qallunaat* came, we started to forget our way of life. I have to try and recall what they did because we were not allowed to ask questions. Sometimes we cannot answer your questions.

Tirisi: There are things that we think we have forgotten that we remember when you ask questions. When you are pregnant your belly becomes big. Your bladder is on the right side. Before you urinate you can press between your pelvic bone and your belly

and feel your bladder. If you press there, you can completely drain your bladder. When the baby presses on it, we cannot completely drain it, but when we press on it prior to urinating, we can drain the bladder.

Were you advised to take care of yourself while you were pregnant, even though you constantly had things to do?

Ilisapi: Yes, definitely. We were advised to take rests periodically and we were advised not to worry about anything. If we had problems with other women, we were told that we should ignore them. We should not reply or get angry with them. We were told that we would make things worse by worrying about the person who was giving us a hard time. I think that was the major thing we had to be aware of as it could affect us physically. I was the type of person that talked a lot so I was often told not to do that. It was not that I was an angry person, but I had a quick tongue. I would talk a lot. I was often disliked for that reason. If I found out anything about anybody, I would gossip about them. I was advised against doing that. Even if we hear something bad about a person, we should not be too quick to judge them. We can only learn from our mistakes.

Today it is important to have a nice slim body. Were there overweight people back then?

Ilisapi: We discussed that earlier. There weren't people who were so big that their arms were like their thighs. There were not people like that. Some were a bit fatter than others but there were not any people who were obese. Today we see some men with very big bellies. There were never any men like that before. Maybe because they were constantly hunting.

Tirisi: Maybe they weren't fat because they used up a lot of energy keeping warm.

Ilisapi: Maybe it was because they were never idle that they were never fat. The ones who were a bit bigger than others were called *uviniktujut*, plump.

Were those who were plump admired?

Ilisapi: You could tell by looking at them that they were healthy.

Did people have heart attacks back then?

Ilisapi to Tirisi: I don't know. Do you recall anyone having a heart attack?

Tirisi: No, I don't think so. Well, there were some, but it was not like it is today.

Ilisapi: I knew one person who had heart problems when I was a child. I remember he was able to speak English. His name was Takijualuk. He boarded with us while on his way down the coast. When I woke up during the night I saw his wife lying on her side. He was leaning against the wall of the *qarmaq* as he slept. It was said that he slept in that position because he had a heart problem. He was afraid to lie down flat. He reached old age even though he had a heart problem. He did not die of a heart attack; he died of an illness.

Were people with heart problems advised against lying down?

Ilisapi: People with heart problems were afraid to lie flat and also to eat too much. There was one woman with a heart condition who lost a lot of weight. Her mother-in-law advised her that she would be healthier if she ate more. She was also afraid of getting pregnant because of her heart condition. She did become pregnant and had a successful delivery. She did not end up dying. She probably started eating more. She lived to such an old age that she lost her sight. She did not die from a heart attack. I think that heart conditions are triggered by our mental state. Heart attacks in the past were triggered by a person's mental state, such as being extremely angry. Some people refuse to believe people who claim to have a heart problem. When they get angry, they start complaining about their heart to get sympathy. Nobody believes the person. I think the same thing still applies. Some women claim to have a heart problem to get sympathy when they are angry. We should not lie if we are healthy. Do you believe that too?

Tirisi: Yes. It makes you want to counsel the person.

Ilisapi: Some people claim that they have a really bad headache, when they get angry. If they want to suffer through a headache, just let them suffer. Be straightforward with the person and ask them if they have a headache. You should tell them they are not sick and they have brought on the headache themselves through their anger. If the person starts talking and admits the problem, they get rid of the cause of their headache and don't need to go to the Health Centre. Headaches can be triggered by the need to cry, or feeling anger towards our relatives. Talking out our problems is better than going to the Health Centre. That was the method that we used in the past. Once a person's pain was released, they would get better. We can help people do things that they cannot do on their own. There are some people who can recover without going to the Health Centre. There are those who claim to have a bad headache when they are hung over. Maybe if they started talking about their problems, their hangover would go away.

It is quite different when you are hung over. You do not even want to be in a place with too much light. You have no desire to get up. I'd like to ask you about snow-blindness.

Ilisapi: People used to have problems with their eyes from snow-blindness. We do not see this today.

Tirisi: Some still get snow-blindness.

Ilisapi: Yes, we still see some people with it today, but back then, it was very common for young people and children to become snow-blind.

Tirisi: After you woke up, it was painful.

Ilisapi: When we would be travelling, we would get snow-blind to the point where we could not open our eyes. It was very painful especially when it was sunny. Eventually we would get better. We did not have sunglasses then, so tea leaves would be put in a little cloth bag and they would be used to cover our eyes. I do not know why they would use tea leaves to help cure snow-blindness, maybe because they are smooth. The eyes were in so much pain, tears would flow from seeing any light. Usually, it was really painful for one whole day, maybe from the salt from our tears. Some people had problems which lasted quite a while though.

I guess back then everyone was healthy as there was no junk food around for people to eat.

Ilisapi: We were always on the go. We did not just sit around and play Nintendo or Sega and drink tea. It seems as if everyone is idle today. We would never be idle. We always had to run alongside the *qamutiik* to keep up with the dogs. Young people would be competitive and try and keep up with their peers. There were some fast ones and some slow ones. I guess we were used to running and playing *amaruujaq*. People were much more active than they are today.

What was done for babies whose skin was jaundiced?

Ilisapi: I do not recall babies that had jaundice.

Tirisi: I found out about that not too long ago. It was spring time and I had placed a baby that was jaundiced in front of the window where it was bright. The skin went back to normal and she recovered.

The reason why I asked is because two of my children had jaundice. My son was placed under a light, and I had to place my daughter in the sunlight near a window.

Tirisi: I made sure that the baby I was caring for did not get a sunburn. I had her in the sunlight and she recovered.

My doctor told me that my husband and I have different blood so our babies tend to be jaundiced. The same thing happened to all my children.

Tirisi: Maybe it is just recently babies started being jaundiced.

Earlier you mentioned that pregnant women were not to worry about things.

Ilisapi: We were advised not to worry. There were no doctors or psychiatrists back then. If something was bothering you, you were advised to let go of the problem. If women were pregnant, they tried not to worry even though they had things on their minds. If we had a shortage of something, we were advised not to worry about it. There would come a time when the shortage would be replenished. We were advised not to be depressed. For example, if a woman had said something bad about us, we were told by our elders not to let it bother us. Even if it was something big, we were advised not to make an issue of it. It was as if they were trying to put a fire out before it spread.

People tried to keep each other from worrying. Some people had an abundance of nice clothes and some people did not. We tried to prevent there being too much disparity between people, such as the number of skins or the amount of sinew someone had. They did not give away everything they had, but they shared.

Were people always generous?

Ilisapi: There had to be a certain amount of stinginess as they had to keep some for themselves. They could give to those who didn't have much if they wanted to, but they didn't have to give to those who had a lot.

They tried to take care of what they had. It is not as if you could buy more from the store. If someone had absolutely nothing, it was not necessary to give them the best of what you had. You also didn't necessarily have to split what you were giving away in equal amounts. There might be others who needed your help too. Anything could be shared. We would not worry about people not sharing. Today people are completely different. We do not even consider the fact that there might be people in need. It is as if

we just live for ourselves these days. There are people worried because they are short of something and we don't even think about them. Maybe it is because we live in our own houses now. We do not check up on other people. Maybe it is because there are more people now.

Ear and eye ailments

What was seal oil used for?

Tipuula: Seal oil is still used today. Amongst all the animals, the seal is the most useful. Although the seal is really small compared to some animals, it is extremely useful. It is the most abundant. It is easier to catch than many other animals. Its blubber is used for food, and for heat. Seal oil is used to waterproof *kamiik* and of course for healing.

Was it used to treat earaches?

Tipuula: Yes. They would use the *taqqut*, the wick trimmer used to tend the lamp, to apply the drops. It was cleaned first, dipped in the lamp oil, and then used. They would apply three drops to each ear.

Was it used just for eardrops or was it used for other things that required medical attention?

Tipuula: They would also use it for someone who was so sick with a lung infection, that they could hardly move. They would rub the area around the pain with oil.

Was this similar to the way we use Vapour Rub today?

Tipuula: Yes. It was like Vapour Rub. Oil would be applied to the chest area if a person was really sick. It was rarely used though; it was used very infrequently.

Was it only seal oil that was used for this purpose?

Tipuula: As long as it was oil, it didn't matter what animal it came from. It was also used to treat people with bad colds. I was given a couple of doses. It really helped even though it was hard to swallow. Although it is hard to swallow, if it is being used for medicinal purposes, you should take it anyway.

Was the oil from a qairulik, a harp seal, used as well?

Tipuula: Absolutely. It was used just like a *natsiq*, a ringed seal, when it was available.

Did you also apply it on cuts?

Tipuula: If one had a large cut, oil from an *ugjuk*, a bearded seal, had to be used. We would take a piece of blubber, remove the layer between the skin and the meat, and then scrape the oil out with a *saliguut*. The oil is called *killik*. You have to remove the excess oil and then place the blubber on the wound. It needed to be firmly attached. I have seen this myself. There was a time when there were skin rashes going around. My father recommended that I apply bearded seal oil on my ankles where I had the rash. The rash was so bad that when it was exposed steam seemed to be rising from it. My father told me to rub some bearded seal oil on my ankles before I went to sleep. Even though I was reluctant to do this because I was a teenager, I followed my father's advice and applied oil on both of my ankles. The skin had peeled off and they were really red. When I woke up the next day, there were my ankles with new skin. They weren't weeping anymore. They started healing overnight.

Was bearded seal oil the best oil to use for medicinal purposes?

Tipuula: We were told it was the best and we know this ourselves.

Earlier Ilisapi and Tirisi mentioned that Inuit in different locations had a skin rash at the same time. Did you have your rash as that time too?

Tipuula: It was at the same time. People who were living in different communities all had this rash.

How was the blubber from the bowhead whale used?

Tipuula: I have heard that the blubber of a bowhead whale can be as thick as a man's calf. My father and his mother survived by eating bowhead whale blubber.

*What does the word *annaktuq* mean?*

Tipuula: It means surviving hardship, whether it be starvation or sickness. When my father's father died he and his mother were left with absolutely nothing, not even an axe. He was quite young when that happened. A bowhead whale had been caught in the summer. After it froze they could no longer butcher it. They would place pieces of blubber on a peg over the *qulliq* after pounding it. The oil from the blubber would drop into the *qulliq*. A piece of blubber that was hung in this manner was called an *itittaq*. When all the oil had drained, the *tangiq* was eaten because it had been burnt to a crisp.

Was polar bear oil also used?

Tipuula: I was told by an elder not to use polar bear oil on *kamiik* that needed to be waterproofed. She said it was alright to use it in the fall and winter but not to use it in the spring and summer because polar bear oil draws in water. She said that all the pores in the skin get water in them and that was why I was not to use it on *kamiit*. I had heard that polar bear oil made excellent soap so I tried it, but it requires a lot of rinsing. If rinsed well, it is excellent. I washed my child's shirt in it, since I did not like it being dirty.

Did the shirt get clean?

Tipuula: Yes. You scrubbed the oil like it was soap. It cleansed just like soap but the shirt turned yellowish from the polar bear oil.

Was it only children who had earaches?

Tipuula: Adults rarely had earaches. Children were the ones who had them most often.

Iisapi: As we said earlier, it was rare for someone to be sick. People who were extremely ill seemed to recover more often back then.

Was bearded seal oil the only oil used to help people with an earache?

Tipuula: I heard that sand could be placed in a bag and then heated and used as a pad for an earache, although I've never done this myself.

Iisapi: It could stay warm for an extended period of time. The sand that was used for this should not contain any clay.

Was it placed inside the ear?

Tipuula: The sand bag would be placed outside the ear.

*Back then were people *tusilattuq*, hard of hearing?*

Iisapi: There is a difference between *tusilattuq* and *tusaattianngittuq*. Someone who was hard of hearing could have a slight or severe hearing problem. Some people lost their hearing as adults and some were like that from childhood. A person who is *tusaattianngittuq* doesn't hear what has been said correctly. Sometimes they think someone has said something when this hasn't been the case.

Tipuula: In the past some children were said to be *tusilattuq*.

Ilisapi: Those were children who were often scolded.

Tipuula: Scolding did not affect these children as they had become used to it. They had been scolded so often it didn't mean anything anymore. Even if they were told to hurry, it was as if they did not hear anything.

I have heard the term tusilattuq used in court during the jury selection process. The judge said that if anyone had a hearing problem they should come forward. The interpreter used the word tusilattuq.

Ilisapi: She made a mistake.

Tipuula: There is a term that is used but I cannot remember it right now. Maybe it will come later.

Were there any deaf people back then?

Tipuula: There was only one completely deaf person in Iglulik. She was born deaf.

Was she able to speak?

Tipuula: She could not talk because she never heard people speaking. She was born deaf. She had never suffered an earache. That was the way her ears were formed in the womb, so she spent her life being deaf.

Did she use sign language?

Tipuula: Very much so. We used to be scared of her at first because we did not know how to sign. Once we got used to her, we found out that she was very friendly.

Ilisapi: Nobody in our community was deaf but we heard of the deaf person in Iglulik.

Tipuula: The woman I was speaking of was completely deaf. She was born like that. We know today that some people become deaf from ear infections, especially if they are not tended to properly. Even when they are tended to, sometimes it's hard to get rid of an ear infection.

I wonder if elders have lost their hearing from driving snowmobiles? Maybe before there were snowmobiles, their hearing was less affected.

Tipuula: More elders have had hearing loss from that, than from hearing loss due to old age.

Ilisapi: There was a very old lady in our community, even older than we are, who had hearing loss.

Tipuula: We had an old man living with us who had been hard of hearing since he was a teenager. By the time he became an old man, he was almost completely deaf. He moved in with us when he became a widower. Once, before my husband went hunting, he told me to tell him to thaw out some meat so when he came back the food would be ready. He wanted him to take out some *ungirlaaq*, walrus meat that had been bound in its own skin. We were living in an *iglu* at that time. Although he was old he was still very active, and not suffering from any illness. Alurut was just a small boy, although he was able to talk. Here we were, this old man who was hard of hearing, and myself. I was not very talkative at all when I was young. I was at a loss as to how to ask him to take out the meat. The time was passing quickly so I wrote him a note and had Alurut give it to him.

Did people remove ear wax?

Tipuula: Yes, we cleaned our ears. We were advised not to poke deep inside for fear that the drum might get punctured.

What did you use to remove the wax with?

Tipuula: Anything that was available. We would use a needle or a splinter of wood. We could use anything as long as it did not have a sharp point. We could also use the top of a feather if we used it gently.

What happened if an eardrum ruptured?

Tipuula: The person could become hard of hearing. When you get a cold, the ear tends to drain. It was not very often that we caught a cold. I was told how to position a baby while breastfeeding so that the ears wouldn't get infected. The baby's ear shouldn't rest against the mother's breast or it might get infected. This advice has been passed on to us for generations. As soon as you finish breastfeeding and the child is going to sleep, make sure the ear is exposed to the air. Otherwise it might get infected.

Maybe my children get ear infections because I have always fed them lying down like that. What was done when the ear started to drain? Was oil used?

Tipuula: Only if they were in severe pain. Myself, I would apply it before the ear drained if the child's ear ached. If a baby was constantly crying, there was no way we could tell what was wrong. I would assume that he had an earache, and would apply drops in the ears. The child would recover soon after.

My in-laws and my parents would advise me to lay down once in a while when I was pregnant because the baby got tired when I stood up too long. Some of us were really ordered around and told what to do. Some refused to listen. Myself, I would sometimes refuse to listen if they were minor things, but I followed what I was told to do if they were important.

Tirisi: It was scary to refuse.

Ilisapi: If we listened more, they asked us to do more chores. Some would completely refuse to do what they were asked to do. I did my share of chores because I was never lazy. Even today, I am still not lazy.

Tipuula: Before I was married my father would worry about my future. He would get me up in the middle of the night to do things for him. He was getting me to do chores so that he wouldn't worry about me after I was married. If I listened to whatever my husband asked me to do, that would make him happy. Even though I did not feel like getting up, I would get up anyway. My father was watching to see how I would react to what he asked me to do. I would even have to do errands on cold winter nights. He would wake me up while I slept and I had no choice but to get up, even though I did not feel like going out in the cold.

Ilisapi: I scared easily. One time my father arrived early because the wind had come up so he woke me up to help him with the boat.

Tipuula: Even though they were capable of doing these things for themselves, they were helping us to prepare for our future.

Ilisapi: It did not seem right at the time. We were given tasks that were difficult so that we would be experienced by the time we got married, so that in times of hunger we

could survive. Maybe our ancestors endured even more hardships. Today, life seems so simple. It seems that everything is too available. People today are in a dangerous situation because everything is too easy.

Today if you do not feel like going out in the cold, you don't have to. Do you understand what I mean? Even men are reluctant to go out in the cold.

Iisapi: We cannot speak of men. They were treated differently than we were. Boys had an even harder time, for they had to be able to provide for their wives and children after they grew up. It seems as if they had to go out all the time, even before they had eaten. As soon as a boy woke up, he was asked to dress and go outside and check the weather, so that he would be trained to go outside, no matter what the weather was like.

What was done if babies or children had eye infections?

Iisapi: They did not get a discharge in their eyes as long as they did not have a cold. Sometimes they would get snow-blind while travelling. When they were out too much, they tended to get snow-blind. I have an older brother who had an eye infection when he was a baby. His iris is sort of a whitish colour as a result.

Tipuula: The eye infection your brother had is different from having discharge in the eyes.

Iisapi: Colds were passed on by *qallunaat* in Mittimatalik once a year when the supply ship would arrive around September. By November, when the ice froze over, the men would come back with supplies. Sometimes they returned with a cold and sometimes they didn't. Sometimes our father would catch a cold and then we all caught it and we all stayed in bed. It was a joyous time when they arrived with supplies. The next day, we might all have a cold but it was only once a year.

Did you make a qimatuannguat, a stash of items set aside for use at a later date, when the men arrived with provisions?

Iisapi: We don't use that word. In our dialect the term is *jiqtuat*. Our mothers would stash away supplies for when they would run low. They would put things aside whether it be tea or sugar. It was really exciting for us children when they would bring out the hidden stash; sometimes there would be candy.

Tipuula: If a child had a discharge in his eyes we would remove it with our fingers. Once I fell in the water with my daughter on my back on our way back from Naujaat. Both of her eyes were really bloodshot. We were passing through Sanirajak and her eyes were still really red. They sort of turned whitish. I was advised by an elder in Sanirajak to apply breast milk to her eyes when she was asleep. I was told to apply it every time she fell into a deep sleep.

Would you open the eyes to apply it?

Tipuula: Yes. I would open her eyes and apply the breast milk. Her eyes started getting better right away and she could see. She couldn't see well though, as her eyes were very watery. Breast milk can also be used to help people who are snow-blind, both adults and children. Breast milk can really clear up snow-blindness. Breast milk could still be used for this.

Does your daughter wear glasses now?

Tipuula: Yes. She wears eyeglasses. We fell in the water in the spring. She had been born the previous fall. Her eyes turned redder and redder. The white part of her eyes was red all summer. Once I started applying breast milk, they got better.

You didn't apply oil in this case?

Tipuula: I have never heard of oil being used in the eyes.

Ilisapi: If someone had a hard time falling asleep, it was recommended they apply oil to their eyes. The time that it was the hardest to fall asleep was when we were asked to go along on hunting trips. We would apply a bit of oil to our eyes to help us fall asleep. Our eyes would start getting blurry.

Tirisi: We used this to help us fall asleep.

Ilisapi: If a baby woke up as we were about to fall asleep, we would apply oil to the eyes. The baby would keep rubbing them and eventually fall asleep. We had to fall asleep at the same time as our father because we had to get up at the same time he did.

When they woke up in the morning were their eyes okay?

Ilisapi: Yes. Once the oil was applied, sleep was recommended. People did not stay up late or get up during the night. There weren't people up when everybody else was sleeping.

Seizures

How were people who had seizures dealt with?

Ilisapi: We were advised not to lay them down flat but on their sides. We would make sure their head was not bent too far back.

Tipuula: We would make sure the body was straight. Their saliva has to drain. You needed to make sure they didn't swallow their saliva.

Ilisapi to Tipuula: Did you ever think that a person who was having a seizure was going to die?

Tipuula: Yes, I did. One of our relatives had seizures. I got used to this even though I was scared at first. We did not try to keep him from crying. The person having the seizure would be groaning. The first time a person had a seizure, the reason they should not swallow their saliva is that they might have repeat seizures for the rest of their life. Even if it is an adult they should be positioned so they will not swallow their saliva, especially if foam is forming. The person may just have the one seizure if they do not swallow their saliva.

Should you wipe off the saliva?

Tipuula: No. You shouldn't wipe it off. Just leave the saliva alone. If all of the saliva with the foam drained out, the chances were they would never have another seizure. It is quite dangerous to let someone swallow the saliva. If the person swallows the saliva, he'll tend to have seizures in the future. The saliva should be only cleaned off after the seizure has stopped.

Ilisapi: I do not think it matters whether it is wiped or not.

Tipuula: It is not the same as when a person has drowned.

Ilisapi: When you were in a frightening situation you weren't thinking about whether you wiped the saliva off or not. If you were the type of person who frightened easily this could be scary. I came across a person having a seizure when we were living in an isolated camp. The reason why I asked Tipuula earlier if she thought the person was going to die was because I found it quite scary seeing a person having a seizure when all their muscles had tightened up. You can even hear the legs snapping when positioning the body.

Tipuula: You shouldn't try to immobilize the person and keep them from moving.

Ilisapi: You shouldn't hold the body down when it is seizing. The muscles can tear if you try to hold the person down. If they are not in a dangerous situation, just wait for them to relax.

Should you leave the person alone?

Tipuula: As long as the person stays in one place, just let them be.

Ilisapi: Even if the muscles are tight, they will eventually relax.

What should you do about the tongue?

Tipuula: Make sure the person does not swallow his tongue or else his breathing will be affected. He could end up swallowing his own tongue and suffocate.

Ilisapi: Do people who have seizures on a daily basis stop breathing when they have them?

Tipuula: No. People don't have them every day. They happen when there is a flood tide and during the full moon.

Ilisapi: There is nothing the doctors can do, although medication does help.

Tipuula: When the person stops convulsing, make sure they do not swallow their saliva. That's the only thing that seems to work.

Ilisapi: The person I was talking about does not have seizures anymore. He only had a few of them and then they stopped. He told me that the day before he had a seizure he would see this black thing. He would try to follow it but he couldn't. After he had the seizure the thing disappeared.

Tipuula: Their heads twist to one side or the other. If their heads twist to the left, then it is better.

If the person twists their head to the left it is better?

Tipuula: I think so. I do not think they were too happy if the head turned in the other direction. A common question that was asked when someone had a seizure was which way the head was turned.

Ilisapi: If a woman has pain in her left arm it is more dangerous than if she has pain in her right.

Tipuula: Men and women differ in this respect.

Ilisapi: It is more dangerous for a woman to have pain in the left arm. If a woman had pain in her right arm they thought she would recover. If a man had a pain in his right arm he tended to die from it. This is called *taliqtaujuq*. Even if it was just your hand that was swollen, you could die from that, if the poison travelled through the blood.

Tipuula: Having a pain in one's arm was considered an illness. This is called *taliqtaujuk*. Those types of pains are connected to death.

I have heard that if you have a red line travelling upwards on the arm, if you were to draw a line across it with a pen, this would stop it.

Tipuula: You had to stop the red line from travelling upwards.

Ilisapi: You didn't just make a line with a pen. You had to apply pressure with a needle or with your fingernail.

What did you do with a child that had a cold? Even babies have chest infections these days. How was that dealt with?

Tipuula: Babies rarely had colds, so I have no information on that.

Ilisapi: I mentioned earlier that people only caught colds once a year. My children were quite healthy, although other women had children that were often sick. I guess children who are well cared for tend to be healthier than others. That's not to say that some unhealthy ones were not well cared for.

It is the same thing with dogs. One dog bears chubby puppies and another dog bears very sickly-looking ones. Some dogs have less of an appetite than others. They are all different. It is the same with us humans; some bear healthy children and others bear unhealthy ones. I am sure those with unhealthy children know what to do when their children are sick.

Tipuula: One time I revived a child that was dying. This lifeless child was brought into the community. The child was less than a year old. The child had been born in the fall and this happened during the winter. When I went to the place where the child had been taken, there were people fighting over the child. I had been asked to come, so I went

there. I have taken some first aid courses. I know just a little, not very much. I tried mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, and the child did not start breathing. The limbs were just hanging, obviously lifeless. The relatives were crying as the baby seemed dead. I told the family that since the child was not able to feel anything anymore I would not be as cautious about hurting it. Then I attempted mouth-to-mouth again. I did mouth-to-mouth at intervals that a child would normally breathe at. After three tries the tummy started to move.

Perhaps this child had been crying so much that the lungs had dried up and collapsed. Because the child seemed lifeless I was just trying to experiment with him then. I could hear noises that seemed to come from the stomach area. Then the child started to move. He was not breathing yet but slowly he started to breathe. The child eventually started to cry.

It must have been a good feeling.

Tipuula: Yes. I have revived a baby more than once. I guess, if it is not their time to die, they live. I was present at the birth of a stillborn baby. It was just limp and had no pulse. I checked for a pulse and there was none. I was using what I had learned from first aid. The baby was cold and blue. Stillborn babies have a higher chance of dying than their mothers. I checked to see if the mother was feeling okay first, for if there had been any sign that something was wrong with her, I was going to let the baby go. I have heard that if the mother is in critical condition and the baby survives, the mother tends to pass away. It seems as if the mother and the baby fight for life. The baby was completely lifeless.

I held the baby's feet and folded and unfolded the baby's legs trying to match the intervals of a baby's breathing. I was moving the stomach around but there was completely no pulse in the intestinal area. I repeated what I had been doing and when I checked the tummy again I felt a pulse. So I said, "Let's say a prayer." First I said the Lord's Prayer then the 'Glory Be' and then I said all the prayers I could remember. After that, I again repeated what I had been doing and the tummy started to move. The same thing happened to this baby as to the baby I told you about earlier.

Ilisapi: Is this person still alive?

Tipuula: Yes. She is still alive. Her younger sister was stillborn too. Her hands were clenched in a fist when she was born. This is called *tigungarujuktuq*. She had more strength as her fists were clenched. She had a pulse but her heart beat was irregular. I didn't know if I could revive the baby but I knew I had to try. I wasn't able to do this on my own; it was because I received help I was able to do so.

Did you revive the baby before the umbilical cord was cut?

Tipuula: I did it after it was cut so that I could handle the baby more easily. I wanted to be able to move it around so I cut the umbilical cord first. Because the mother was fine, I wanted to save the baby.

Did you only tend to the baby after checking to see if the mother was fine?

Tipuula: Yes. If there had been any indication that there was something wrong with the mother, I would not have tried to revive the baby as she was already dead. Even though you hate to see them die, if there is something wrong with the mother, you have to tend to the mother first. Since the mother was fine, I wanted to save the child. It took almost an hour to get the baby breathing. I often regret not keeping track of the time. I find that newborns can be quite resilient.

Tirisi: Just like puppies.

Tipuula: Yes, puppies do not die easily. Puppies were killed when there were too many of them, but they did not die easily. Even when they are knocked out, it takes quite a while for them to die. Puppies can have tremors for a long time. The same things applies to newborn babies. They don't die easily.

It must have been a good feeling.

Tipuula: Newborns do not suffocate easily either. Even if they are face down when sleeping they do not suffocate easily. If a baby has gained weight and it is chubby though, it is at a critical stage. If it is face down even for a short period, it can die quickly. If it chokes it can also die quickly at this stage. We have heard this and have experienced it ourselves.

Allergies and infections

Were there cases of people having allergic reactions, such as to caribou meat?

Tipuula: It was mainly fish that people were allergic to.

Ilisapi: I used to get hives when I was a teenager for no apparent reason. I got bumps but they did not seem to be from what I ate. Sometimes people get them from eating

fish. When I ate seal liver and intestines that were boiled, I used to get a mouth rash. It was like I had bumps in my mouth. My parents never told me to stop eating liver or intestines. Whenever I had the opportunity to eat them, I would, even though I would get a rash in my mouth after.

Tipuula: Some people would get hives from eating fish that were too fresh.

Do they call those nutilliarjuttut?

Tipuula: Freshwater fish were called *nutilliarjuit*. Some people would have a reaction from eating them.

Ilisapi: Some people had a reaction to polar bear meat. Either their mouths swelled up or they got hives.

That happened to my daughter.

Ilisapi: Some people react to the point where their whole body becomes swollen, and where they itch down their throat and esophagus. They feel dizzy for a while, but this is temporary. I knew a person who had that kind of reaction. Myself, it seemed that my itching would go deep inside. After there were nurses, they asked me what I had eaten when this happened, but I was unable to figure out what I had had the reaction to.

What was done for babies who had canker sores? Did they get these because they were allergic to breast milk?

Ilisapi: My older sister often had canker sores. When we were asked to soften skins, she would say she couldn't. When I would ask to see her mouth she would have sores which she would clean herself by wiping them with duffle or other material that wasn't smooth. That way, she would get better.

Rinsing out the mouth with salt also helps.

Ilisapi: I think that is the best. Nowadays children are given medicine to kill the pain. I would recommend putting oil on the sores as well.

Would you apply oil to canker sores?

Ilisapi: Yes. You can really feel it when you have a sore throat. Using myself as an example, it was not very often that I got a sore throat but when I did, it was really bad. I even had a hard time swallowing water. Once, not too long ago, I was trying to drink some tea. It was very hard to swallow and I was rather hungry. I slept for a bit, and

when I woke up there was some fresh *maktaaq*, whale skin, on the floor. I was thinking how painful it would feel eating it since it was so hard. Even eating *palaugaq* was painful. I was even scared to eat that. Even though I was thinking how painful the *maktaaq* would be to eat, I decided to have some anyway. I chewed it for quite a while. There was some saliva in it when I swallowed it. Even though I was very hungry, I made sure I chewed it well. I do not know how much I ate. Eventually, my sore throat disappeared. Maybe it was because *maktaaq* is oily. I even drank tea without a problem after I ate the *maktaaq*. I felt much better.

Perhaps oil is the best thing for a sore throat?

Ilisapi: Maybe this is because you can't feel what you are swallowing as much.

Was beluga blubber useful for a sore throat as well?

Tipuula: When my son had a throat infection, blubber made him better. He was too scared to eat meat so he asked for some blubber, even though he could hardly talk. After he ate it, he was able to swallow more easily, and he was able to eat meat shortly after.

Could any kind of blubber be used?

Ilisapi: It's worth trying anything if you have an infection in the mouth. A person who has an infection will try anything. Our children had thrush around their first birthday. Any child with thrush cannot eat well. There is nothing you can do.

Tipuula: When the sores are fresh, before they start bleeding there is nothing you can do.

Tirisi: If you remove them they can get worse.

Tipuula: They should not be removed while they are still being formed.

Should you only remove them when they are no longer fresh?

Ilisapi: Yes. When my daughter was suffering from this, I would take her outside and carry her on my back. She would be crying from hunger and yet she would not nurse from me. She was very quiet but when night came, she was bawling. I would get up and carry her around outside until she stopped crying and fell asleep. Then she would start crying again. She was like that for about three days. Back then, there was more concern about babies with thrush than babies that were actually sick. It was really exhausting. No wonder! Their mouths were swollen.

Tipuula: When a baby had thrush after the teeth had erupted, the mouth would seem to be so swollen the teeth would disappear.

Really?

Ilisapi: Once the child could be fed again, even if the mouth was still bleeding, we were very happy.

Tipuula: Sometimes women would have thrush on their breasts.

Ilisapi: Yes, the areola around the nipple turned red. This would happen after the small white sores appeared in the mouth. I wonder why some women would get this and some women wouldn't. I heard about this occurring in my community.

I don't know if they are itchy or not. They are white and they look like sores. I heard a person in Mittimatalik saying that her grandchild had very strong saliva. He was scratching his mouth and it seemed dry. I advised people to stop scratching their mouths. The saliva seemed strong and they had these itchy white sores in their mouths that were hard to get rid of. They healed eventually.

When the breasts became infected, was oil applied?

Tipuula: The breasts did not really have sores but they turned red. How quickly the infection would clear up depended on how quickly the baby's infection went away.

Medicinal plants

What kind of plants did you use to take away a stomach-ache?

Ilisapi: If we had diarrhea, we were advised to eat *airait*. All plants have *airait*, but these are the roots of the yellow oxytrope. For example, the *qunguliit*, mountain sorrel, has roots as well. The type that we are talking about though, were the ones that would made the diarrhea stop. They did not seem to help much.

Tipuula: They were a big help to some people.

What colour is this plant?

Tipuula: The tips of the plant are a greenish yellowish colour. *Kigutangirnit*, blueberries, and *paurngait*, blackberries, were recommended for a person who had diarrhea. If you eat a lot of berries, the stool hardens.

Ilisapi: August is the best month to pick berries. When children ate too many berries, their stools tended to be harder.

Tipuula: When someone had watery stools, blackberries were more effective in hardening them than blueberries.

If a person has a tendency to be constipated were blueberries better than blackberries?

Tipuula: Yes, they were better than blackberries because blackberries can cause constipation. It is okay if you eat them with meat. If you just eat the berries alone, you'll get constipated and have a hard time going to the bathroom.

What did you do if a person was having pain in their kidneys?

Ilisapi: If one is feeling pain in the lower back, the muscles tighten and so we know where the pain is from. The urine turns really dark. We could tell there was a problem with the kidneys, even before there were doctors.

Were the tea-like leaves from the kakillarnait, the prickly saxifrage, put on cuts?

Ilisapi: I have heard that people made tea from the prickly saxifrage and that the leaves were put on cuts. I do not know if we used those in our area. We used the leaves of *paunnait*, dwarf fire weed, for tea. We also used the leaves of the blueberry bush, *kigutangirnaquti*. I don't remember what else.

Were suputiit, the flowers of a willow gone to seed, used on boils and on umbilical cords?

Tipuula: I do not know if they were used on boils.

Tirisi: The flowers from a willow that had gone to seed were used on umbilical cords.

Were they also used on boils?

Tipuula: They could be used to wipe the abscess of a boil, though I have never seen this being done personally. Lemming and rabbit skins were used as dressings for boils that weren't healing properly. The lemming skin is said to draw out the eye of a boil.

Was ijjuq, soil, used on burns?

Ilisapi: *Maniq*, lamp moss, the one that looks like soil, was used for *saqqarluktut*, indigestion.

Tipuula: The catkin of the willow before it goes to seed was said to be good for indigestion.

Was lamp moss commonly used for healing purposes?

Tipuula: I know that if one just had a baby and was lacking breast milk, lamp moss would be used to start the flow of milk by smoldering it under the breast. The lamp moss would be lit from the lamp. Lamp moss was also used as a wick for the *qulliq*.

Ilisapi: When it is on the ground it is brown in colour.

Tipuula: It has greenish tips.

Ilisapi: The tops become fuzzy before they wither.

Tipuula: Although it grows in strands, it looks solid.

Ilisapi: Lamp moss seems as though it has *ipa*, warp threads, whereas soil doesn't. Lamp moss can be quite tall or it can be really short. We had many uses for it. We would soak it in oil. If it was saturated with oil, it would stay lit for a long time.

Tipuula: *Urjuk* is like lamp moss. It is light in colour. It seems as though it has warp threads like lamp moss.

Tirisi: Lamp moss is harder than *urjuk*.

Ilisapi: *Urjuk* tend to grow in rocky areas, against rocks.

Tipuula: It is called *niaquttaq* when it grows in clumps because it looks like a head. It has green tips. It is a type of *maniq*.

Ilisapi: There are plants that grow around it. It can also be found in swampy areas. *Tingaujait*, caribou moss, can be found nearby.

Is the niaquttaq the same colour as the land around it?

Tipuula: It is smooth but it grows in clumps.

Ilisapi: It looks like *ijjuq* and yet it is not.

Was mountain sorrel used as a healing plant as well?

Ilisapi: By the time the *qallunaat* figured out that plants were an excellent healthy food source, we had been eating them for a long time. We used to eat leaves and roots. When we were young we would fill ourselves up on mountain sorrel.

Tipuula: When we were going to go out walking we would cut blubber into tiny pieces and take it along. We would eat it later with *uqaujait*, young willow leaves, and *aupilattunnguat*, purple saxifrage.

Tirisi: They sure are tasty.

Ilisapi: I guess the plants we ate helped keep us healthy. I guess for that reason we hardly ever got sick. Everything that we ate was fresh.

Tipuula: When they are boiled, mountain sorrel are excellent for broth.

Tirisi: They are very sour.

*What were *pujualuit*, puffball mushrooms, used for?*

Tipuula: They were used on large cuts. The powder inside the puffball helped to cut down the bleeding. Rabbit droppings were used for the same purpose. We would be told to collect rabbit droppings. Then they would be beaded together and kept for future use.

Ilisapi: Rabbit droppings could also be used to start a fire.

Tipuula: We used to make bandaids from the skin under the forelegs of a rabbit as that area didn't have much fur.

Ilisapi to Tipuula: What was done if the cut was too big to sew a bandaid over it?

Tipuula to Ilisapi: There were some people who could stitch up a person if the cut was too large. When a cut is very fresh, a person cannot really feel anything. Once the feeling returned, they would be in a lot of pain.

What did they use for thread?

Tipuula: Sinew. Sometimes hair was used. It was said that hair was even better to use on a major cut. I have seen hair being used for thread.

What type of a needle was used?

Tipuula: It is better to use a glover as it has a triangular point. Plain needles are not as good to stitch a cut with. Our skin seems very tough when we are trying to puncture it with a needle but if we cut it accidentally it is quite soft.

Tirisi: The skin on the head is even tougher than skin elsewhere.

Tipuula: The palms of the hands and soles of the feet have very tough skin too. Some people used to be very capable at stitching up a wound.

When you were children were you taught by your parents which plants were edible and which were not?

Tipuula: I have only heard *kakillarnait*, the prickly saxifrage, were not good if eaten raw.

Ilisapi: I enjoyed chewing them because of their prickliness.

Tipuula: We were advised not to swallow them unless we had chewed them well first. Those are the only ones that were considered dangerous. We were told to eat plants when they were ripe.

Ilisapi: If we ate too many plants, we tended to get constipated.

Tipuula: After eating plants, boiled meat tasted even better. Your appetite gets better after eating plants such as *uqaujait*, young willow leaves.

And the delicious quarait, net veined willow. Are the prickly saxifrage different from kimminnait, cranberries?

Tipuula: Yes. They are not the same.

Ilisapi: They are not the same as *aupilattunnguat*, purple saxifrage either. They are not sweet.

Do you have aqpiit, cloudberries, where you live?

Tirisi: Not in our area.

Tipuula: We don't even have any *paurngait*, blackberries, in our area.

Is that because it is too cold?

Ilisapi: We have blackberries and blueberries.

Tipuula: There are *qungulit*, mountain sorrel. There are also *kukijait*, capitate lousewort.

I will send you berries.

Tipuula: That would be really good. There is only one area where *kallat*, bearberries, grow. There are no other berries.

The plants you are talking about are never available in the winter. What did you do when you had diarrhea in the winter time?

Ilisapi: We didn't get diarrhea very often. It was only if we ate too much, that we would have diarrhea. We would just wait for it to pass. It was not a major problem. If a person had very watery feces for a long while and lost weight, then seal flippers would be boiled and fed to them.

Tipuula: When they boiled the flippers they didn't remove the fur. The flippers were cooked until they softened. The fur was also eaten.

Ilisapi: That's how they treated diarrhea, if the person had had it for a long time.

What do caribou eat?

Ilisapi: *Nirrait*, caribou lichen.

Tipuula: They eat caribou lichen the most. They are whitish plants.

Ilisapi: They eat caribou lichen, *quajautit*, rock tripe, and the visible parts of plants. Sometimes they even eat down to the roots.

What are the yellowish plants that seem to move called?

Ilisapi: I think these plants are called caribou lichen.

When the plants are covered in the winter, what do the caribou eat?

Ilisapi: They eat the same plants. They still eat them, even if they are dead. They can smell them and they know what plants can help them gain weight. They move on after living in a certain area, when they are running low on food.

Were you ever told that a qalupalik is scared of rock tripe?

Tipuula: I haven't heard that.

I have heard if there is a qalupalik, you should go where there were rock tripe because the qalupalik won't go there. Did you eat the same plants the caribou ate?

Tipuula: We would not eat them to get full. We just nibbled on them.

Ilisapi: We would eat a little mountain sorrel, then a few willow leaves and then a few roots. We would pull out the sweet parts which are called *tuttut*. We would munch on those. Mountain sorrel, willow leaves, *aupilattunnguat*, purple saxifrage and the roots of the yellow oxytrope were the plants that we ate. We did not eat *paunnait*, dwarf fireweed, but we used it for tea.

Tipuula: People from Kinngait eat a lot of *kuanniit*, kelp.

Ilisapi: We started doing the same thing. We started eating kelp as well.

Tipuula: They made *aluk* with it also.

Ilisapi: To make the *aluk*, we added seal blood. We used to gather the leaves of the dwarf fireweed. We would mash the leaves and remove the juice. Then we would put the leaves in a bowl and add some seal blood. After oil is added it becomes really tasty. I learned this recipe from someone from Kinngait.

If you chew one plant and it touches your tongue your tongue becomes numb. When you chew it and you have a toothache it goes numb. Some of the plants we ate were sweeter than others. We did not eat leaves from the *avaalaqiat*, dwarf birch, very often as they were not very sweet. We only ate them once in a while.

Don't qimminnait, cranberries grow in your area?

Ilisapi: No, they don't.

What was the name of the plant that numbs the tongue?

Ilisapi: It does not have a name. When we were children we called it *qasilinnait*, because it burned when we tasted it. The leaves have bumps on them.

Tirisi: Maybe you are talking about *atungaujat*³, but I'm not sure.

Ilisapi: We do not seem to know what to call them. *Atungaujat*, or *alaksaujat*.

Tipuula: We used to eat *kukiujait*, capitata lousewort. When you pull out the insides, they taste like sugar. We used to just eat the tips of the flowers.

Do they look a bit like bananas?

Ilisapi: Yes, they are quite long. They can grow quite long if they grow in an area where they don't freeze too early.

What about the flowers on the qijuktaat, Arctic bell heather?

Tirisi: They taste awful.

Did people ever eat them?

Tipuula: We used to try and nibble on them when we were children, but they tasted awful.

What are these plants called?

Ilisapi: I don't know. The only plants that we have are blueberries and crowberries. We don't have many other plants in our area.

Were there any plants that were used for medicinal purposes that we have not asked about?

Ilisapi: All I know is that *pujaluksait*, unripe puffball mushrooms were used as bandaids.

Tipuula: Last summer we got together for a conference. I learned that the algae at the edge of the river was used for boils. I found that out last summer. You can remove the slime from the *aqajaq*, seaweed, and apply it. If a boil doesn't have an opening yet, it draws out the pus.

Did they use this to try and remove the infection?

Tipuula: I heard about this from some people from Iqaluit.

I heard from my father that it was also used as bandaids.

Ilisapi: It can also be used as wicks. It is quite thick but it can be pulled apart and it is not sandy.

Tipuula: It does not have roots.

Ilisapi: It smouldered very well. The plant that I said had a numbing effect, has a leaf like the Canadian flag.

Sickness before and after the arrival of the whalers

I will be asking what types of sicknesses there were before the whalers arrived, and what kind of sicknesses there were after. What kind of sicknesses did they bring?

Tipuula: I have never heard of any.

Ilisapi: I do not think there were any sicknesses before the whalers arrived. We were very healthy people. It seems as if the only thing the *qallunaat* brought were colds. I do not think that the colds back then were the same as the colds we have today. We used to cough up *marniq*, very thick yellow sputum. Today, when we have a cold we have this bubbly sputum. People used to catch colds and then they would recover. I never had colds myself. Even today, I still do not get colds. I do not think the *qallunaat* brought any sicknesses except for colds.

What about measles?

Ilisapi: I have never heard of people back then having measles.

In the past, were there measles too?

Tipuula: Measles is a recent sickness.

Ilisapi: That type of sickness wasn't around back then. The only thing we had was the rash I told you about. People suspected that the rash was caused by a bomb going off while the war was going on.

Tipuula: I have heard of children having fevers and being really sick back then. We assumed that there was a problem with their intestines. They felt pain inside and they had very high fevers. If little red spots erupted on the skin, the child was expected to recover and it was no longer dangerous. That's what they considered as a sickness travelling outwards. When this happened, the person was on their way to recovery.

You said the skin would have little red spots. Do you mean that they had measles?

Tipuula: They were not measles, just little red spots. When this happened they used to say the sickness has broken in children who had fevers. The spots were visible on the skin. When they were feverish and the sickness had not erupted in a rash on the skin, the sickness was considered more dangerous. It was said that it was destroying the body internally. Fever can be dangerous too but it was more of a concern if the sickness had not erupted on the outside of the body.

What do you mean by uutiq?

Tipuula: It is a very high fever.

Ilisapi: A person would be very hot to the touch. If children have high fevers, they do get better, but at the time they are cranky and pale.

Tipuula: It was also a big concern if they were really pale.

Is it better if they are feverish than if they are really pale?

Tipuula: Yes.

Ilisapi: If they are feverish you know it is just a flu going around.

Tipuula: It was considered more dangerous if you could tell the child was not himself, but you could not tell where the sickness was coming from. If there was no fever and no other visible symptoms, then you knew something was wrong.

Was the child cranky?

Tipuula: Yes. If the child remained really pale, that was considered dangerous. If they did not have an appetite this was also a concern.

Ilisapi: Even if someone was quite ill and had a fever, it was not alarming because they knew that this fever would pass.

Tipuula: If a child got really hot we would be told to take the child out for a while. They certainly were not kept inside back then. We would remove all their clothes before putting them on our backs. We would not expose them to the cold but we would take them out to cool off. We would have them covered while cooling them off and we watched them at the same time. When we got back in, the fever was down.

Did the whalers bring sicknesses other than colds?

Tipuula: I was not aware of the whalers. It was a generation or two before I was born when the whalers arrived.

Ilisapi: I do not think they brought anything other than colds. I have never heard of other sicknesses that they brought here. It was not like sickness occurred all of a sudden. Rashes have always been around, even before the incident I told you about. There was a song about rashes.

kumilakut, kumilakut, ungilakut ungilakut

Scratching, scratching, itchy, itchy.

Around that time, the ship did not come to our community for three years. Everybody had a rash everywhere. There was another rash outbreak long before I was born when my mother was just a child. That's when that song was created.

Tipuula to Ilisapi: It was not the whalers that brought rashes?

Ilisapi to Tipuula: They were not caused by the whalers. Although the whalers did not bring diseases, they really changed our way of life. It is as if the whalers split people up. People used to have just one of each of what they owned. Nowadays, some people own more things than others and vice versa. We are aware of the changes to our way of life that have occurred since the whalers arrived. A missionary was already on board when the whalers first arrived. The changes that took place both physically and emotionally were too sudden. We were advised to change our way of life and our way of thinking because there was God, and there was Jesus. We had to grow. We were changed. We had to change our way of life.

Tipuula: Yes, even the things we used everyday changed. Written language arrived. Before then our knowledge was passed down orally. Young people today should be taught by elders, as we are doing with you now.

Ilisapi: I don't think we are writing enough of the knowledge we have down. The whalers first arrived around the Pangniqtuuq area and then later went to the Mittimatalik area. It was in the early 1900's when they arrived in our community. My grandmother was a young woman then, and my mother was not yet born. We were born after the arrival of the whalers.

Different categories of illness

Can you tell us the difference between aanniaq and qanima?

Ilisapi: In our community when a person is sick we say they are *aanniaqtuq*. *Qanimarujutuinnaqtuq* was used for someone who was just sick in passing. In our dialect we don't use the word *qanimarujuk*, we use the word *surangajuq*, for someone who is a bit sick.

Tipuula: It is the same for us.

Ilisapi: *Qanimajuq* is not a word that was used in our area. My mother recalled when the term *qanimajuq* started being used. Maybe it came from the Pangniqtuuq area. This term used to refer to someone who was sick and close to death. Before this term was introduced we used to say *aanniaqtualuk* for this.

Were you able to tell if someone was terminally ill or if they just had a passing sickness?

Tipuula: Yes. You could tell the difference. The person was *qanimajattuq* if he was not near death, and he would recover. A person who was *aanniaqtuq* was deathly ill but would recover. If the person was sick but could get around on their own and work they were *qanimatuinnaqtuq*. A person was *aanniaqtualuk* if they were bed-ridden and were unable to do anything.

Was there a chance they would recover?

Tipuula: Yes.

If a person was surangajuq, they were not critically ill?

Ilisapi: It is just as she said. It is the same as *qanimajattuq*. We all had our own dialects before we started interacting regularly with people from the Pangniqtuuq and the Kivalliq areas. We rarely saw people from the Inujjuaq area in Nunavik.

Tirisi: This was before there was modern communication.

Ilisapi: We used to make fun of each others' dialects if they were different from ours. If their dialect was different from ours, then we thought it was funny, especially us people from the Mittimatalik area.

Footnotes

¹ Generally known as bannock, a flat bread.

² It was said that lemmings knew the reasons for sickness and death. Rasmussen (1929: 113) mentions that they were often used by *angakkuit*.

³ *Atungaujat* in Iglulik are leaves of mountain avens. In some communities in South Baffin this term is used for gilled mushrooms; in some communities in both North and South Baffin it refers to leaves that seem to sprout individually right from the ground, that are reddish in colour and shaped like willow leaves. These leaves are known as *alatsaujat* in other communities.