

Part Two

*Uqqurmiut
Elders
(South Baffin)*

Aanniasiutigijauvaktuviniit, Materials Used for Healing; and Childbirth

Uses of oil

Was ringed seal, bearded seal and other marine mammal blubber and oil used for healing?

Aalasi: I will tell you all the things I have tried and I will answer what I know. My mother used to try anything. She was quite poor. They never used anything from the nurses when I was growing up. It was only when I moved here that I stopped using our traditional methods. Polar bear oil is very clear, unlike seal and walrus oil. It is the best. My mother used to use it for ear drops. She would put one or two drops in each ear. It is very good. We didn't use just any fat from the bear. We would use the inner layer of fat from the stomach. The fat around there is really thick.

Jaikku: This is called *aluqiak*.

Aalasi: You would melt it over heat without boiling it. We did not measure with spoons back then. We used lids from baking powder cans to measure. One or two drops was put in each ear, not more. If the lid was full it was around a teaspoon. When we get medication from the hospital, we often have to take it every four hours. These drops were applied about every six to twelve hours. My mother would make us lay on our side even though we really wanted to be up and around. My mother tried a lot of different things. She was an *alla*, a Cree. My father was very knowledgeable also.

Was oil also used on cuts?

Jaikku: I know that it was used for cuts and for impetigo. The oil was removed from the blubber of an *ugjuk*, a bearded seal, and the remaining *tangiq* was used as a bandaid. It was considered the best for wounds and cuts. It would be applied and then removed after the oil had been absorbed.

Aalasi: The *tangiq* drew out any infection. It cleaned up the wound perfectly.

Jaikku: Once the *tangiq* dried up, it was removed. Another piece was applied if needed.

Aalasi: They used to keep a supply of *ugjuk* blubber for this purpose. Sometimes it had been scraped and sometimes it had been chewed.

Would the oil be scraped off?

Aalasi: Yes, the excess oil was completely removed. Even the *tangiq* was chewed to remove any excess oil.

Jaikku: You do not have to scrape it, as long as the extra oil is removed. You could also chew it well and spit out the oil.

Was it also used for burns?

Aalasi: Yes they used this for burns too. Two people in our camp had really bad burns. My mother got a really bad burn on her ankle from boiling oil. She used rabbit stomach to heal it. The internal organs of animals are different. Some of them are stronger than others. The stomach of a rabbit is excellent for burns. You just remove it from the rabbit and apply it directly on the burn without removing the contents of the *qisaruaq*, the stomach.

Are the contents of the rabbit's stomach also called nirukkarujuit?

Aalasi: Yes. It was okay to apply the stomach to the burn with the contents inside. Since it should not dry up, you need to tie a rag around it to hold it in place. The *qisaruaq* sucks out any infection. I have seen this myself.

Was bearded seal oil applied to burns?

Jaikku: Yes. Bearded seal oil was the best. Ringed seal oil tended to dry up quickly.

Aalasi: Yes, it is the weakest because it tends to dry out the wound.

Jaikku: This can end up being painful because it is so dry the skin ends up cracking.

Aalasi: Bearded seal oil is the strongest of all the oils.

Did you ever try polar bear oil?

Aalasi: I know of polar bear oil being boiled and used for congested lungs, but not for wounds. It was used as a Vapour Rub on the shoulder area for those who had bad colds. It really brought the sweat out when used as a rub. It was good for colds.

Was oil ever taken orally as a cough medicine?

Aalasi: It was used for this. My mother used to give us one spoon of oil and this helped with a cough. You would boil the oil and swallow a spoonful. Nowadays I go to the doctor when I have a cold but if it lingers I have oil rubbed on my shoulder area. I boil the oil for this beforehand, whether it's from a bearded seal or a ringed seal.

Jaikku: You have a lot of experience in this area.

Aalasi: Yes, I do. I keep a supply of boiled oil in a glass container in my freezer. We should keep a supply handy even today. We depend on the doctors too much. We should keep a supply handy since it is not always possible to go to the doctor. The oil in your freezer needs to be warmed up before it is applied. It is absorbed better if it is not cold.

Are you talking about boiled oil or tangiq?

Aalasi: Oil was stronger after it had been boiled.

Could any kind of blubber be used?

Aalasi: Any kind of blubber could be used but bearded seal blubber was the best. It was always the strongest.

Was polar bear fat used?

Jaikku: It was hard to get polar bear fat. A bear was rarely ever caught back then, unlike today.

Aalasi: Bearded seal oil was the most readily available.

Jaikku: Bearded seal oil was considered the best.

How often did you have to swallow the oil, every half an hour or so?

Aalasi: Back then we did not follow the clock. It was usually given at bedtime. It would be rubbed on around nine or ten in the morning, then at one, at six and at bedtime. It was also good to swallow a spoonful of the boiled oil.

Did you used to have infected skin?

Aalasi: Yes. We used to have infected skin.

Jaikku: Babies and children often had impetigo behind their ears.

Aalasi: The *tangiq* that had had the oil removed worked well on impetigo as well. We would put it on the infected area when the child fell asleep. It drew out the infection.

Jaikku: Rabbit fur that had had oil applied to it was very good for cleaning infected areas. It was even better than cloth because it did not stick to the infected area and it easily removed the scabs. That was what we used. We applied oil to infected areas around the eyes and on impetigo to keep infections from drying and cracking.

Did you use the oil even if it hadn't been boiled?

Jaikku: Yes. Even if it had not been boiled we used it.

Aalasi: Some of the medications supplied by the doctors are not as good as animal oil. Some of them are really bad for infections. Sometimes, they make them worse and cause swelling. Animal oil does not cause a reaction.

During an interview with other elders I heard that whale oil tends to cause a swelling reaction. Did you ever try to use it?

Aalasi: I can't think of an incident where someone swelled up from whale oil. It was also good to use as a rub. I do not know if it causes swelling. We have different knowledge, depending on the areas we come from. Keep this information. Don't dismiss it. You gain knowledge from everything you hear.

Elders older than we are have more knowledge. Keep the information from both interviews and use what you feel is useful. The marrow from seagull and duck wings is also good for oiling the corners of an infected eye.

Impetigo on the head is different from impetigo on the body. Marrow works well on the head. You need to apply a fair amount. You can remove it after. My mother used marrow a lot.

There is not a lot of marrow in a bird's wing. Did you have to collect it?

Aalasi: Yes. We tried to have a supply handy.

Jaikku: We would only use it if it was available. We did not collect it. We would use it if we happened to have some handy.

Medicinal plants

I am very eager to hear more about plants. What do quajautiit, rock tripe, look like?

Aalasi: I think they look exactly like your hair. They are curly. You find them on rocks.

Are they similar to tingaujait, caribou moss?

Aalasi: They are not the same as caribou moss. Rock tripe is different than *tingaujait*. It looks curly and it seems to be stuck on the rocks.

Jaikku: You find it on solid rock. It is not in the soil.

I heard that qalupaliit are afraid of rock tripe.

Aalasi: Yes. The *qalupaliit* tend to stick to rock tripe. The *qalupaliit* were never to touch them.

Do you believe there are such things as qalupaliit?

Aalasi: There are *qalupaliit*. One approached our camp when we were living outside of Pangniqtuuq. It would come to our camp at night. Nobody ever saw it but the dogs were so scared that they got on top of the *qammaq*. The people started wondering if it was a *qalupalik*. When we were out clam digging, my brother-in-law saw the tail of an *amauti* made of *mitiq*, eider duck skin. He saw the *qalupalik* running very close to us. Every night we heard something saying “*viivii*.” Apparently it lived very close to us throughout the whole fall. There was one near our camp that year but the following year it was gone. There are actually *qalupaliit*.

Jaikku: I think they move from camp to camp. I have heard that they used female eider duck skins for clothing.

I have heard they put whomever they capture in their amautiit.

Aalasi: Yes, if a *qalupalik* puts a child in their *amauti*, you cannot see it. They can put more than one child inside. They live in the sea.

I want to tell you something I learned about plants from the late Kakkik that I tried myself. My sister's late husband used to know about *nirnait*, caribou lichen, the plants

that caribou eat. They are long and you pull them out. They tend to grow in swampy areas. I boiled them when all the people in our camp were sick. I was the only one up and about when we were living in a fishing camp. My mother had been admitted to the hospital and we were waiting for her return in August. Six of my family members were sick in bed. I boiled some caribou lichen in a pot for a long time, following my brother-in-law's advice. He told me to stop boiling them when the water turned black. I waited for them to cool down and I gave each sick person some to drink. The next day, they were all up and about. It looked like the cough syrup in a bottle.

Were caribou lichen used for healing?

Aalasi: They were useful for medicinal purposes. The people that I gave some to were sweating so much their hair seemed like it had just been washed. I have seen myself that caribou lichen can be useful. You have to get them from a swampy area.

What do they look like?

Aalasi: They have black roots. Caribou eat them.

Did you cook them until they turned black and then give them to people as qajuq, as broth to drink?

Aalasi: Yes. You would cook the caribou lichen until the water turned black. The plants themselves were not eaten. *Miqqapiat*, seaweed found in brooks and creeks, were also useful. They are furry and they are green. They are nice to look at.

Jaikku: They are a nice green.

Are they slippery?

Aalasi: Yes. They are very slippery, and they are furry. The furry parts are excellent for healing an eye infection. Even a person who had such a severe eye infection that their eye was closed shut, could open their eye the next day.

Did you boil these plants too?

Aalasi: No. You took them directly from the creek and applied them to the eye still damp. I only know them as *miqqapiat*. I have never heard another name for them. Maybe the name is different depending on where you come from. *Malitsuagait*, seabeach sandwort, can be found at the edge of the sea.

Jaikku: At the edge of the water.

Aalasi: They have medicinal properties.

Do you have to boil them too?

Aalasi: You just eat them. You rinse them first, take the sand out and eat them. They can help people who are sick.

Are mamaittuqutiit the same as qijuttaat, Arctic bell heather?

Aalasi: *Mamaittuqutiit* is just another name for *qijuttaaqpait*, Labrador tea. It is larger than Arctic bell heather, Labrador tea is called *mamaittuqutiit* in Nunavik. They are very useful. They can be used to moisten very dry hands. They have a very strong odour. That's why they are called *mamaittuqutiit*.

Jaikku: I know a lot about *pujualuit*, puffball mushrooms. I brought some *pujualuit* back from Kinngait after visiting there. I put them in a pill container. When I got back here, I checked them so that I could take them over to the hospital to show them what we used for cuts. When the plant is not fully mature, the inner parts are white. I kept it in a jar after I found it. When I checked it after I returned, it had turned to liquid; maybe because I hadn't dried it out enough before I stored it.

It turned to liquid?

Jaikku: It just turned into liquid. I haven't tried to collect it since.

Aalasi: It was probably still good.

Jaikku: It may have been good but I just threw it away.

Aalasi: It could still have been used to help someone who was sick if there was no medical assistance available.

Was anything from the sea used for healing?

Aalasi: *Kuanniit*, kelp, and *iquutiit*, rockweed, two different types of seaweed, were some of the most requested plants. They worked really well.

Jaikku: *Nuvaqqiit*, jellyfish, also had medicinal properties.

Aalasi: They could be used to heal impetigo. Some of them are so big, they look like a basin. They look like pouches and are called *ippiarjuujait* in some dialects.

Jaikku: The big red ones were used on areas that had trouble healing. They would be squished into an ointment.

Could they be used to heal a hand rash?

Jaikku: Yes. I have heard that they are good for a hand rash. I do not know this personally; I have just heard this.

Aalasi: I used to have problems with my hands. I tried to keep it on the whole day but it did not work for me.

Jaikku: I guess it takes time. It does not work immediately. It kills the germs in the infected areas. Germs cause impetigo and the jellyfish kill germs.

Aalasi: My hands were even worse the year after I tried this. When we were out on the land again, the flesh on my hands was completely raw. I wanted to be taken back to Iqaluit because I got scared when one of my nails came off. The men did not want to go back so I started wiping my hands with fresh lemming skins and that healed my hands.

You used a lemming skin?

Aalasi: Yes. You keep the fat on the skin and apply it to the flesh. I even had gloves made out of lemming skins. That is how my hands healed.

Are all the slippery ones that look like hair called aqajait, seaweed?

Aalasi: Yes! Make sure you write that down.

Can you make jam out of kimminnait, cranberries?

Aalasi: Yes. Cranberries can be made into jam just like blackberries, and blueberries.

Jaikku: They are really sour before they ripen. Once they ripen they are excellent to eat.

What do you add to them to make jam?

Aalasi: I never made jam myself, but I know people who have.

Jaikku: I have heard that people make jam with blueberries too, but I have never tried it myself.

Were atungaujait used for bandaids or for food?

Aalasi: They were used as bandaids. They also made excellent tea.

Jaikku: I never knew they could be used for bandaids.

Aalasi: Yes, they can be used for bandaids after being soaked in warm water. They are also an excellent source of tea. I have drunk it many times. We lacked a lot of things back then so I grew up drinking them as tea. My mother taught me that on walks while we were looking for things to eat. My aunt used to talk about which plants were the best, which roots and plants were really good to eat.

Did the allait, the Cree, use plants more than Inuit did?

Aalasi: Very much so.

Jaikku: There are many more plants in Nunavik, Northern Quebec, than on Qikiqtaaluk, Baffin Island.

Are atungaujait mushrooms'?

Jaikku: Very much so.

In Pangniqtuuq, atungaujait are the mushrooms we buy from the store. Are they different from pujualuit?

Aalasi: I do not know the Inuktitut word for the ones we buy in the store.

Jaikku: Before the *pujualuit* flatten out, they are round.

Aalasi: They have a thick stem.

Jaikku: *Quarait*, net veined willow, have *qupirruit*, worms.

Were bearded seal and ringed seal blubber the only oils used for earaches?

Aalasi: They are the only ones I know.

Were there people who were tusilattuuq, people who misheard things? I heard that tusilattuuq and tusaattiangittuuq have different meanings.

Aalasi: There used to be people who were *tusilattuuq*. There were not very many of them.

Jaikku: *Tusaagaliit* were people who heard things.

Aalasi: People who heard things preferred to be alone.

Jaikku: They would hear invisible people speaking. They were non-humans even though they sounded human. People who were *tusaagaliit* tended to be withdrawn.

Aalasi: They started to believe what their minds created and considered this to be true.

I have heard that people who are about to receive bad news hear ringing in their ears. Do you think this is true?

Aalasi: That used to happen to me when I was going to hear that someone had died. My ear would start ringing. My flesh tends to twitch if I am going to hear bad news nowadays.

Jaikku: When I hear ringing in my ear, it means that the weather is going to get windy.

Aalasi: *Siirniq*, spring water, is excellent for sick people. It is often requested by elders but it is also good for others as well.

What is siirniq?

Jaikku: You can not get *siirniq* from a lake. It is found at a river. It is different from plain water. It is very clear. It has a great taste.

Aalasi: That type of water is very good for a sick person. You can find it at the edge of a river.

Jaikku: When there is a full moon, the water comes up onto the ice.

Aalasi: The edges of rivers and lakes become spring water. In the summer, you can find spring water that comes from deep underground.

Jaikku: It is nice and cold.

When we scoop up water during the spring, does it come up from underground?

Aalasi: Yes, it comes from underground. Spring water is the best during a full moon. It seems so clear. It is good to take to elders. Even if they haven't requested it they will really appreciate it, if some is brought to them.

I am going to go down to the river's edge at the next full moon. When you drink from the river, do you think it is good for all parts of the body?

Aalasi: It is very good for the body. It affects the whole body. It is as if all the body toxins are being removed.

Jaikku: Fresh rain water is also very good. Fresh rain water from puddles on clean ground is very good.

Water from melted surface sea ice is also really good. It is not salty.

Aalasi: Those things you see that are stuck on the rocks, that look like teeth, have meat inside. They are called *kiliugait*, barnacles. You can boil them to make broth which you can use for medicinal purposes as well. You can scrape them or hammer them off the rocks and put them in a pot. After you boil them and drink the broth, you become energized. Barnacles can be useful to people who are feeling sick and for those who are constipated.

Jaikku: I never knew they had medicinal properties. I just suck on them. They taste like clams.

Aalasi: They are really tasty. You cook them the way you cook clams.

But they are not edible!

Aalasi: You can eat them. They are food too. They have some meat inside.

Jaikku: I never knew they could be eaten. I just sucked out the juice. *Aggaujait*, star fish, are really good to suck on after you hammer them open.

Where do you find them?

Jaikku: On the tidal flats. They look like they are shaped like a hand. They are stiff and you find them lying out in the open. When you go near them they close up and bury themselves with only their tips showing. Sometimes they make themselves stick to the ground. They are very tasty.

Aalasi: I find them creepy. They look like stars.

What type of plant was used for stomach-aches?

Aalasi: *Iquutiit*, rockweed, from the beach would be eaten if someone had an upset stomach.

Would you boil it in a broth?

Aalasi: No. Rockweed does not need to be boiled in a broth.

Do you boil it in plain water?

Aalasi: Yes, *iquutiit*, *kuanniit* and *qiqquat*, different types of seaweed, are boiled until they turn green. That was all you ate for a day if you had an upset stomach. The water that had been used to boil the seaweed would be used as a rub for the stomach afterwards.

Was there anything else you could use to treat a stomach-ache?

Aalasi: *Uqaujait*, young willow leaves, *quarait*, the net veined willow, and *naqutiit*, blueberry bushes were also good for treating an upset stomach. They too would be boiled until the water turned green. They were good too.

How much water did you use?

Aalasi: Not too much. You would make sure that the plants were covered.

Jaikku: You would stir them occasionally as they were cooking.

Were qunguliit, mountain sorrel, cooked too?

Aalasi: Absolutely. The juice from the mountain sorrel is even better than the juice we buy from the store. Once the mountain sorrel are cooked they turn white. They were used to treat people who had no energy and those who had aching bones. Even now, I boil mountain sorrel every year.

I am going to try that this summer. Do you cool it first?

Aalasi: You should drink it when it is cold.

Does it have a slightly sour taste?

Aalasi: Yes. You can mix it with water.

Jaikku: If you chew them by themselves, it is almost painful, because they are so *siirnaqtuq*, sour.

Aalasi: Those are the ones I know that were used as treatments for a stomach-ache.

Jaikku: They are really potent when they are fresh.

Aalasi: My mother would gather plants from the land and mix them together, when we were not feeling well. She would mix them with seal oil and blood. She would try to make us feel better and this would help. Once she had collected enough of them she would mix them in a bowl. She would use *quarait*, net veined willow, *kigutangirnaqutit*, blueberries and *paunnat*, dwarf fireweed. *Paunnat* are the ones which look really pretty on the land in the summer.

Jaikku: They are the nice purple ones.

Aalasi: Dwarf fireweed acted the fastest. They were given to those who had indigestion. For those that had intestinal problems to the point where they had blood in their stools, if they ate *maniq*, lamp moss, which is used for the *qulliq*, it would absorb the excess acid in the stomach. When you ate the lamp moss you could take it with tea or broth or by itself.

Even if you only ate a small amount, it would absorb the excess acid causing the heartburn.

Jaikku: Lamp moss was good for you when you ate too much blubber or oil. The lamp moss would absorb the stomach acid immediately and you felt better right away.

Is maniq the same as ijuq?

Aalasi: A lot of plants can be used for medicinal purposes. Lamp moss is *ijjuq* that is used as a wick for the *qulliq*. *Ijjuq* are the ones we pull out from the land, the ones that we dry.

Would you just use the ijuq by itself?

Jaikku: *Sputiit*, the flowers of willows gone to seed, and *ijjuq* are mixed together when they are to be used as lamp wick. We didn't use the *ijjuq* by itself. It is different just looking at pictures in a book. It would make much more sense if we were walking outside and discussing the plants. During the summer, you would be able to learn a lot more.

Aalasi: It is hard looking at plants in a book. You would learn a lot more by taking a walk and then picking up the plants and smelling them. It would be much better if we took a walk in June, July or August. August would be the best month, because by then, all the plants have grown. September would be a good month just after school has started. Try and keep that in mind.

Jaikku: The plants start growing at the end of May, or the beginning of June. Then in late July, when it starts getting colder again, the plants begin to wither.

When someone had a cut, what did you use to cover it with?

Aalasi: *Uqaujait*, young willow leaves, are excellent if someone has a cut. You should pick up the biggest leaf and apply it to the wound after wetting it first. The leaf juices then flow into the cut.

Did that help the cut heal faster?

Aalasi: Yes. I want to change the topic for a minute. If someone had a really bad wound from a fall or from a gunshot, you should shoot a rabbit and take out the lungs and apply them to the wound. Rabbit lungs stop bleeding right away.

Would it stop the bleeding even if the wound was really big?

Aalasi: Yes. You cut the lungs open and apply them to the wound. This is an excellent way to stop bleeding. Urine was also used to stop the bleeding.

Jaikku: If the *mikiliraq*, the ring finger is tied, this will stop bleeding too. You had to bend the finger down so it was touching the palm of the hand and bind it with thread.

Did it have to be bound like that for an extended period of time?

Aalasi and Jaikku: Yes, it had to stay like that for quite a while.

Jaikku: *Pujualuit*, puffball mushrooms, are excellent for cuts too. Last year, I went for a trip with some other elders across the bay and one of the cooks got a bad cut on his little finger. Even though we put a bandaid on, the bleeding continued for a long time. Someone found a puffball and I applied it on the cut. It did not take very long for the bleeding to stop after that. There were some doctors with us, but they could not stop the bleeding with the bandaid. Once the *pujualuk* was applied, the bleeding stopped.

Did you tie your ring finger up with your other hand?

Jaikku: Yes. You would tie it up with your other hand.

Aalasi: If we had a lot of nosebleeds and lost a lot of blood, our ring finger would be tied.

I remember someone telling me to tie the finger with one hand to stop the bleeding. Which finger has to be bound, the one on the right or the left hand?

Jaikku: I often tied up the ring finger on my left hand.

Aalasi: Because I had a lot of nosebleeds, my finger was tied so often that I can hardly bend it today.

Is it best to tie the finger on the left hand?

Aalasi: I do not think it really matters which one you tie.

We heard that the body is quppariik, made of two vertical halves and that the right half is different from the left half.

Jaikku: Yes they are different. One side is bigger and stronger than the other.

Aalasi: It is really fun to pick plants. I often go for walks and have tea with my children. I even keep a supply of tea leaves because I really enjoy tea.

Jaikku: I used to do that because I had no other choice back then. These days, I don't bother.

Aalasi: *Kakillarnaqutiit*, the prickly saxifrage are good too. They are prickly. *Mamaittuqutiit*, Labrador tea are excellent as well. *Mamaittuqutiit*, Labrador tea are very useful. My mother used them a lot back then. They have a very strong odour.

Do they smell bad?

Aalasi: The fragrance is really strong. If you hold the plant, the smell transfers on to your hand.

Does it smell like perfume?

Aalasi: Yes, it smells like perfume. This was also given to people who had a sore throat.

Did you use it without cooking it?

Aalasi: You had to boil it.

Jaikku: We were really aware of plants that had medicinal properties back then because that was all we had to help us when we were sick.

Treating botulism

How did they used to treat a person who had botulism?

Aalasi: Do you know the dark part which looks like excrement in the fish, the *anaujaq*?

Yes.

Aalasi: Those who had botulism from *igunaup qupiqrungannut*, aged meat, could be treated with that part of the fish. When my husband and I heard about one case, we went down to our net to get the *anaujaq*, and then we went to the hospital with four fish. We removed the excrement-like parts, and took them to the hospital. We were advised that the patient couldn't have visitors because she was dying. We were told that the relatives were being contacted. We insisted that we wanted to try the traditional method of treating botulism as the patient was going to die anyway. We were strongly advised against this but we wanted to try. My husband and I went to see the patient. This was the late Liitia Onalik, Susie Onalik's mother. She has since passed on. Her husband died at that time of botulism. Liitia was close to death herself. She was unconscious. I mixed the *anaujaq* in a cup and put some in her mouth with a spoon. A person who has botulism has a very dry mouth, not one drop of saliva is present. I put some of the *anaujaq* in her mouth and made sure she didn't choke. That is how Liitia survived botulism. Keep this in mind if someone has botulism out on the land.

Jaikku: The *anajaq* is the dark line found along the spine of the fish. Make sure you do not throw that part out, because it is good to eat, even if you don't have botulism.

Do you mix it with anything else?

Aalasi: You use it as is. A person that is near death cannot chew anything. You just put it in the person's mouth and make sure they do not choke on it. It took the woman we were treating approximately two hours to start stirring about. She started to have tears in her eyes. Even though we were told that she would not survive, we treated her anyway. She ended up living for quite a long time.

Childbirth

Can you tell us about the early stages of pregnancy?

Aalasi: We were told what we should eat, how we should sleep, and how we should go outside quickly in the early morning. We were taught these things so that the baby would be healthy.

Jaikku: We were advised not to take our time when we were going outside so that the baby would come out faster during delivery. We were told not to linger at an entrance-way. We were not even allowed to look back if we were on our way out. We were advised to leave quickly if we were going out when we were pregnant.

Were your laces not allowed to be long either?

Aalasi: Our laces were not supposed to be too long.

Jaikku: If we braided our boot laces, we were not allowed to make them long and were not to braid them right to the end. We did this so the baby's umbilical cord wouldn't get wrapped around the neck.

Aalasi: I think some of the things we were told were true. We were also advised not to chew too much gum or the creases and folds in the babies skin would be covered with vernix making the baby hard to come out. We were not to wear tight clothing so the baby's movements wouldn't be constricted.

What would happen if you wore tight clothing?

Aalasi: The baby would not be well prepared to come out if tight clothing was worn. This could jeopardize the pregnancy.

Were you not allowed to make the waist of your pants smaller?

Aalasi: We were advised not to take our pants in at the waist because it might affect the birth canal as it would be difficult to dilate. I received this advice from my aunt, my mother, my grandmother and from women from our camp who visited my mother.

Jaikku: We received a lot of advice, especially during our first pregnancy.

Aalasi: We were not supposed to lie on one side for too long or else the baby would be in that position for too long too. We were advised to turn over every now and then.

Jaikku: When we got up in the morning, we were not allowed to just stay put. We were advised to get dressed right away, and to go out the door quickly so that we wouldn't be in labour long.

Were you advised not to wear clothing that had holes in it?

Aalasi: We were always told not to wear clothing that had rips or tears in it. As women, we weren't allowed to expose our skin.

Jaikku: It was unthinkable to expose your skin.

Aalasi: We were not even allowed to expose our skin at home. We were taught as girls to respect our bodies. Children and other members of the household were taught this as well.

Jaikku: We were told that the umbilical cord might be entwined if we braided our hair a certain way. If the umbilical cord wrapped around the baby's neck it could become taut. That happened to a woman whose baby I delivered when I was really young. I was only seventeen years old then. I had to cut her perineum. She was in so much pain she was moaning from the pressure. Although there were other women present I was the only one able to make the incision. We had a special knife which was often used for cutting open boils. We knew that if someone had internal bleeding they could die. I had to make an incision to enlarge the opening for the baby to come out. Once I made the incision, her moaning subsided. It was very dangerous when this happened.

Aalasi: The mother-to-be was not the only one to be given advice. The father was as well. Today it seems as if the father is left out of the whole process.

Jaikku: Men don't seem to be considered these days.

Aalasi: These days if a man makes a mother-to-be angry or causes other emotional turmoil nothing is said to him. Men weren't allowed to be like that back then.

Jaikku: Men had to be really good to us when we were pregnant.

Aalasi: They also had to get dressed right away, go out quickly and be cheerful. This was the advice they were given. The baby was really important even before it was born.

They accepted the advice they were given because the elders' advice was very good. It was good for the well-being of the baby so that it would be born into a healthy environment without violence.

Once the baby was born, our mothers and in-laws advised us to lay down with the baby even though we didn't want to go to bed because babies want to be held.

Jaikku: Newborns are used to being in an enclosed area inside us. They are not used to being in so much space so they need cuddling.

Aalasi: We were advised to cuddle a baby by keeping one hand on the buttocks area and the other hand on the back. This would comfort the baby and it would fall asleep right away. Some children are on their mothers' back past midnight because their mothers are still out visiting.

Jaikku: In the morning, babies get tired of lying down so they start getting cranky. Babies can be really bossy. Adults know the ways of babies.

Aalasi: Babies can't do things on their own and they can't understand well. Their clothing had to be loose so they would be comfortable while they were growing. It also had to be warm.

What was done for a woman who was about to miscarry?

Aalasi: If a woman fell or there was something wrong with a pregnancy you couldn't stop a miscarriage. But if a woman went into premature labour she was advised to lie down and not move.

Could anything be done if a woman had repeated miscarriages?

Aalasi: If she had repeated miscarriages or her babies kept dying, she would be given a baby to adopt. Adopting a child seemed to stop the miscarriages and the babies from dying.

Jaikku: My son Qaapik, who is now deceased, was adopted by Qummuattuq because her children kept dying. Her mother asked me to give the baby to Qummuattuq. Because she adopted from me, the other children that she had survived.

Aalasi: We learned these things from our mothers, our grandmothers and our mothers-in-law. It was as if the adopted baby stopped the miscarriages and the babies from dying. The child was not adopted out because it was unloved or unwanted. This was

done because there was deep compassion for the women who were having a hard time having a baby. These women were given babies to adopt. That is what we know. Our mothers and mothers-in-laws had great knowledge. It should be recorded and written down.

I am going to consider adopting. I have miscarried twice.

Aalasi: This will eventually stop. It won't continue on forever.

In Nunavik I read that something could be placed on a woman's stomach to keep her from miscarrying. If a woman was having a stillborn baby, what could the midwives do to help deliver it, after the baby's heart had stopped beating and it wasn't moving anymore?

Aalasi: Sometimes a stillborn baby was delivered the same way, but the contractions were very weak as there was no support coming from the child.

Jaikku: The woman still had contractions to push the baby out, although the contractions were weaker. It was like being in labour. Maybe it is still like that. The doctors are the ones that deal with this today. Today labour is induced when the doctors know that the baby is stillborn.

Aalasi: Back then, we never talked about babies being overdue. We just waited for them to come out naturally although they were considered high risk. These days women that are overdue are induced with a needle. Back then they were considered high risk but labour was never induced, because we had no means of doing this.

Jaikku: I also heard in Kinngait that if a woman got pregnant later in life, the pelvic bone could no longer separate.

Aalasi: This happens after a woman turns twenty-nine or thirty years old.

Jaikku: These women had difficult deliveries. I heard they used a piece of wood to separate the *ingiq*, the cartilage connecting the pelvic bone, by pressing down on it. The *ingiq* separates when we are giving birth. When the delivery was difficult, the wood was placed on the woman and pressure was quickly applied so the baby that was having a hard time could come out.

Aalasi: You would learn so much if we spent a year on the land. It would be nice if this opportunity was available to those who were interested. We elders cannot speak English but we have a lot of expertise. I am sure we would have a lot to teach.

Jaikku: We have a lot to offer. We could teach you about the things we used for medical purposes. You would learn a lot. We would keep a first aid kit handy, but try not to use it.

Aalasi: It would be good if there was a woman in the early stages of pregnancy there. Something should be done about this prior to the creation of Nunavut. We elders have a lot of knowledge about our way of life and we still remember what we were taught.

Jaikku: It would be good if young men came along too, so they could learn about hunting in the fall, winter and spring.

Aalasi: Pregnant women were advised not to scratch their stomachs or else they would get stretch marks which were sometimes even black.

Jaikku: We get stretch marks when the fine muscle tissue breaks apart.

Could a woman tell if she was carrying twins?

Aalasi: You could tell if a woman was carrying twins. I assisted in the delivery of twins once. After the first one came out, there was an indentation on the tummy so you could tell another baby was in there. We were not in a hospital.

Jaikku: To find out if someone was carrying twins, you could place an object on top of the tummy to see if it would fall off.

Aalasi: That's because the *naakuluapik*, the stomach was so big.

Jaikku: I almost had twins when I had my daughter. She had two swirls of hair on the crown of her head and her vagina looked like it had been connected to something else. That was the most painful delivery I ever had.

When we are in labour, we have contractions at intervals. This labour was painful all the way. I think that two babies had started to form and became one.

Aalasi: When a woman was in labour, she was given special care. I started assisting at deliveries when I was really young as there were not many people in camps back then.

I learned a lot about midwifery from my mother. I assisted at some of my sister's later deliveries. We had to know what to do with the placenta. We had to know what to do if a baby did not start breathing right away. We even learned how the head should be shaped by the midwife. That practice is not followed at the hospital at all.

Jaikku: Pressure was applied to the newborn's head to connect the skull. That is not done at all any more.

Aalasi: The head was shaped. A baby that takes a long time to come out tends to get a cone-shaped head.

Jaikku: This also happened if the mother had her legs closed too much.

Aalasi: If the placenta did not come out shortly after the birth, we knew it was stuck. This would happen because the woman had tended to lie on one side too long during pregnancy or she had sat down too much. That would be why the placenta would be stuck. The midwife would apply oil from blubber to her hands and then insert her hand in the uterus, being careful not to let her fingernails touch the wall of the uterus, and pull out the placenta. We would only use our fingertips because the uterine wall is very delicate.

If the blood stopped flowing shortly after the birth, the midwife would insert her hand inside and the blood clots would be broken. A woman could die if her *ammaniit*, her genital area, was blocked by blood clots. She could stop breathing.

Jaikku: A woman had to make sure her milk was expressed so she didn't get sick. I used to suck and spit out my own milk when my breasts were full and I had too much milk.

What was done for a woman who was suffering cramps after the delivery?

Aalasi: If there were cramps after the delivery, pressure was applied to the abdomen to soften the clots.

Jaikku: The pain comes and goes as the womb is shrinking back to its regular size.

Aalasi: The cramps are not just from blood clots. A woman might think it was something serious but it was just the womb shrinking back to its normal size.

Jaikku: Women felt *akuangjujuq*, cramps, when the womb was shrinking.

Aalasi: We could also feel pain from the blood clots before they were broken.

Jaikku: A woman tended to sweat and have difficulty breathing when there was a blockage after the delivery.

Aalasi: Clots could form if a woman's body cooled down too quickly after the delivery.

Jaikku: I always lost a lot of blood after each delivery. I have had eight children. I was able to pull through even though there were no doctors then. As long as there was food available, I was not even scared when I lost a lot of blood. There was actually one delivery where I didn't suffer much blood loss.

Aalasi: When a woman was losing a lot of blood, she would be given broth and hot water. That was how this used to be treated.

Women who lost a lot of blood did not die?

Jaikku: I survived even though I lost a lot of blood during my deliveries. I have had a lot of children.

What would be done after a woman went into labour?

Jaikku: I often went into labour after midnight. When the contractions got stronger and the baby had dropped, I would tell someone.

Aalasi: We stayed busy even when we were feeling contractions. We just made sure we stayed inside if there were obvious signs we were in labour. Sometimes we had a very quick labour, three pushes and the baby was out. Sometimes it only took two pushes. It was better when the baby came out quickly.

Jaikku: If you had given birth many times, you could estimate the time the baby would be born. I never told anyone I was in labour until I knew it was time to deliver. The first time I was in labour I wanted to defecate frequently and yet I could not go. When I was in labour I did not know what to expect the first time.

Was more attention given to a woman if it was her first child?

Aalasi: Yes, because she did not know what to expect. She would be given advice during her labour and delivery so she would know what to do and expect the next time. She wasn't always going to be in labour when her mother and mother-in-law were present. The first delivery was given special attention, so she knew what to expect the next time.

Jaikku: A woman's first delivery would indicate what her other deliveries would be like.

Aalasi: We were given advice on the importance of childbirth and having a spouse. We were told to stay quiet so that the delivery wouldn't be long. We would not die from it so we were told not to groan and moan. It was all up to the baby and all we could do was wait. I thought I was going through something that nobody else had ever gone through when I had my first child. This determined what the delivery process would be like for my other children. All I could do was wait and endure the pain.

Babies don't want to feel their mother moving about as this is scary to them. The baby wants the delivery to be calm. The baby doesn't like the mother moving about, changing positions or getting up to go to the washroom. The baby feels uncomfortable with moans and groans, as it doesn't recognize these sounds. The baby wants to be in a relaxed environment and see the bright light at the end. If the mother doesn't relax, the light tends to be covered. That is what my aunt told me. I know for a fact that really happens. If the mother is restless and moving around and moaning, the baby feels uncomfortable. Once a woman was in labour, no one was allowed to just walk around as the baby would be reluctant to come out.

Jaikku: My mother squirmed because she was in pain. We were told not to squirm as pain was inevitable. We were told that we might damage our *qitiq*, the small of the back, or our *kuutsinaak*, pelvic area, if we squirmed around. We would be advised not to squirm around even if the pain was severe as that was the only way the baby was going to come out.

What would happen if you scraped yourself?

Aalasi: When the skin is scraped in the vaginal area the skin does not heal the same way as other skin. If the mother was squirming around the baby might defecate and that could be dangerous.

Jaikku: In the days before there were doctors, if the baby defecated as it was coming out, the mother usually died because it is not possible to wipe the baby's first feces off. It is even hard to wipe it off the hands. The mother could not survive if the baby defecated internally. That does not seem to happen any more.

Aalasi: My aunt taught me a lot. My mother did not teach me as much as my aunt. My aunt used to tell me the truth. She used to advise me to pull on my hair when

I was about to push so I would be distracted from the pain. That was what she told me so I used to really pull hard on my hair. That really helped me, especially when it was my last push.

Were women in labour allowed to have their hair tied back?

Jaikku: Everything had to be loose.

Aalasi: All our hair decorations would be removed; we even had to remove our rings. That was how bossy the baby was; it would rule over everything.

Jaikku: The mother shouldn't have anything binding her.

Even braids had to be undone?

Jaikku: Yes. Everything had to be undone.

Aalasi: Today, women even deliver wearing earrings. Once we started nursing and the baby had diarrhea because it was reacting to something we ate, we would be advised not to eat what we thought the baby was reacting to.

Jaikku: Because the baby was exposed to whatever we had eaten through our breast milk, their stool was never the same.

What did the midwife do to the baby after the birth?

Aalasi: The midwife would shape the head of the newborn. She would also suck out the baby's nasal cavity with her mouth as there was no other means of doing it. Then she would spit out the contents. That's how this used to be done.

Jaikku: This was not considered disgusting. If the baby swallowed the mucous, it would take a long time for it to gain weight.

Aalasi: Some babies swallowed the mucous so they would have to be swatted on the bum to get them to start crying. They would take the baby by the feet and give it a swat on the buttocks or the back. After the baby started crying the nostrils would be sucked out.

Did this have to be done to all babies?

Aalasi: Yes, that was always done and the heads were always shaped by the midwife. They would always suck out the nostrils so that anything inside them such as amniotic fluid would be removed.

Do you think we were too quick to hand over the responsibility of delivering babies to the doctors?

Aalasi: This happened too quickly. We elders are dying now so you young people need to be taught these skills before it is too late. The government, including the doctors, were in too much of a rush to take over everything. We should have held on to our midwifery practices.

Jaikku: We practised midwifery until quite recently. I came to Iqaluit in 1953. I used to assist in deliveries as there were not many doctors who delivered babies back then. We first started giving birth in the American hospital here in Iqaluit. There also used to be deliveries in Niaqunnguq. [The small community of Apex located three kilometers from Iqaluit.]

Aalasi: Newborns were not all the same size. Some were really big so their mothers tore while giving birth. Bearded seal oil was the best for that. My mother would use that for women who had a tear.

Jaikku: Tears were caused if the opening was too narrow, especially if it was your first baby. That happened to me with my first delivery.

Aalasi: My mother and my aunt told me that women who had long labours were advised to talk about things they were worried about that might be preventing the baby from being born. If there were issues between the father and the mother the woman was advised to discuss them at that time.

Jaikku: They were given an opportunity to talk about their wrongdoings. The baby comes into being through the mother. If the mother was under stress of some sort, either from cheating or from keeping other secrets, she would have to admit this because the baby had to be comfortable coming out.

Aalasi: The baby had to come out to a peaceful, relaxed environment. That was the advice we received when we were learning about giving birth. We passed this knowledge down to our own children as well. We had to welcome the child into the

world, and take good care of it. We used to think that only those who could speak were capable of understanding, but babies understand. They know when there is joy or anger in a person's voice. In the past the whole camp would come and welcome the newborn by shaking the baby's hand.

Jaikku: Everyone was happy when a baby was born.

Aalasi: Because babies were born into a harsh environment and would be struggling to survive, we would have to welcome them.

Sometimes when we see a newborn, we comment in a loving way, "What a not-so-pretty baby." Is it okay to do this?

Aalasi: You have to consider it as a pretty baby. The baby is aware of what is being said. The baby is born with feelings so we have to welcome them. I was asked by a fourteen year-old-boy why his mother did not ask him if he wanted to be adopted as a newborn before she gave him away. It was especially hard for those that were mistreated when they did not want to be adopted in the first place. We were told to acknowledge newborns that were being carried by their mother. Our mothers advised us to lie down with our babies to comfort them as they knew the feel of our skin. When they woke up we weren't to just let them lie there. We needed to go to them and pick them up and talk to them. Even though we wanted to go out and do things alone at times, we would have to put the baby on our backs once in a while and take them out.

Jaikku: Even if we were in a rush to finish our sewing, if the baby became cranky from being inside too long we would have to take them out. Then they would calm down.

Aalasi: It is like their bodies needed fresh air. It was not what we wanted that decided our priorities, but what the baby wanted. You had to take a newborn out once in a while even when they were small. You couldn't take them with you everywhere either, as you might tire them out. If you took the baby out late at night when it was tired, it could develop deep-seated anger. We have lost some of the ways of raising our children. We tried to listen to what we were told back then.

Jaikku: I am deeply touched when I see babies that are left lying on a couch when their mothers should take the time to hold them. They should be in their presence all the time even when they are content. You can carry them in your *amauti* while you are going about doing your chores. If you carry them more on your back than in your arms, they will be less cranky. When babies got tired of being carried, they would start to get cranky so you had to lay them on the bed.

Aalasi: You need to hold them. They need to stay with the mother. I do not agree with babies being bottlefed lying down and having a blanket holding the bottle in place. You have to have patience and time to feed a baby. If the bottle is placed in the baby's mouth improperly, the baby gets bloated with air when they try to suck the bottle. These things hurt the baby's feelings even if they cannot voice them.

Jaikku: That is how babies start getting sick.

When a baby's feelings have been hurt, do they become more susceptible to being ill?

Aalasi: These days, babies don't get enough attention. You have to praise all the baby's accomplishments. Even the first time the baby stands up, it is a major accomplishment for them. You have to notice things like that. If a child feels like they are able, even after they have fallen, they will stand up and try again.

Jaikku: You have to be happy about a child's accomplishments. That is one of the ways of strengthening a child.

Aalasi: Then the child realizes they can do something. We were told when we went for walks with babies approaching a year old, to give them the roots of plants to suck on. Back then, we used more plants than we do today. The root is called an *amaaq*. Some are really thick. You break them off by pulling them out of the ground, then you remove any debris, and clean them before giving them to the baby. The baby would suck at the root and eventually fall asleep. They would enjoy the juice in the root. These days, babies are given pacifiers to suck rather than roots.

Are roots good for the body?

Aalasi: Yes, they help the body. That was what we used to give our babies. I still give them to my grandchildren in the summer. Let's go back to our discussion on delivery. I assisted a woman in labour at the hospital here who could not walk. She was from Ausuittuq. She now lives in Inukjuaq. She was in labour for a long time, almost for three days. She was induced on the third day but the baby was stillborn. It was in such an awful state it reminded me of a dead fox. The stomach was so sucked in there didn't seem to be any insides.

This was because the baby was dead. I started thinking about the advice my aunt and my mother had given me about stillborn babies. I decided to try to use their advice even if the doctors didn't agree with me. I spoke to the interpreter as I could not speak English and the doctors could not speak Inuktitut. The mother had already been told

that the baby had been born dead. When a baby is stillborn, you have to put the placenta on top of the mother's stomach as it is a live tissue. I placed the placenta on the tummy, and put the baby that has been dead for some time face down on top of the placenta. The baby had been stillborn for a while. I got the feeling that the doctors did not like what I was doing. I was told that the mother was tired and that they were going to take her back to her room when the baby's big toe started jerking. That baby who had been stillborn is still alive and well and holding down a job.

Jaikku: The stillborn baby came back to life?

Aalasi: The stillborn baby that looked like a dead fox was brought back to life by the placenta.

Jaikku: This happened when he was placed on what he had left earlier.

Aalasi: The baby's body reacted to something familiar. The baby recognized the warmth of his mother's placenta. The baby was in a tight space for too long a time so he ended up suffocating.

Jaikku: He died because of the delivery. He did not die of his own will.

Aalasi: My *angusiaq*, this boy I helped to deliver, is now a grown man. He is Anna Nungaq's son. She was still living in Ausuittuq when she had him. This increased my belief in trying anything, even if you aren't sure it's going to work. If something is not going to work, it's not going to work.

If you are going to revive a stillborn baby you need to put the placenta on the stomach of the mother and make sure the baby is face down on top of the placenta with its head pointing towards the feet of the mother.

Do you have to make sure it is positioned the way it came out?

Jaikku: The baby needs to be positioned the same way it came out, face down and pointing towards the feet of the mother.

Aalasi: Saimataq Pitsiulaaq from Kimmirut told me once that I seemed like a doctor without a degree. We elders have a lot of knowledge that is no longer being used.

Before you started trying to revive the baby, did you talk to the mother?

Aalasi: I told her what I was about to do. I told her that I had heard about this being done before. I just made sure she understood what I was about to do.

Was the mother comfortable with this?

Aalasi: Yes, she was fine. She is presently a seamstress. That was the last child she had. She was advised not to have any more children because of her disability.

Did women in labour need to be comfortable?

Aalasi: Women in labour had to be very comfortable. The midwives made them as comfortable as possible while they were delivering the baby.

Jaikku: They made sure that they were comfortable. When you are positioned at the back of a woman in labour, it can be very tiring but you try not to give in to it. You try and think about the woman in labour. My *arnaliat*, the girls I helped deliver, are now becoming old like me.

Aalasi: When I receive gifts from one of my *kisuliat*, one of the children I have helped deliver, it reminds me that I have other *kisuliat*. I have helped deliver so many babies.

Can you give us an example of how you would endow the baby with certain characteristics at birth?

Aalasi: I would say I wanted the girl to have long hair, or that I did not want her to fight back even when she was faced with a problem, or that I wanted her to be talkative, or that I didn't want her to leave things she was sewing unfinished. For a male child I would want him to be a successful hunter, and take some of his catch to the less fortunate. Those were the types of things we said to the newborn boy or girl.

Could you shape the eyes so they would look a certain way?

Aalasi: Yes, we could do that, by pretending to fix the facial features the way we wanted them to be. Sometimes it seemed to be effective.

Can you tell us about sipiniq, a sex transformation that occurs just before the baby is born?

Aalasi: Yes, this occurs when the labour is taking too long, or if the mother is writhing around too much, Then the baby's sex gets transformed. I have seen that myself first hand.

Were pregnant women forbidden to eat the tail ends of seaweed?

Aalasi: I have never heard that.

Jaikku: I do not know about that either.

I have heard that a man would have more sons if his wife ate seaweed while pregnant.

Aalasi: Yes, you are right. Akisu just told me last night that his sister was told to eat a lot of seaweed so that she would bear a lot of sons. You can have a daughter with a round face if you eat a seal *akuq*, the bone from around the hip area.

Were women forbidden to drink broth straight from the pot?

Aalasi: A woman who wished to have a dark-skinned child would drink broth straight from the pot. Men were not allowed to clean their plates with their tongue.

Jaikku: Or else when they went out hunting they would only find areas where the animals had already been caught.

If a man ate scraps of caribou fat, would he catch a lean caribou?

Aalasi: Yes, That is what Saamuuni, my mother-in-law used to say. If you ate scraps of caribou fat rather than pieces of it, you would catch a skinny caribou.

Jaikku: Boys would be told to carry babies on their backs so they could catch a whale easily when they became older.

Aalasi: I think what they say about this making them good whale hunters is true.

Jaikku: Men were advised not to wipe themselves with rocks after defecating. This was so their catches wouldn't sink underwater if the animal was too lean and didn't have enough fat to stay afloat.

Aalasi: If the wind was blowing for too long we were told to pull our pants down and expose our buttocks to the wind.

Jaikku: Children that were born as breech babies were told to do this.

Aalasi: Nuvija told us to do this when the wind blew for too long to clear up the weather and this seemed to work.

Were you supposed to do this while up on a hill?

Aalasi: Yes. We were supposed to do this at the top of a hill or at the highest point of the land. That is what we were told.

Jaikku: This was also done when it was foggy outside.

Aalasi: We were told to massage our stomachs when we were pregnant so the placenta would not stick, especially after the stomach hardened.

Were you able to tell if a child had a possible disability?

Aalasi: Yes. You could tell. If the baby was not able to hold its head up even though it was at a stage where it should have been able to, this was a cause for concern. People became suspicious if it took too long for a baby to hold its head up. They thought that it might have a disability or it might be deaf.

Is it true that babies were not allowed to hold tasiqqut, skin stretchers?

Aalasi: Yes. If they held skin stretchers they might end up becoming liars.

Jaikku: We didn't have much to entertain our babies with. We handed them almost anything to keep them occupied. Babies get bored holding the same things.

Aalasi: We didn't want our sons saying 'rrr' or their future wives would end up having a bad crotch. That's not really true. The only time we made that sound was when we had a sore throat and we gargled with salt. Salt water from the sea is the best to gargle with.

What was it that made a baby cross-eyed?

Aalasi: I have never heard about that.

Jaikku: I do not remember.

Some babies die while they are sleeping. Did that used to happen back then as well?

Aalasi: That used to happen then too. I have known of babies dying while they were asleep. Some babies just died in their sleep without being suffocated. We were advised, though, never to nurse the baby while in bed or we might suffocate them with our breast. The urge to sleep is very strong when you are nursing a baby.

Jaikku: We were told never to put our arms around babies while nursing in bed or else we might cover them with our breast and they could stop breathing.

Aalasi: We might hug them to death. They could suffocate that way.

Jaikku: Saanniq from Kinngait lost quite a number of babies in that manner. When she was a young woman, she was a very heavy sleeper. She was not the only person this happened to. I just mentioned her because I knew her personally.

Were the mentally challenged prevented from getting pregnant?

Aalasi: I recall hearing that the mentally challenged were not considered fit to be anyone's spouse so they were not fit to have children. I recall this being said about a woman in our camp.

Were funerals held for babies that died?

Aalasi: Always. We did not have wood for coffins so the grave would be made of rocks. We would cover the top with a slab of rock from the bed platform. We were very poor so that was how we used to bury babies.

Jaikku: We made sure the baby's body was well wrapped.

Aalasi: We tried to use our cleanest cloth to wrap the body. We would wash the deceased before burial. We would try and make a decent grave whether it was for a baby or for an adult.

Jaikku: A mother whose baby had died had to make sure she drained her breasts. If she didn't her breasts would become very full and the milk inside could harden. We could nurse another baby in the camp, not only if our baby had died, but if we had too much milk.

Aalasi: If there were clots of milk in the breasts this could become dangerous.

Jaikku: When I drained my breasts when I had too much milk, the milk had become salty. If the milk sat for an extended period of time it became salty. I know this for a fact because I removed my milk myself.

What would happen if a woman lost a lot of blood after giving birth?

Aalasi: In one case I know of, something cold was applied to the mother's stomach. The pillow was removed from behind her head and the feet were elevated.

Were women given hot broth and hot water when that happened?

Jaikku and Aalasi: Yes.

Jaikku: We would be given something to help our blood thicken.

Did anyone ever attempt birth control?

Aalasi: No. I never heard of anyone using any type of birth control. Even women who were really busy with lots of children did not use birth control as we had never heard of such a thing.

We did not have any diapers. It was quite recently that diapers were introduced. We were taught to make babies urinate by holding them on our laps with our legs spread. Some mothers kept themselves very clean considering. It was as if the baby never had an accident. We had no diapers whatsoever. Babies did have accidents once in a while.

Jaikku: We would try and anticipate the baby's needs. When hungry, the baby would start crying. After they had been fed we would position the baby to urinate. They would get used to the routine. If the baby was asleep on your back, you could tell they needed to urinate if they started squirming. Children who urinated routinely complained a lot if they wet themselves.

Have you heard that babies that had names picked before birth came out faster?

Aalasi: I have never heard that.

Jaikku: I do not know about that either.

I seem to recall hearing that if a woman was a sipiniq then she would give birth to sipiniit.

Sipiniq, sex transformation

Aalasi: If a woman was in labour for too long the baby could become a *sipiniq*.

Jaikku: I have heard that some become *sipiniit* after they were born, although that didn't happen very often. I do not think this only happens to babies who take a long time being born.

I didn't have a long labour and my daughter became a sipiniit.

Aalasi: That happens. Look at Kamiga who lives in Kinngait. You know who she is. The people who were going to adopt her went to see her, and they did not want to adopt her anymore when they found out the baby was a boy. The old lady Qiatsuk went to see the baby the next day and it had changed into a girl. The baby had become a *sipiniq*.

Jaikku: My mother-in-law was on her mother's back when she became a *sipiniq*.

Aalasi: The people who were adopting Kamiga thought they were being led on when they were told the baby had become a *sipiniq*. Kamiga was very pale. They said that even the penis was really pale.

Did those who were sipiniit end up being tomboys?

Aalasi: Those that ended up being tomboys were the ones named after a man. They were treated like boys because of whom they were named after.

Do some boys act like girls?

Jaikku: Some boys act like girls. Ujjualuk acted like a girl even when he was older. He used to remove his pants and urinate like a girl, even though he had a penis. He was treated like a girl. He had long hair even though he was a boy. He did not want to be a boy.

I never wanted to be a girl myself.

Aalasi: That is what happens. When we were at an elders' conference, we were advised not to treat a child the opposite gender as it can ruin the child's life. It can hurt the child.

Even though they are named after a certain person, we are not to treat them the opposite gender, especially when they get older. We have a girl that is named after Juusipi and I try to let her father know what can happen if he treats her like a boy. I make sure she knows that she is a girl.

Jaikku: My name is Jaikku even though I am a woman. I was named after my mother's father. Even though I was named after my grandfather my name has never bothered me.

Can you tell if a child had an illness or a disease by looking at the baby's skin?

Aalasi: Yes, you could tell if the baby had an illness or a disease if the skin was pale or looked odd, or if the child got goose bumps easily.

Is it okay if babies get goose bumps easily when they get cold?

Aalasi: Babies who get goose bumps when they are cold are fine.

Jaikku: Sometimes they can be caused by illnesses you cannot see with the eyes.

Aalasi: Yes, they could be caused by an internal illness, in their head, eyes or especially the heart.

Could it be in the bones?

Aalasi: Yes. It could be in the bone marrow. If a baby only had a very small amount of urine, it was a sign that the baby had a disease somewhere. You wouldn't notice the illness immediately, only later when they started walking. A child who urinates a fair amount is a healthy child. My mother used to tickle the soles of a baby's feet to see if there was a response. She said if there wasn't a reaction it meant there was something wrong with the baby.

Did some babies have jerky movements before getting sick?

Aalasi: Some would have jerky movements just prior to getting sick.

Jaikku: Some mothers said they noticed that their children were having jerky movements and not acting their usual selves before they got sick.

Breast milk

Was breast milk used to treat people who were snow-blind?

Jaikku: I have heard of it being used, but I have never used it myself.

Aalasi: My sister's father-in-law, Kakkik, used breast milk that had congealed in the cold. After it had congealed he applied it to his eyes. Maybe it worked. Milk darkens when it gets cold and thickens.

What was done if milk hardened in the breasts?

Aalasi: It is dangerous for milk to clot in the breast.

Jaikku: Yes, this is very dangerous. When it clots it hardens.

Aalasi: My mother treated a woman with clots in her breasts with hot water.

Jaikku: When it felt like my breasts were going to harden, I made sure I drained them completely.

Aalasi: There was one woman with infected breasts whose skin turned red. It even started peeling. We got some salt water from the sea as we did not like using *qallunaat* salt. Once it was heated, it was applied to both breasts and they started draining. Breast clots are very dangerous because they can get infected. You have to use salt water from the sea to treat this.

Did you add plain water to the salt water?

Aalasi: It is best to just use salt water.

How was it applied?

Aalasi: You applied it with a cloth.

Jaikku: You would just leave it on the breasts and it softened the hardened milk.

Aalasi: You had to leave the cloth there for quite a while. Once it softened, the milk would come out eventually.

Jaikku: Milk turned really salty after it had sat for a while.

If a woman adopted out her baby, how did she remove her breast milk?

Aalasi: She could nurse other babies if there were any in the camp. If she had another child, she could nurse it. Women who could not drain out their own milk nursed other babies.

How did they nurse babies when they were travelling?

Jaikku: When they were travelling in the winter, they did not have to remove the baby from the *amauti*. All they had to do was move the baby from back to front.

Aalasi: That is how they did it when they travelled by dogteam.

Jaikku: My right breast is larger than the left one. The breast that was not nursed from as often is smaller than the other one.

What else was breast milk used for?

Aalasi: Probably it had other uses. It was also used to soak dry mucous. It was excellent for that.

Jaikku: Yes. It used to be squirted into a baby's nostrils when they were dry. When both nostrils were plugged with mucous, they soaked them with milk. It did not take very long for this to work. I had completely forgotten about this. You have excellent questions concerning our old way of life.

Menstruation

When you started your menstruation for the first time, what did you use for menstrual pads?

Aalasi: It was hard to get hold of cloth.

Jaikku: Back then there was no cloth. We used caribou and rabbit skin.

Aalasi: Mainly rabbit skins. We made sure we had some handy that had been cleaned and dried in advance. They were also used during deliveries when necessary.

Jaikku: They were also used to wrap newborns.

Aalasi: They were also used for trim on a baby's hood.

Jaikku: They were also used for padding for the baby in the *amauti*. They were placed at the bottom of the *amauti* to absorb the baby's urine, and underneath the baby when it was lying down.

How did you use the rabbit skins as menstrual pads?

Aalasi: We kept them in place with our pants.

Did you use the skins more than once?

Aalasi: When babies peed on them, we would scrape off the urine and clean the skin. When we did not scrape them off right away, we would put them out to freeze. Then we would pound the frozen urine with a stick and it would come out easily. They were then put above the *qulliq* to dry as we would use them over and over again. They were well taken care of as we did not have very many.

Akisu: In the winter, they would be rubbed with snow before they were dried. The urine came right out.

Aalasi: It came right out and it dried up.

Jaikku: That is what we did with menstrual pads too.

Aalasi: I used rabbit skin with my oldest son Juili when he was a baby. He was born before there were any diapers. Eric was born after there were diapers. The only babies who had diapers at that time were the children of the Hudson Bay store manager.

Jaikku: I used rabbit skins with my oldest daughter Tuttuarjuk and my son Ijitsiaq. They did not have diapers when they were babies.

Aalasi: Children from that era did not use diapers. We used rabbit skins. We used to make them pee too.

Jaikku: When we made the baby pee, we never even washed our hands afterwards. We were really strong back then and not as susceptible to germs.

Akisu: I think it was around 1960 when cloth diapers became available.

Aalasi: We first received them in 1958 and 1959 from the store manager as he had children. We used to receive diapers and second-hand clothing from the store manager and the hospital in Pangniqtuuq. I think that was the first time diapers and plastic pants were used.

Jaikku: In communities where there were ministers, people were given used clothing. In Kimmirut, the minister there used to hand out clothing.

Delivery

Is the person who is behind the woman in labour called the sanaji as well as the arnaliaq?

Aalasi: The woman behind was called the *sanaji* when the baby was a girl.

Jaikku: She was called the *arnaquti* when the baby was a boy.

Was it only the one behind the woman in labour who called the baby her arnaliaq, not the others assisting in the delivery?

Jaikku: Yes, very much so.

Aalasi: Nowadays, even women who aren't present consider the baby to be their *kisuliaq*; an *arnaliaq* if it was a girl and an *angusiaq* if it was a boy.

I always thought that the woman who saw the baby first was the one who had the arnaliaq if it was a girl and would be called arnaquti. Am I wrong?

Jaikku: That was not how it worked in our community.

Akisu: That is not how it works according to our customs. The child would call me *angutiquti*. He or she would not call me *sanaji* because I am a male. My older brother Harry delivered his wife's child alone. People from Kinngait, Kimmirut and Iqaluit use *sanaji* and *arnaquti*. These days I hear midwives being called *arnaliaq* when in actual fact it is the female child that is the *arnaliaq*. I have heard some of the children she helped deliver call Aalasi their *arnaliaq*.

Jaikku: If it's a boy, the midwife calls him her *angusiaq* and if it's a girl she calls her her *arnaliaq*.

Akisu: In the Pangniqtuuq area the midwife and the child both use the term *arnaliaq* to address each other.

Aalasi: The one behind gets to call the baby her *arnaliaq*. The first time I saw a woman delivering in a squatting position I thought she must be in a lot of pain. I never saw that in Pangniqtuuq. I was afraid the baby was just going to drop out of the mother and die.

Akisu: When my wife went into labour for the first time it was during the afternoon and she still had not delivered by night-time. Even though there were midwives present, my brother Harry went behind her, and squeezed her and that is how the baby came out.

Jaikku: Men are really sturdy to have behind you while in labour. Once I had a man behind me during labour. It was very comfortable to have a male there rather than a female, because you could really push your whole back against him.

Akisu: I guess a man's back is more solid.

Did you have someone at your back if you were delivering on your side?

Aalasi: I always gave birth on my side.

Jaikku: It is only after we had the hospital, that I gave birth lying on my back for the first time. I gave birth to my other children in a squatting position. If a woman gave birth lying on her side, they would put something in between her legs to keep them from closing.

Aalasi: Yes. A *kasujaikkuti*, something to keep the legs open, was made for this purpose. They would also place wood in between the knees.

My daughter's father was behind me when she was born. Would he be considered the sanaji?

Aalasi: Because he is not a woman, but a man, he would be called the *angutiquti*.

Was the person behind in charge of the delivery?

Aalasi: It seemed as if the person behind was in charge of those assisting in the delivery.

Was she the advisor?

Jaikku: She was the one who kept the woman comfortable.

Aalasi: Yes, she was the one who kept everybody informed.

Jaikku: Those who had experience being behind a woman in labour were very comfortable because they knew what they were doing.

Aalasi: Yes, some were able to hold their position. Those who were less experienced tended to move around.

Jaikku: My grandmother was behind me for a while, but she was not able to maintain her position.

Aalasi: The person behind me was Nuijaut's grandmother. She was an excellent person to have behind me. She did not move a bit, not even once. She just hummed softly.

Did they try their best not to move around? If you were behind a woman in labour, did you try not to move?

Aalasi: Some women were in labour for a long time. Even though the woman at the back got tired, she tried not to move. She would sit at the back and have the woman in labour lean against her. I delivered Taiviti when I was alone. It was only after Eric's head and chest came out that someone came. Some of my babies came so fast!

Jaikku: Maybe my cousin Akisu used to be quick leaving the *iglu* or tent so you had quick deliveries. Perhaps his mother taught him to do that.

Aalasi: Saamuuni used to advise us to face the west. Your head should face that way. That is what Saamuuni taught us. I found it more comfortable if I had to lie down. Something would be placed to use as a foot support, a *tukirummiag*.

Would someone be holding you in place?

Jaikku: Yes.

Aalasi: We used to use an *agvik*, a sealskin scraping board as a pillow. You needed to make sure to pull your hair when you pushed.

Jaikku: The thighs would be positioned as well.

Aalasi: You would put pressure on the foot support when you pushed.

Did your legs have to be even?

Jaikku: Yes, they had to be level.

Aalasi: Yes, they had to be level or else the woman might get injured.

Nowadays we are told to keep our legs open.

Jaikku: An *allaangaguti*, something to keep your legs spread, would be made and placed between your knees to keep your legs open.

Do you think the position we are in at the hospital nowadays is for the benefit of the doctors?

Aalasi: We midwives find the procedure used today uncomfortable!

When the woman was in labour, did you match the amount of pressure you applied with the intensity of the contraction?

Aalasi: I would monitor the contractions. When the woman's stomach hardened I would apply more pressure. As soon as the contractions started, we advised her to start pushing. In the hospital, women have to wait and are told not to push.

Would the woman be pulling her hair while she was pushing?

Aalasi: Yes, I found it comforting to pull my hair when I was pushing. I was taught to pull my hair when my baby was coming out.

I gave birth on a seat that looked like a portable toilet. It was made just for birthing.

Aalasi: Where?

In Montreal at a birthing centre not at a hospital. If a woman was ready to give birth in a squatting position, would someone be down there?

Jaikku: You would be pushing on the person's knees with your hands. She would be supported by two women at her sides. They would be holding her hands.

Would someone catch the baby as it was coming out?

Jaikku: Yes. You would check to see where the head was, and if the baby was ready to come out, you would break the water.

Aalasi: I have burst the water with my nail many times. I even used a small knife once because I could not break *Qummuattug*, *Nuvija's* wife's, water by pinching the sac, because it was too thick. I used a knife to break the water. It was not painful for her. She did not even feel it.

Make sure you invite me the next time you are delivering a baby.

Aalasi: I really like to be of assistance. I have delivered many babies.

I am going to deliver like that next time.

Aalasi: You will find it so comfortable you will want to keep delivering in that position.

It was much more comfortable for me to give birth with a midwife.

Aalasi: You would have to remove your rings and bracelets, and loosen your hair. Nothing should be tied. We used to be advised to untie our laces. I didn't agree much with the doctors. We delivered babies at home because the mothers wanted to deliver there. One mother did not receive any Family Allowance cheques for two whole years because her baby was born at home.

Jaikku: They didn't have much sense.

Aalasi: The government was looking for any way to control Inuit. They didn't believe in our traditional ways.

Jaikku: That is why people did not get their cheques. They were using that as a deterrent to having babies at home.

Aalasi: They wanted everybody to give birth at the hospital. In Nunavik, Inuit are very fortunate to have the power to deliver their own babies.

I gave birth at a birthing center in Montreal which was part of a research project. There is a birthing center in Puvirnituk in Nunavik now.

Aalasi: Inuit are in charge of deliveries there and they do it the Inuit way.

I want to make sure this is known.

Jaikku: Before he even knew I was pregnant, my cousin said he was going to assist me when I was giving birth. I was separated from my husband during my first pregnancy for almost a year because I did not want to leave my mother behind. I used to get my way most of the time because my parents loved me very much. We were separated for a year and my cousin only found out that I was pregnant after he was told that I was in labour. He got back from a trip to the trading post after I had given birth.

Premonitions

Aalasi: If and when you have daughters or nieces who get pregnant, you will feel it in your breasts too.

My mother said she felt that way.

Aalasi: That happens to us when our daughters get pregnant.

Could some people predict things before they happened?

Aalasi: If your eye twitches it means you are going to see someone you haven't seen for a while.

Does it matter which one of your eyes twitches?

Aalasi: Either one. Our eye twitches when we are going to see a friend or someone we haven't seen for a while. If your skin twitches anywhere else, it is a sign that someone is going to die.

Jaikku: You would be considered to be *qilualatsijuq*, twitching for a reason.

I have heard that another sign that a person is going to die is if you see the person larger than he actually is. Have you ever heard that?

Aalasi: I have heard that before. For example, if I saw Akisu and he was like a giant, it would be because he was going to die soon.

That happened to someone in Pangniqtuuq. The person only remembered the incident after the person had died.

Aalasi: Yes, that is what happens. The person gets larger, *angillimajuq*.

What do you mean by angillimajuq?

Aalasi: It is when someone appears larger than they actually are because they are going to die. It is also said that if a person is always rushing about it is because they will have a short life and they are trying to get everything done before their life ends. It is also said that if a person grows too fast for their age, it is because they will have a short life.

Could it also mean that a child would get a sibling?

Aalasi: They used to say that if a baby smiled, he would get a sibling.

If a baby has two kajjik, swirls of hair on the crown of the head, did this mean the baby was making room for another?

Aalasi: What I have heard is that if there were two swirls on the head it meant they were almost twins.

Sailua said my daughter was making room for another because her swirl was at the side of her head. Could newborns' faces be shaped at birth too?

Aalasi: Yes, you could pretend the baby had long hair; you could make droopy or large eyes, or you could make the baby have an upturned nose.

Jaikku: The midwife would do this to her *arnaliaq* or *angusiaq*. She would pretend to remove the parka from a baby boy so he would be very capable.

I saw my child's chin being pushed in and he ended up with a dimple.

Aalasi: That could be done too. Also if the hair was parted in the middle, the child would have a nice part.

I was also told that you could lick a baby's eyelashes so they would be longer. I did that to my daughter and she now has long eyelashes.

Aalasi: Yes, that could also be done.

Infrequently used words

Are there names for the creases in the palm of your hand?

Jaikku: They are called *sanatuilutait*.

Have you heard that if people have long creases they are not very creative?

Aalasi: Yes, I think that is so. I am going to check my daughter's because she does not like making anything, although she is good at other things. She is a good woman.

Jaikku: That is just a saying.

Aalasi: In Puvirnituk in Nunavik, I saw a lady with six nipples.

How is that possible?

Aalasi: She had one normal pair and the others were not as big, but they were all nipples. The smaller ones were on the bottom and the bigger ones were on top.

My daughter has an extra pair of nipples. Were children checked to see if they were going to be creative?

Jaikku: Yes, they would check a baby's *sanatuilutat*.

Were boys also checked for this?

Jaikku: Yes. They did that with all babies.

What is this lump on the throat called?

Aalasi: We used to call the Adam's apple a *qallunaujaruti*, something that enables you to speak English.

Jaikku: They say you have a nice voice if you have a lump there.

Aalasi: Some people don't have a lump there.

Jaikku: Yes, only males have them. I must be a bit masculine, because I have a small one.

What is the real word for this in Inuktitut?

Jaikku: It is called a *qingannguaq*, which means it's like a nose.

The Adam's apple of a caribou looks like a nose.

Aalasi: Yes. You can put it on top of your nose and it fits.

I started crying when I saw my mother, whom I call my ai, my sister-in-law, with a caribou qingannguaq on her nose. What are the muscles in your jaws called?

Aalasi: They are called *kimmautiik*.

Akis: A *kimmiquaq* is the lump at the back of the hind feet of land animals.

What part of your body is the iituaq?

Jaikku: It is the name for the shortest rib in your body. They say that if your thumbs are really twisted, you can make things really well.

Are people with twisted thumbs said to be very talented?

Jaikku: Yes. They are said to be creative if their thumbs are twisted. I am always ashamed of mine. My *sauniq*, the person I'm named after, used to use the word. One who is waiting to see something is *takummisuttuq*.

Footnotes

¹ *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.