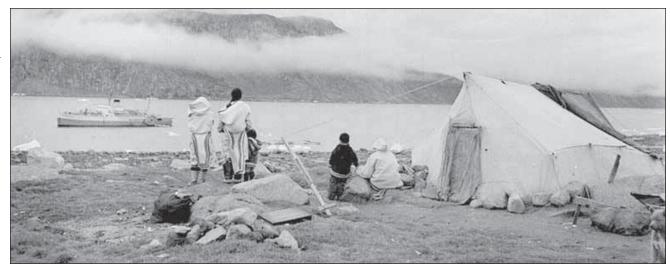
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In the Qikiqtani region, Inuit were tested for tuberculosis on the repurposed Coast Guard Ship C.D. Howe. The vessel is seen here near Pangnirtung in 1951.

photo courtesy of W. Doucette/National Film Board of Canada/Library and Archives Canada



# In pursuit of resolution

## Families continue to grieve loved ones who died of tuberculosis in the south

In the year 1956, it is estimated, one in seven Inuit contracted tuberculosis and subsequently resided in a sanatorium – about 1,600 in total, yet there are no definitive numbers. A resulting horror was the federal government's practice of burying those who did not recover at gravesites near the many sanatoriums throughout southern Canada.

The tragedy of the epidemic that swept through the North and affected so many Inuit families is now well-documented in research and books, including in work completed by the Qikiqtani Truth Commission, which documented stories of the illness and its wide-ranging effects on families.

But these are much more than tales told of the past. Some have found the graves of their loved ones, and therefore closure, but for many the search continues. Yet others have arrived at uneasy peace.

> by Michele LeTourneau Northern News Services Nunavut

Jack Anawak's weeks-old grandson carries Anawak's mother's name, Piovaa.

For Anawak, this is both moving and miraculous. Since the birth of the boy, he's received news about where his mother Piovaa might be buried.

"So since then, I call him my miracle baby," said Anawak.

His mother was taken from Naujaat when Anawak was six. He now thinks she was sent to Clearwater Lake Indian Hospital, a repurposed United States Army field hospital built in 1943 and run by the Sanatorium Board of Manitoba on behalf of the federal government.

"Two years later, March of 1958, we got word that she had passed away," Anawak recalled. "They didn't tell us where she was buried."

At least one-third of all Inuit were infected with tuber-culosis (TB) in the 1950s. Piovaa was one.

In Naujaat, as Anawak and his friend Piita Irniq remember, Inuit were gathered by the federal Department of Health at the Roman Catholic church, where everyone had to strip off their shirts as a group – men, women and children.

"Then they would go back to wherever they came from, we never knew where they came from, and find out who had TB. They would send a message back to the Roman Catholic mission or the Hudson Bay Company people, identifying the people who had to go south for treatment," recalled Irniq.

In the Qikiqtani region, Inuit would be tested on the repurposed Coast Guard Ship C.D. Howe, and for some years those who tested positive were not brought ashore to say goodbye to their families.

Suzie Muckpah recalls making a promise to her own mother Elizabeth when she was 12 or 13, the same age Elizabeth was when her mother Tuungaaluk was taken from Pond Inlet.

"My mother used to tell me a story about how she longed for her mother. I started questioning, asking what had happened to her," said Muckpah. "She said she was sent away on a ship because she had TB and was close to becoming blind."

The young Elizabeth waited and waited for Tuungaaluk to come home, watching for every plane. She took on her mother's duties in her absence, caring for her siblings, sewing her father's clothes.

"Many years passed and she still waited and waited. She would tell me stories of what she used to do with her mother. I had a mindset: I was going to find my grandmother's grave. I wanted my mother to have peace of mind. I told myself, at 13, I would go on a mission, when I was finally able to speak properly in English and was more educated," said Muckpah, whose family later moved from Pond to Arviat.

"I loved my mother dearly. I promised her that one day I would find her. I will have closure for you, mother."

Muckpah cries.

### **Treatment could last years**

Tuberculosis treatment for Inuit could last several years, said Irniq, who recalls his parents spending a year at a sanatorium 200 miles southwest of Winnipeg.



photo courtesy of Jack Anawak

Jack Anawak, seen here as a child with his mother Piovaa, has been searching for his mother's gravesite for years. She was removed from Naujaat to be treated for tuberculosis in the south when he was six years old.

**SEARCH** 

For Peace

This is the first instalment

"One person from Naujaat spent four years. So many of them spent many years," said Irniq. He was one of the lucky ones: his parents returned.

Record-keeping of burials in the 1950s and '60s depended

mostly on the sanatoriums. Some kept good records, others did not.

"There were so many sanatoriums," said Irniq.

In Naujaat, those to be sent to the south were given a brown envelope to wear around their necks bearing their name and disc

number.

"In Churchill, the government agents would find them by reading the brown envelope around their neck, and let them continue down to Winnipeg. When they got to Winnipeg, a government agent met them at the airport. Once they had them there, they would put them on a bus and bring them to a sanatorium, where they would spend months and years being treated for TB," recalled Irniq.

"You have to remember, Inuit did not speak a word of English when they were taken south. They had no translator at the TB sanatoriums. And the southern personnel did not speak Inuktitut in those years."

Which makes finding the gravesites of those who did not return all the more difficult.

Some graves have a person's name, or even the names of two people. Some have just disc numbers, and some have nothing at all.

Muckpah did keep her promise to her mother. When she finally set out on her mission, it took her over a year.

"I did a lot of digging," she said.

The gravesite is located in Winnipeg, marked only with Tuungaaluk's disc number.

Muckpah, took her moth-

Muckpah took her mother and her aunt to visit their mother's grave in 1991.

"It was very emotional. They finally had the sense of closure. There were tears of joy and grief."

Muckpah pauses, as her own tears flow.

"It hurt to see my mother in pain. It was so touching. When I think about it I still tear up, even though my mother's been

gone for eight years."

Muckpah says it made a difference for Elizabeth to finally be able to say goodbye to Tuungaaluk.

"It changed her. Now I know why she used to be so angry at times. She was in pain, longing for her mother from the age of 12. But I felt they had a sense of closure because she was different after that. It was as though there was a big load lifted off her shoulders."

It was a big load off her own shoulders, as well. Muckpah also carried anger.

### 'We're human beings'

"We're human beings, not dogs," she said.

"But I needed to let that go. I had to back off. It happened before I was born."

Anawak says under colonialism, Inuit were not really considered people.

"We were not important enough for our people to be sent home. We were not important enough to do what would be done for anybody else – which is bring the body home."

Anawak has received messages from his mother, such as in 1988 when an aunt relayed that Piovaa had told her to "make sure Jackie always has kamiik."

"It was like a message from her 30 years after she'd passed away," he said.

Another 20 years passed, and Anawak attended a burial in Naujaat. A woman from Iglulik recognized that he was Piovaa's adopted son.

"She happened to be down there 50 years ago and she said (my mother) was always talking about me. Again, a message from her that she loved me," said Anawak.

Yet another person, an elder, told Anawak he noticed how Piovaa always used to hold her son's hand when they walked.

"It's heartwarming, but at the same time I was still looking for where she might be buried. Over the years, it's been constantly on my mind."

Facebook helped Anawak with his latest lead, when he posted about his grandson's birth and naming.

Through word of mouth and shared stories, Anawak has learned Piovaa may be buried outside The Pas, close to where the Clearwater Lake sanatorium was located, six hours north of Brandon, where Anawak originally thought she might be.

"Apparently there is a reserve right near The Pas where they buried Inuit who passed away down there. Ever since then I've had my hopes up, planning a trip to The Pas," said Anawak, adding a cousin who found her grandmother's gravesite at The Pas also recently sent him a message.

Now Anawak is in contact with someone there who has offered to help find Piovaa.

"It's a nice feeling to think I may be able to put closure to that whole thing. I hope."

He cannot predict how he will react when he finally finds his mother.

"I think about what my cousin Cathy said when she found her grandmother. She got to the grave, and she collapsed. So I think in those terms. If I am looking at my mother's grave ... I ... think it will be joy and grief, and everything, in that moment.

"In one way, I'm very hopeful. In another way, it's like, 'I'm so sorry I did not find you sooner."

# Addressing painful memories

### Cost is high for grieving families searching for graves

In the year 1956, it is estimated, one in seven Inuit contracted tuberculosis and subsequently resided in a sanatorium - about 1,600 in total, yet there are no definitive numbers. A resulting horror was the federal government's practice of burying those who did not recover at gravesites near the many sanatoriums throughout southern Canada.

The tragedy of the epidemic that swept through the North and affected so many Inuit families is now well-documented in research and books, including in work completed by the Qikiqtani Truth Commission, which documented stories of the illness and its wide-ranging effects on families.

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> by Michele LeTourneau Northern News Services Nunavut

Family members who are searching for the graves of loved ones taken south for tuberculosis treatment are mostly on their own. Information is picked up here and there, wherever they can find one piece of the puzzle that will lead to the next. It's an emotional ordeal, with the financial cost incurred by mourning family members.

Between 300 and 350 Inuit were sent to the Mountain Sanatorium in Hamilton, Ont. for treatment, including Sheba Pikuyak and Joanasie Akumalik's grandfather Pauloosie Akumalik.

'In 1957, (he) was sent off to Hamilton for TB, and he never returned home," Pikuyak said.

"His children became

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This is the final instalment

of a two-part feature

orphans and the youngest of the siblings, the late Elijah Percy Pikuyak (my father) never saw his again. In the 1980s Percy decided

to put closure to his late dad's death. He went to Hamilton and visited cemeteries and spoke with funeral directors."

Pikuyak, of Hall Beach, says her father, who had limited English, found the gravesite, though there is very little detail of his search. What is known with certainty is the visit was part of his healing.

"He believed that in order to help others, he must heal first. He later became a counsellor helping with the youth and adults," said Pikuyak.

"This was all on his own expense. He paid for travel and accommodation all on his own."

Then in 2005, his brother Mucktar Akumalik, of Arctic Bay, also wanted to visit the gravesite. Joanasie Akumalik was living in Ottawa at the time, and took his father and uncle to Hamilton. Finding the grave again took some detective work and wrong turns – but they found it.

"My uncle Percy, being a lay minister with the Anglican church, wanted to read burial services from the Bible. So he did. We said prayers," said Akumalik.

Akumalik, and his father and uncle, bore the brunt of the costs of their trip.

"They paid for their own expenses, own airfare, accommodations, family members donated Aeroplan miles, and they used what little savings they had and booked their tickets," said Pikuyak.

"It was only in Iqaluit when the two men were overnighting, and Mucktar was invited over for a Qikiqtani Inuit Association banquet, that they gave him \$1000 when they learned that he was going to go to Hamilton to go see his father's grave."

The three, who had brought tea and bannock to the grave, drank and ate in Pauloosie's memory.

"I told them, 'It's there. We found it. Your father's

grave.' That's when they started to cry, started talking about who he was, how he was, how they missed him. It was amazing

... there were a lot of geese around us. It

made the visit more serene, which was beautiful." Pikuyak says the search

continues for her maternal grandmother. "One among many Inuit

who have never been found. Many Inuit don't know where their loved ones are as they never came home," she said.

### Where to look?

As a young girl, Quluaq Pilakapsi hoped her mother Emily Epiksaut would return

home to Coral Harbour. Then she hoped she would one day find her grave. The last time she saw her mother through was the bubble window of a small plane. She has no photos.

remember her telling me she went to Churchill for medical (treat-

ment) and she would look in the cemetery, looking for her my mum was there."

"He believed that in order to help others, he must heal first."

Sheba Pikuyak

Pilakapsi said: "I think



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Brothers Percy Pikuyak, left, and Mucktar Akumalik, seen here in the early- to mid-2000s, had the opportunity to visit their father's grave in Hamilton, Ont. together in 2006. They shared tea and bannock with Mucktar's son Joanasie while saying their final goodbyes.



The marker for Pauloosie Akumalik's grave in Hamilton, Ont., around which his sons had tea and reminisced about the man who left such an absence in their lives after he was taken to the Mountain Sanatorium in Hamilton for tuberculosis treatment.

But she also mentioned

Clearwater Lake and Nin-

ette sanatoriums. And so

Osmond's search began, first

online, then with a spatter of

e-mails to churches and cem-

etery caretakers in Brandon,

called the hospitals, the Lung

"I e-mailed everyone. I

The Pas and Ninette.

mother's name," said daughter Brenda Osmond.

"But she never found any-

Then, one recent Christmas, a fateful

trip took place.
"We took took my mum to Brandon for Christmas, to in-laws, and when we were driving by the old

Association in Winnipeg," said Osmond. The Coral Harbour health centre had no record of Epiksaut, neither did Vital Statissanatorium my tics in Rankin. Finally she husband said, tried NWT Vital Statistics. It turns out the authorities 'That's the old Brandon sanaof the day spelled her name torium right Eepikshoot. there," said 'They had a list of the

Osmond. E-numbers with the correct (for then) spelling of her name and date of birth.

That's how I applied for her death certificate in Manitoba," said Osmond.

In the late '80s and early '90s, the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) ran the short-lived Medical Patient Search Project. The program no longer exists, but the GNWT still accepts requests for help.

"If a request was processed, we would review our records and provide what information was possible under ATIPP (the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act)," said manager of communications with the Department of Health Damien Healy, who noted while his government retains all historical records prior to 1999, "most of the deaths of

these persons did not occur in the NWT, the NWT would not have death records."

"If we received a request, we would do our best to help," he said.

The Government of Nunavut's Department of Health says it encourages anyone looking for information to contact its office of patient

relations. "The patient relations office will work with the client on a case-by-case basis depending on their case needs. They may inquire with an Inuit organization should it be appropriate or utilize other methods," said acting manager of communications Nadine Purdy.

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When Quluag Pilakapsi arrived with her family at the Oak Indian Reservation Cemetery near Griswold, about 30 minutes outside Brandon, Man., she discovered most graves did not have names, while some had dates. She chose one to commemorate her mother Emily Epiksaut, who died of tuberculosis at the Brandon Sanatorium.

**Continue** from previous page

### 'Let's find them'

A federal program to help families with their searches has been in the works since 2008. A working group called Nanilavut, or Let's Find Them, was established in 2010.

Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) chairs the group, with membership from Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. (NTI), Makivik Corp., Inuvialuit Regional Corp., the Nunatsiavut Government, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK), Pauktuutit, Kivalliq Inuit Association, Kitikmeot Inuit Association, Qikiqtani Inuit Association, Government of Nunavut, Government of Northwest Territories and Health Can-

"Since 2010, INAC has undertaken a collaborative approach with Inuit partners

through the Nanilavut Working Group. INAC is continuing to work with partners on finalizing the database and determining next-steps," stated INAC spokesperson Stephanie Palma via e-mail.

"The Nanilavut Working Group determined the research priorities with the ultimate goal of locating the burial locations of Inuit who passed away while undergoing medical treatment during the tuberculosis epidemic of the 1940s-1960s."

Palma said comprehensive research has been conducted at Library and Archives of Canada, departmental records, provincial archives, religious archives, key informants and publications, as well as outreach to various cemeteries across Canada. Research conducted by working-group members was also included in the find-

Palma could not say if funding for families would be part of the program.

"As the new Inuit-Crown relationship moves forward, the Government of Canada is committed to take action to address painful memories of the past, including relocations and the treatment of Inuit during the tuberculosis epidemic of the 1940s-60s."

Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. declined to comment on details.

'Negotiations are still happening and NTI would prefer not to comment until things are finalized and proper supports are put in place. This is a difficult subject for many families."

ITK also chose not to participate in this story.

### 'We picked a grave'

Osmond did receive Epiksaut's death certificate. She learned her grandmother had

died at the approximate age of 33, that she'd been treated at the Brandon Sanatorium, and that she was buried at the Oak Indian Reservation Cemetery about 30 minutes

from Brandon. "She was there. She passed away there. They didn't send her body back. They brought it to an Indian reservation," said Osmond.

"We planned to take my mum - I think it was nine months later. My mum wanted to go right away, but we had no money. We needed to save and plan," said Osmond.

Another bit of information came to Osmond.

"One of my friends has a book by a nurse who went to Coral Harbour to work. She talks about the first patient she sent out for TB - which was my grandmother. She had just received news from Brandon Sanatorium that

the first person she sent out passed away. She had to go tell my grandpa, with someone from the community, that his wife had passed away," said Osmond.

The words describe Osmond's mother's reaction she is Koolooah in the nurse's memoir.

Osmond and her mother read the passage, and Pilakapsi said, "Yes – I remember crying a lot because I wanted my mum."

Last year, when Pilakapsi was 72, Osmond and other family members took her to Winnipeg, driving to Brandon, then Griswold.

"We asked at the band office. But they don't have any records of who is in the cemetery," said Osmond.

As Osmond describes it, the cemetery had two sections - the right side was Anglican and the left side was Catholic. The graves

of sanatorium patients were separated by a gap, in the front area.

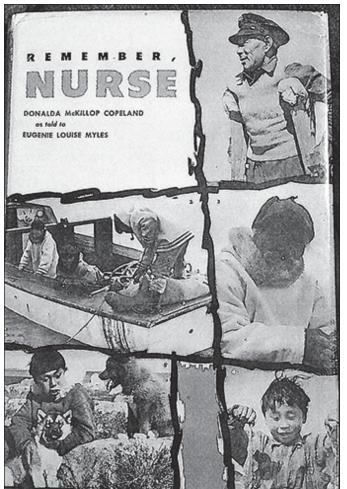
The family was taken aback - most of the graves had no names, only dates.

"We never found it," said Osmond.

'We were walking around looking for the grave, looking at all the graves ... I asked, 'What are we going to do now?' My mum said, 'We're going to pick a grave. We're going to put the flowers there.'

Pilakapsi set the flowers down by a cross and said what she wanted to say to the mother she'd lost so long ago.

"One of my sisters that came with us really believes the grave we picked is her grave. Because ... when we got there it was quite windy. It was overcast. When we picked the grave, it got sunny for a few minutes. And the wind died down."



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Cover of Remember, **Nurse** by Donalda McKillop Copeland, a book published in 1960.

photo courtesy of Brenda Osmond

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As soon as the storm subsided, once again we seumied about in our regular duties, with Harold re-opening the school and the hunters preparing again to get away to their trap-lines.

Late one November evening came a message to me from Brandon Sanatorium in Manitoba. Eepikshout, the wife of Santainna or Sandy, and the first woman I had sent out to hospital, had died. I called on Tommy to accompany me as I went to break the sad news to her husband. As we moved across the snow, I thought of the couple's unfortunate children. After her mother had left, six-year-old Koolooah had some quite regularly to school with her older sister Koochuk. But Harold reported that the child was quite unhappy and distusbed. The slightest happening might cause her to burst into a flood of tears. Day after day the littlest one, a pathetic figure about three years old, would stand crying at the school door. Harold of sourse pesmitted him to enter and to enjoy the comfort of sitting beside one of his older sisters.

So with particular misgivings and special sadness for her motherless family, I now entered Santainna's wretched shack. Briefly I broke the news to the man.

A page from the book Remember, Nurse by Donalda McKillop Copeland. Copeland, who worked as a nurse in Coral Harbour in the 1950s, recalls having to tell Emily Epiksaut's family that she had died of tuberculosis far away from home.