

Being Creenuk

By Julia George

I live in a community with two names; Whapmagoostui/Kuujuarapik. In our community, we have separated years ago as two communities instead of one, the Inuit side and the Cree side, even though we live in one area. Since the beginning of our ancestors settling here, both parts of our community have been against with each other because of previous wars our ancestors have had. We have separate schools, housing, gyms, radio stations, police stations, fire stations and clinics.

My father is Cree and my mother is Inuk, making my siblings and I, Creenuk. Being Creenuk, a mix of half Cree and half Inuk, has made a huge impact in our lives because we cannot speak in Cree or in Inuktitut. In my childhood, I struggled immensely with learning each language in separate periods in my life. To this day, I still struggle with learning each language.

I myself have been transferred to each school. I have gone to the Cree school in my early childhood. I struggled with learning the Cree language. In result I've been bullied in a way I thought I wasn't good enough to be a proud Cree.

The bullying got so out of hand; my parents decided I would transfer to the Inuit school instead to get away from the bullying. But when I got there, I didn't know how to read, write or speak in Inuktitut. I cannot read or write in both languages, only a little in Inuktitut.

At one point in my time at this school, I've had my Inuktitut teacher make fun of me during class in front of other students. It made me feel stupid and insecure. I was only able to copy down the words she wrote on the board. The teacher asked each student to read a few words out loud from our workbooks. When it was my turn, I wanted to try but I knew I would be teased for even trying, so I didn't say a word. Then she said "Wow, she could only write and not read." then laughed at me. My classmates laughed at me as well. Which led me to believe I wasn't good enough for my Inuit culture.

I felt like a failure. I felt rejected. I felt like I couldn't connect or communicate with my other fellow Inuks. I wish I could say I've learned Inuktitut in the past eight years of my time here at Asimauttaq School but I haven't.

Our ancestors having no choice to learn the English language, they started losing their own languages, Inuktitut and Cree. That may be why lots of Inuk and Cree are losing their languages as well. Or parents

haven't been really told or telling their children how important our languages are. Whatever the reason it may be, it is important to keep our language going because it's obviously a part of us, our culture. Just like the language you speak is important to you because how else are you going to communicate? Sure, maybe through another language but because it is a part of our culture and tradition, we'd like to keep it thriving as long as we can. Otherwise, we have lost a part of our culture and ourselves.

My siblings have struggled and are struggling as well with our cultural languages. My two older sisters have transferred to each school and had the same Inuktitut teacher who would try to put them down as well. My two little brothers have transferred from one school to the other countless times for the past few years of their lives. For the same reason; being bullied for being different and for not understanding our cultures. My two older sisters have dealt with the same situation as well. We all have.

We have felt rejected, insecure, isolated and ashamed. Ashamed of who we are. As we get older, wiser, we learn to accept that we are different. We are hybrids of two very unlikely, beautiful cultures. That it is okay to be different. It is okay to be Creenuk.

We get benefits of being Creenuk because we are both. We are allowed to choose which beneficiary side we can be on. We are able to learn each culture and traditions from our family members on each side. We are able to live up to each traditions our cultures have. We are able to understand our ancestors and the life they had lived. It is important that we the new generations keep our traditions and cultures going.

I will not point fingers as to why we do not understand our cultural languages we are "supposed to understand". I will not blame my parents. I will not blame my teachers. But most of all, I will not blame myself. I have embraced two extraordinary cultures into my life and into my heart. Maybe we do not understand our cultural languages but that does not mean we are not Inuk or Cree. We are Creenuk by heart, blood, mind and soul. I am a proud Creenuk and I will continue to embrace two marvelous cultures as long as I live.