

# Listen to the elders

## Inuit have much to teach us about how the climate is changing, and how to adapt to our new world

BY ZACHARIAS KUNUK, CITIZEN SPECIAL NOVEMBER 5, 2010

I was born in 1957 in a sod house at Kapuivik on the northwest coast of Baffin Island, when my family still lived as my ancestors lived for 4,000 years. As a child, I fell asleep with eight brothers and sisters listening to our mother tell stories and legends that teach what every good person should know. In the mornings I woke up on my pillow of frozen sealskin kamiks and hurried outdoors to check the weather, as all Inuit children were taught.

I was nine years old, learning to train my own dogteam, when my parents dropped me off in the new government town of Igloolik; they were told I had to go to school or they would lose their government family allowance. I learned English in town while my family lived their last few years following the seasons, weather, sky, wind and ice, living off the land and animals we Inuit knew so well.

As a teenager, I learned to carve soapstone to earn the 25 cents I needed to see movies at the community hall. The ones I liked best were John Wayne westerns; John would find some cavalry troopers shot full of arrows and say, "What kind of savages would do something like this?"

I identified with John and the cavalry; those "savages" had nothing to do with me.

Then one day I figured out there are two sides to every story. In 1981, a year before my community had television, I sold some carvings in Montreal and brought home the Arctic's first video camera.

I decided to be a filmmaker to tell our Inuit side.

Twenty years later, Isuma Productions' first Inuit-language feature film, *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner*, won the Camera d'or at the 2001 Cannes Film Festival. Shown all over the world, subtitled into Spanish and Japanese and other languages, *Atanarjuat* adapted one of the most exciting legends my mother told us kids growing up. We all had imagined that naked man running for his life across the ice, his hair blowing in the wind; now our film shared this legend with Canada and the world.

Ten years later again, we're ready to release our first online film, *Inuit Knowledge and Climate Change*, a title that speaks for itself. Inuit have gone from Stone Age to Digital Age in one generation.

I am living that change in my lifetime.

Thirty years ago, as scientists began to notice a warming planet, no one bothered to ask Inuit elders and hunters what they knew about their Arctic homeland from observing the weather every minute of every day. Now through our skills as digital filmmakers -- using 2.0 interactive Internet -- the whole

