

## Arctic Survival—

## Boy Caught Grayling to Mumangeena's Delight

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Times editor

"Mother, go and tell that uncle of yours to come down and help us to bring these sacks of fish to the igloo. That lazy walrus hasn't given me a peace of mind since he married me." Aunt Mumangeena said with impatience.

As an after-thought, she added, "And bring that little sled by the meat rack."

Aunt Mumangeena's temper had been smoldering the past few days. Her husband, Nayukuk, had lapsed into one of his periods of laziness. She had asked him that morning to chip thin ice next to the flowing waters of the Kukpuk River so we would not break through as we fished.

"That sharp pain on my back is back again. I can't move," Nayukuk had said touching his left ribs with his hand.

When Uncle Nayukuk complained of such pains I was inclined to believe him for he did it with great seriousness. This pain, real or otherwise, was reflected in his rather sad eyes. This feeling of sympathy for my uncle's ills was partially quashed by Mumangeena who had said to me privately, "Your uncle never had a sick day in his life."

## First Fishing Trip

The fishing trip that morning was an exciting one for me because it was to be the very first time I would fish for grayling. My lack of experience apparently made Mumangeena think that we would not get many. Nevertheless she picked up three gunnery sacks.

"We will probably need only one, but you know mother, I'm known to be a good fisherman, when it comes to hooking grayling," she said with an air of satisfaction. "And what pleasure I'll get out of teaching you how to fish. Mother, you must pay strict attention to everything I do. This is going to be part of your training to be a hunter."

I was a boy nine years old after living with Nayukuk and Mumangeena for two years; I had gotten used to being called "mother" by my aunt. She had been devoted to my grandmoth-

er, for whom I was named. Aunt Mumangeena had strong sense of family ties.

We had been staying in a little igloo that belonged to the family on my mother's side. Mumangeena had told me that it was built by our ancestors generations before. When it became rundown it was repaired by some member of the family.

We left the igloo just before full daylight. The sky was overcast with light snow falling. It was early in October and the ice had formed on the river except in places where the current was swift but ice had formed from the banks part way out to the open water. It was chipped away so it would be safe for the fishermen.

This was the Kukpuk River where traditional grayling fishing was done each year during the month of October. There were about thirty people who had camped that fall waiting for the right time to fish. Few people had preceded us heading for locations known to be choice spots for hooking grayling.

## Surprising First Lesson

We walked to a location across from a bluff. "This is one of the finest places to fish," Aunt Mumangeena said.

She chipped away the thin ice with a sounding rod we had taken along. Standing about three feet from the edge of the ice, Mumangeena began to get ready to show me how to fish. Our fish poles were made of willows about five feet in length. The lines were made of baleen, shaved round and polished and the leaders were made of seagull quill sections. The hook was made of ivory with a metal hook.

The bait was nothing but a piece of yellow cloth or yarn. Some people used red.

"Now, mother, watch carefully how this is done. When you learn to do it properly it will never fail you. This is the way it's done," Mumangeena said seriously.

She cast her line into the water. As the hook sank she undulated it by flexing the fishpole.

"When the fish bites you simply haul it out and land it on the ice far enough so it won't jump back in the water. You do it like this."

She made a sweeping motion with the fishpole and as she did so, she emitted a happy scream and out came a grayling on the hook!

Aunt Mumangeena laughed happily and exclaimed, "Mother, this is the finest lesson I've ever given anyone in all my life!" And indeed it was. She hooked the fish without expecting it.

## Windfall

I began to hook for grayling following my aunt's instructions as best I could. I sank my hook and undulated it. I suddenly felt a heavy jerk and I pulled up. I had caught my first grayling! I was very excited and I shouted, "I got one, Aunt Mumangeena! I got one!"

My aunt was beside herself. She chatted happily all day on anything that came to her mind especially about my first grayling. It had a significant meaning to her.

"I knew it all the time, mother. You are going to be one of the finest hunters alive. This should convince your parents that you are going to be one. We'll save the fish and give it to them when we get back."

After my first grayling, I, of course, fished eagerly for more. I became quite a fisherman as the hours passed and surprised my aunt with my newly found prowess. As it turned out I caught most of the fish. Mumangeena wasted no time to brag about me to people who happened to pass by.

"Take a look at mother's pile of fish. I'm as good or better than anyone when it comes to fishing but you'd never know it from the way he kept hooking grayling today. It's unbelievable, this is the first time he ever fished in his life. And mother is such a little boy, too."

When it was around the hour of four in the afternoon, Mumangeena said, "We better put the fish in the sacks now and get ready to go home. Where is the first one you caught, mother? I'll tie a piece of this yarn around its tail so we'll know which one it is. We have to save it for your parents."

Aunt Mumangeena was the most carefree person during the day of fishing. It was amusing to listen to her. She would let out little cries of pleasure every

time a grayling bit. She even talked to the fish she caught, "My, you're a nice big one. In couple of days you will make wonderful 'qorq' for us." (Qorq is frozen meat or fish usually eaten with seal oil.)

## Back to Reality

Our fish haul filled two sacks and a quarter, a fine catch for a little boy and his doting aunt. Mumangeena's carefree manner seemed to fade as we filled the sacks. She had forgotten about Uncle Nayukuk's lapse into laziness during the day but now she was back to reality.

"We'll never be able to get these home by ourselves. I can never depend on that man when we need him most. These unthinkable lapses of his are the most exasperating things I ever experienced. I could scream and go completely mad. Whether he likes it or not he will have to help us."

Aunt Mumangeena then directed me to go after Uncle Nayukuk.

As soon as I was told I ran to the little sod igloo which was not far. As I ran, I kept wondering why Nayukuk didn't fish with us because I had found it thrilling and fun. I asked Mumangeena why he didn't during the day and she had answered, "It's undignified for a hunter to fish. It is usually done by women and children."

## Was He Making Hooks?

I walked into the tiny igloo. Uncle Nayukuk was sitting on the floor on a reindeer skin in the left corner of the room. He didn't seem to be doing anything but it looked as if he had been meditating.

"Aunt Mumangeena wants you to come down and help bring the fish home," I said excitedly. "We caught over two sacks full and I caught most of them."

The only motion was when his eyes focused on me briefly. He then looked down at his feet that were crossed one over the other. Without looking up he said quietly, "I'm making hooks for you and your aunt."

I was surprised at what he said because I didn't see any evidence of hook-making, but I didn't question him. My aunt, more than once, had told me

never to question my elders because they were wiser than me. I wondered if Uncle Nayukuk was doing the wise thing. It was plain that he was not about to come to help my aunt and me. It was disturbing.

## Exasperation

I went out and got the little sled from near the meat rack and started pushing it along the banks of the Kukpuk River until I came to a rather sharp incline that was covered with snow. I pushed the sled with a run, got on the runners and slid down until it stopped on the snow covered ice of the river. I pushed it along until I reached Mumangeena.

She had caught a few more fish while I was gone. She asked incredulously, "Is that — man — coming?"

"I don't know. He said he was making hooks for us," I answered. "I didn't see him doing any..."

"Stop that, mother! How many times have I told you never to talk about your elders in that manner?" my aunt cut me short.

She emitted a hiss and then spluttered, "That lazy—lazy!" She apparently ran out of names to call Uncle Nayukuk.

We struggled to load the fish into the small sled. A gunny sack full of grayling was far too much weight for me to handle. Aunt Mumangeena was not much stronger. She was only about four foot nine inches tall and not too robust. Her legs were very bowed and they bothered her when she tried to lift things.

We managed to load the sled and we began to push it toward our igloo. It was quite easy until we came to the incline on which I came sliding on to the river. As hard as we pushed, we couldn't make it up the incline. Aunt Mumangeena became more frustrated by the minute. She exclaimed as she strained against the sled, "That man! Where is that man?"

## Dash For Help

"Mother, don't push anymore. I'll go get that — man! I'll —"

She started climbing up the incline. She slipped twice and that didn't help her frustration. She spluttered and emitted something that sounded like a sob. I ran and helped her up. She was close to tears and she was pitifully grateful as she said, "I don't know what I'd do without you, mother. Stay here and watch the sled. Some loose dogs might get to it."

She went toward the igloo with determination. Her bowed legs made her waddle as she hurried along. She entered the igloo quickly. It was not hard to imagine what went on in there. Aunt Mumangeena was somewhat more agitated than previous times. I knew there was nothing gentle on her part.

After about five minutes, Nayukuk emerged, quickly followed by his wife. She was apparently still flinging words at her husband. The harried husband briskly walked to the rack and picked up a rope. He started toward me at a fast walk.

When he reached the top of the incline he didn't bother to come down to the sled. He threw one end of the rope and I knew what he wanted. I tied it to the front end of the sled. Nayukuk began to pull on the rope hand over hand.

I was amazed at his strength. I was also a little frightened because Uncle Nayukuk seemed to be angry. I had never seen him display any temper. Whatever Aunt Mumangeena had said had stung him deeply.

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