



LOOKING BACK CON'T. — Whalers avoided Pelly Bay for fear of ice jams around the bay’s islands.

In *Kabloona*, de Poncins recounts the trip he took to Pelly Bay in 1939. He estimates the Inuit he met had encountered less than six Caucasians. The only outsider in residence was the region’s first missionary, a Roman Catholic priest from France, Father Pierre Henry. Some of the elders living in Kugaaruk today may have been the little children de Poncins met during his visit.

Except for annual trips 250 miles to the Gjoa Haven HBC Post to trade for things like tea and metal needles, the Pelly Bay Netsilik lived as they had for thousands of years. Eighty-three years after de Poncins’ visit— almost to the month — the Inuit way of life is unimaginably altered.

Nearly every modern convenience is available. Snowmobiles replace dog teams. Airplanes deliver ice cream, which, incidentally, sells for \$16 per half gallon. Teenagers surf Facebook instead of helping their families survive the elements. Children play with iPods instead of rustic handmade toys.

Despite the dramatic metamorphosis, one thing about life in the Arctic certainly hasn’t changed.

*“I was cold, freezing cold, but I never shivered. Cold in the Arctic is not like cold at home. It is not in you, but around you. There is no humidity in this country .... You wander through this cold dry as a bone,”* de Poncins said, an apt description indeed.

Part of me wishes I could experience life in Kugaaruk as it was a hundred years ago, when routine was inescapable, but when I wince from the cold biting my hands — as it did a few days ago when I went outside without my mittens because I am longing for spring and had convinced myself it wasn’t *that* cold — I reconsider.

Still, reading about Inuit life before modernity touched it makes me wish for a firsthand glimpse into the time when human existence near the North Pole was incredibly difficult, yet in some ways more appealing.

The Inuit formed a close-knit community that made survival possible in this wilderness, de Poncins said. *“Human life in the Arctic would vanish without this solidarity among men. It is the community that remains alive here, not the men; it is the community that has had a poor hunting season or a good one, that is hungry or well-fed, that has reason to rejoice or to despair.”*

That heritage lives today. Unlike southerners, Inuit rarely leave their homeland because they are so closely tied to their families and way of life.

On that note, I’d better bring some joy to my family and wash the dishes awaiting me in the kitchen.



Friends spoil Aine, Mari and Nora (wrapped in the blue blanket) Sunday, March 18, during a baby shower for Nora.



TOP: Aine kneels while Lucy Immingark slips Nora into the indoor/warm weather amauti Lucy made for her shower gift. LEFT: A gift from Margaret Inaksajak, the amauti sash (woven yarn) was handcrafted in Taloyoak. RIGHT: Aine pats Nora’s rump to calm her — the usual tactic for calming a baby in an amauti — while listening to some tips on “packing,” as it is called, an infant.

**Ups & Downs** March 17 – March 23, 2012  
**Maximum = -28.5°C/-19.3°F Minimum = -31.5°C/-24.5°F**  
Source: Environment Canada, Station Kugaaruk A, Nunavut [March 23]  
 Mostly clear, moderate wind; some ice fog  
**Wind chill -37/-35 [March 25 at 11 a.m., -26°C/-15°F]**  
 March 25 **Sunrise = 5:36 a.m. Sunset = 6:34 p.m. MDT**

