

Cross Generation – Passing on Traditional Skills

The inspiration behind this Cross Generation Polar Bear - "Flesh it" illustration comes from an Inuvik grandma and granddaughters, passing on traditional skills. As grandma, Beverly Ann Esau explains "it's a cultural connection with their past"



"Flesh It" means to take all the fat off. In order to clean the polar bear for resale all the fat needs to be cleaned off first, and the skin and feet, the mouth and head. This is very delicate work because it will be sold to a customer. Many times customers will make a rug with the shape of the head. In this particular story it took the family 12 hours to skin the roughly seven foot long bear hide.

In order to clean the hide a tool called an ulu is used. An ulu (as seen in the illustration) is an all-purpose knife traditionally used by Inuit. An ulu is utilized in applications as diverse as skinning and cleaning animals, cutting a child's hair, cutting food and, if necessary, trimming blocks of snow and ice used to build an igloo.

The technique of using an Ulu to flesh a hide is a challenge and requires hours of experience and training. The ulu is never used like a saw, which is something a person new to it would automatically think how it would be used. Instead it is used in a slicing motion, relying on the flexing and flicking of the wrist. If your wrist is locked and not moving, you are using it wrong!

Fun Fact: Ulus will go dull pretty fast, but it depends on the type of skin you are working on. For instance I could work on caribou meat without having

to sharpen it at all besides the beginning, but when working on polar bear or seal you sharpen every 10 minutes.

Passing on Values and Traditions

Grandparents have gained wisdom and knowledge from their years on the earth. When they gain the respect of their communities for what they know they are known as Elders. They are willing to share what they know with others who, regardless of age, are looking for knowledge, Teachings, information on their traditions, culture and values. Grandparents have an important role to play in helping raise the children because they have patience and wisdom as well as the knowledge that the child's parents may not have to pass along to the child.



