

# MARY KOGEAHLOOK

Yellowknife, N.W.T.

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**“Today, I have grade three,  
and I am very happy.”**

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When I was nineteen years old, in 1953, I got polio. At that time I did not speak English, and I did not understand very much about what happens outside of Gjoa Haven. I was sent to the hospital in Inuvik, and there a nurse taught me to say, “I am fine, thank you.” I never forgot that, and when the doctor came to visit me, I was very excited. First he spoke and I said “I am fine, thank you.” Then he said, “Oh, you speak English.” And I did a turn-around. I decided then that it was very important to speak English.

So I went to school right at the hospital. Before I finished grade one, they put me in grade two. Then they said again that I was too smart, so they put me in grade three. Today, I have grade three, and I am very happy.

Today I live in Yellowknife, but before that I lived for seventeen years in Inuvik. I went to Inuvik from my own little community of Gjoa Haven. That was a long time ago.

For seventeen years, I stayed in Inuvik, in my own apartment, because I knew how to look after myself. After a lot of time, I started to get sick, I got pneumonia, and I went back to the hospital. I could not go back to my community because the people were still living in igloos. Only the Hudson’s Bay manager had a house. In Inuvik, it was not bad, but there were very many stairs. It was not easy for me to go to the store, and I had to count on other people to help me.

The right answer came when I moved to Yellowknife about a year ago. Here, I live in an apartment on the seventh floor, but there is an elevator. There is no problem with the stairs at my apartment. My apartment is nice, and I live here very well. I can go to the store, and I can do things for myself. In fact, I do not need anyone to look after me or stay with me. Only once in a while the public health nurse comes to help when I call her.

I like it here better than a boarding home, because I am on my own. I never get lonely, because I have many friends, and I have my sewing. I also have my own kitchen, my own living room, and I don’t need anyone to cook for me. I am independent.

Since I have been here, I have been very happy with my work. I know my English is not the best, but it is good enough. For the last summer, I worked at the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre. I like that place, and maybe next summer I will do that again. Right now, I do not have a job, but I am keeping very busy. I like to sew and I like to go outside. Mostly I make Eskimo dolls to sell to friends and people I meet. You never know how many people want a doll until it is finished. So far I have sold all of mine, and have not had to sell them through the co-op, because I am independent.

Just this year, I went for a visit with my sisters at Gjoa Haven, and it was a different experience. Since I have learned English, I do not use my own language very much. So, many of the words I have forgotten. I had a hard time talking to the people in the community. Not only that, but I had a hard time recognizing my own people. I had been away a very long time and I forgot some of the names. But they remembered me, and they asked me lots of questions. That was a very special trip for me, because I paid for it with my own money. Everybody was very kind, the airplane people and all the people who helped me to make the visit. I saved my money for many years so I could make this visit. I will never forget going back to see my sisters.

I also like to go outside because I really like the cold. This is not true for many people, but I have my parka and I don’t like all the heat that you get inside. Outside makes me feel very good.

