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Editor's Letter

In this Spring/Summer issue of *The Masik*, you'll find a letter from Qajaq USA President, Christopher Crowhurst. Christopher writes about the exciting happenings in Qajaq USA. Also included is "The 2018 Greenland National Kayaking Championships," written by Tim Gallaway. Tim does a wonderful job of capturing the spirit of the competition. Also included is a list of Qajaq USA's Sanctioned and Affiliated events.

Special thanks to the article contributors, and a huge thank you to Tony Schmitz for co-editing.

I hope that you enjoy this Spring/Summer issue of *The Masik*. To subscribe to future issues (if you haven't done so already), click [HERE](#). If you have article ideas or a photo that would make a good header, please e-mail helen@greenlandorbust.org.

Helen Wilson

Editor, *The Masik*

Letter From Qajaq USA President, Christopher Crowhurst

Dear Members,

The winter can be a quiet time for kayakers, especially up north where the water turns solid. Despite the lack of fluid water, this winter has been a productive one for the Qajaq USA committees and Board.

New website coming

Perhaps the most exciting news is the start of our new website development. At our last Board meeting, it was approved for the website, forums, store and membership processing to be moved to a new web platform that enables us to provide a better experience to our members and the general public. We are aiming to complete the migration by the middle of the year, and you can expect further updates as the go-live date approaches.

New merchandise coming

The merchandise and store committees have been hard at work creating new products. You can expect hats, mugs, shirts, etc., all with great qajaq branding and imagery. So, if you are looking for a gift for the paddler in your life, consider purchasing it from the Qajaq USA Store.

Opportunities to get involved

We are seeking volunteers to help on all of our committees, if you have a passion for writing, graphics, merchandise design, process optimization, administration, event organization or any other relevant activity, please contact a Board member to see how you can help. We are also seeking active members who would like to join the Board either as an Advisor or a Director. Please contact me directly if you are interested.

Upcoming events

The season of Qajaq USA events has already kicked off with a very successful one, TRAQs in Florida. Upcoming events include SS TIK in Minnesota, Qajaq Camp in Minnesota and HRCF in New York, and that just takes us through the beginning of the summer. Links to the event [LINK](#) on the Qajaq USA website to stay abreast of upcoming traditional paddling events around the country. 2019 events, dates and links are also listed at the bottom of this newsletter.

I want to personally thank each of you for your continued support of Qajaq USA; financially through your membership dues, through your attendance at Qajaq USA events and through your volunteer activities on the committees.

Well, that's enough from me, it's time to go and oil my paddles and get ready to get afloat again.

Best wishes,

Christopher

The 2018 Greenland National Kayaking Championships

By Tim Galloway

When I arrived at the club, the only person there was Pavia. He was putting the finishing touches on a new racing qajaq in preparation for the competition. It was an angular and purpose-built craft, disproportionately Swedish in form and made to do only one thing well, go fast. Pavia gave me a short tour, and then went back to work. I unloaded the qajaq from the box that I had schlepped through Chicago, Keflavik, Reykjavik, Keflavik again, Kangerlussuaq, and to its final destination, the Qajaq Club in Nuuk. Sitting amongst the Nuuk National Museum, the Qajaq Club is mere meters from the water. From its low ceiling hang several qajaq frames in various stages of creation or disrepair, as well as paddles, harpoons, and rib stock. The worn work benches are well stocked with wood working tools and decorated with trophies and medals from previous years. On the bookshelf are books in several languages about qajaq building and hunting, coffee makers, knickknacks and at least one fully functioning Xbox. I got to work immediately. It was going to be a long few days with plenty of time to think in this weirdly charming place.







Stitching the stern

Greenland has loomed in the background of my consciousness from when I first learned about traditional paddling. It started off as just a name, a catchy and curious moniker for a novelty paddle. The paddle quickly moved from being a novelty to something much more meaningful. I practiced my rolls, trained on the ropes and absorbed as much about the culture surrounding my new favorite sport as I possible could. The idea of actually traveling to Greenland was there in the back of my mind, but it stayed just that, an idea. That is, until I finally set myself the goal of going to compete in the





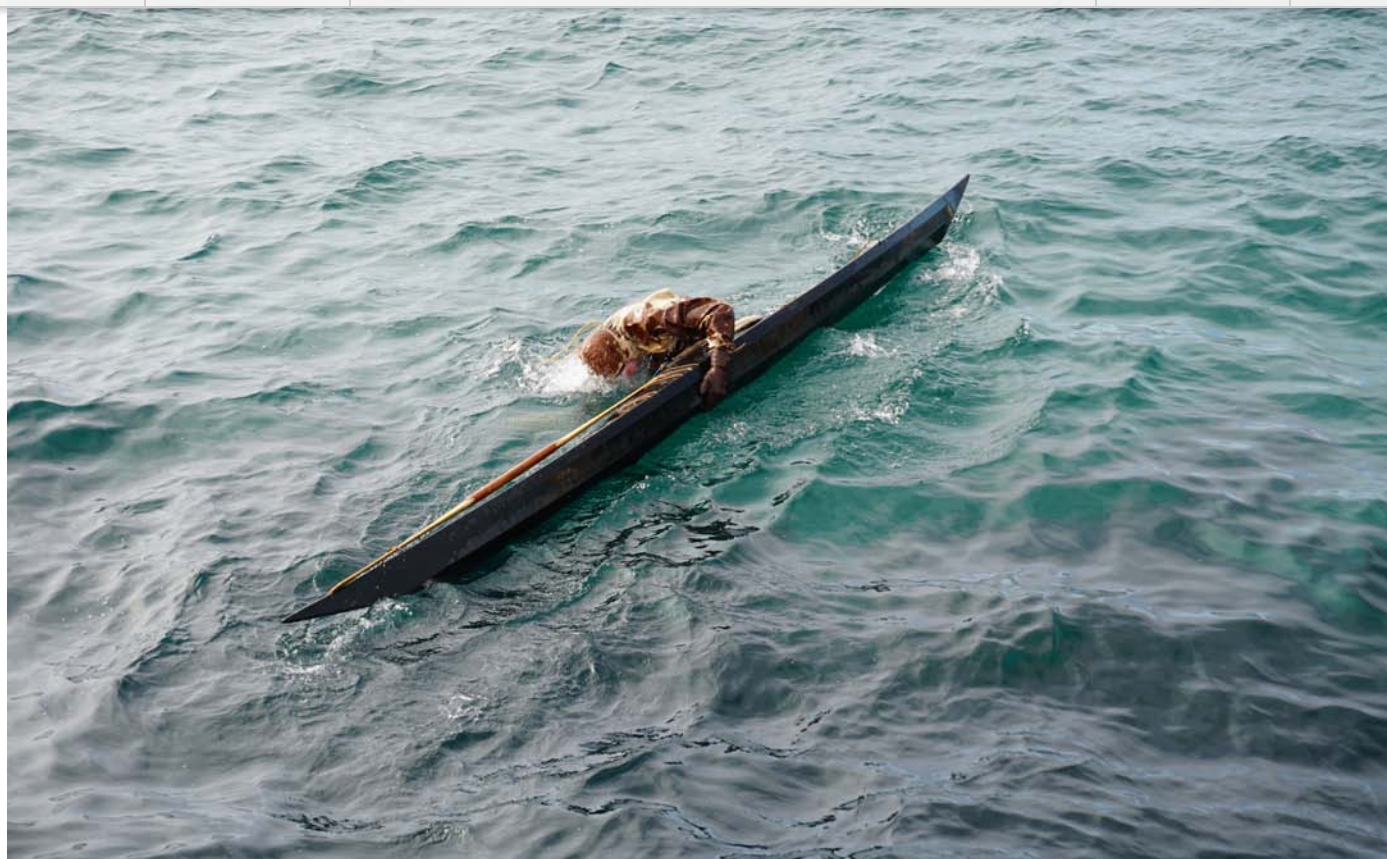
Qajaq Nuuk, a workshop full of little details

Each summer, typically in July, a qajaq Club hosts the National Qajaq Championships. Competitors come from towns up and down Greenland to compete against each other in a friendly but still serious competition. Each event focuses on a skill that a qajaq hunter would have needed to be successful while hunting seals and other marine mammals. Those who do the best overall are given the honor of being named Qajaq Man and Qajaq Woman of the year. Up until the early 2000s foreign competitors were not allowed to compete in the games. Being a foreign competitor, I would be competing in the international division with the handful of others that came from abroad.

I named my qajaq Kufferti. It translates to suitcase in both Greenlandic and Danish. It was the most fitting name I could think of for something that had spent a fair amount of its short life in a suitcase. The gunwales, chines and keelson went together the first day, the majority of the deck and the hull the next. I skinned her the third day, and on the fourth I coated the skin. By the fifth day, the rigging was ready, and onto the water she went. My progress on the qajaq went hand in hand with my comfort in Greenland. The first day I was wondering what I had gotten myself into, but as a fair curve formed from a pile of wood, I began to make friends. The members of Peqatigiiffik Qajaq Nuuk welcomed me into their space and watched on with curiosity and bemusement as I worked. We shared some laughs and a rolling session one evening, and I finally got to see them on the water. Three teenage boys moved with a practiced grace. They blasted through the rolling list, nailing some of the hardest rolls with ease. At one point during the session I watched on as all three of them completed Qaannap Ataatigut Ipilaarlugu, the under the hull sculling roll on both sides without hesitation. These young men had some serious skills. On land they were a bit reserved, trying to be cool like teenagers all over the world, but on the water they were relaxed



My finished qajaq



Ari practices Assamik Masikkut

I explored parts of Nuuk between build sessions in the clubhouse. Nuuk is the largest city in Greenland, as well as its capital. It has a population of about 18,000 people. It is also a modern growing city. Tall apartment buildings stand in rows along the shore and main roads. Houses and smaller apartments give color to the city with a characteristically Scandinavian color scheme of red, yellow, and blue, with a few other vibrant colors scattered in for fun. Cranes rise over many parts of the town, and you are likely to see cargo ships, cruise liners, and military vessels in the harbor simultaneously. Cellular coverage is ubiquitous in the city, and you are just as likely to see people working on laptops at a coffee shop or teenagers taking selfies while waiting for the bus as anywhere you might visit in North America or Europe. But in amongst all of this modern facade are things that remind you that you are in a culture that has a growing appreciation of its history and traditions. In the local supermarkets you can buy fresh red peppers from Spain, but also locally caught smoked fish and the popular (and in my opinion rather tasty) snack mattak (whale skin and blubber). There are sculptures around the city reminiscent of figurines. They are carved from walrus or narwhal ivory, and the logo for KNR, the national radio station, features a qajaq. I had to continually reset my expectations as I explored.

I came to appreciate the language as another symbol of pride. Everything is in Greenlandic first, Danish second, and if you are lucky, maybe English third. Signs, menus, and the local radio broadcasts are all in Kalaallisut, or West Greenlandic. It is a rare thing for an indigenous language to have survived colonialization relatively intact, let alone be the common language of a modern nation. I have tried to learn some Greenlandic, but it is very difficult to learn as an outsider. There is almost no overlapping vocabulary with English except for a few words adopted from Danish. To make it even more difficult, many of the mouth sounds of Greenlandic don't exist in European languages. But as you go, a few phrases and pleasantries become apparent that let you be polite at least: thank you, qujanaq; you're welcome, illillu; well done, pikkori.

On the last day before the opening of the games I finally met some of the international competitors. I caught up with Maligiaq Padilla, the many time Qajaq Man of the Year and a friend from the Qajaq USA event circuit. I also met Wolfgang from Norway, Mayumi from Japan, Hans from Denmark (via Sisimiut), and Li Chun and Chiehtuan from Taiwan. All were in Greenland for the competition but also for a qajaq expedition in the fjord up from Nuuk afterwards. We were a diverse group, but we all had one thing in common, a passion for Greenland-style kayaking.

The start of the games is marked with a somber ceremony to honor and remember those qajaq hunters that came before: to those who came home from the sea and to those who didn't. Flag bearers led the way from the school where we had meals together and headed straight through town to the

old church by the water. The procession turned heads as we went along one of the busiest roads in town. Some people wore full traditional clothing complete with sealskin kamik boots, while others wore more modern clothing with splashes of traditional designs or team uniforms. Younger children were led or carried by older siblings or aunts or uncles. Families walked hand in hand, and friends walked with arms over shoulders. As we approached the church, I joined up with some of my international teammates and sat with them in the back row for the church service. Having barely the slightest grasp on the language, I only gleaned the faintest idea what the theme of the services was about but learned a lot about pronunciation. Afterwards it was explained to us how the minister was giving blessings to all of us for safe passage on the sea, and requested that we watch over each other as family on the water.









The procession moves through Nuuk

After the service there was one more stop for the procession. We were led back through town and up to the top of a hill just south of where we started to a simple memorial at the crest. The climb wasn't on a path, and it was a group effort to get children in their strollers and the elderly with their canes up to the top, and then back down afterwards. The organizers placed a wreath at a simple memorial plaque, and through the biting wind paid tribute to kayakers and friends and family lost both on the sea and on the shore. There were more than a few tears among the silent crowd as flags were dipped



At the memorial

Competition started the next day with a change of plans. It was a cool and drizzly sort of day, so the races that were scheduled got swapped for individual rolling. The feeling among the international crowd was that we were hoping for another day or two of practice time before rolling. This was especially the case for me since I could count how many days old my qajaq was on one hand, and the number of times I had paddled it on one finger. Nevertheless, we watched our competitors roll and cheered along with the crowds from shore. As with every club sport community, there was a wide range of skill levels, and it was sometimes easy to see who had been practicing or who had an injury they were trying to deal with. Participants are scored in rolling for completing different rolling techniques. They get points for doing the roll on each side, and more points for the

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Pavia rolling

When I competed I was glad I had Maligiaq as my safety boat and coach on the water and had Pavia as my judge onshore calling out the rolls. I made it through a lot of the list and took some pointers as I went. The individual rolling competition was the most fun rolling session I had had in a long time. The crowd cheered from shore, the names were called out in Greenlandic, and there were kelp beds to avoid, all of which elevated the experience. By the end of it I was tired, smiling and so happy to have actually made it to Greenland. My face was salty and cold, and it didn't function well until the blood began to return to it once I got back to shore. Overall, I came in sixth in rolling. I figured I would have gotten fifth if I had had my own rolling qajaq from home. I am proud of my score of 188 points, and know I can do better next time I make it there.

The next several days were some of the best days for the spectators on the seawalls in the harbor. The short distance races, portage race, and harpoon throwing took place the next three days. Pavia, in his specialized racing qajaq, was always at the front of the pack and came in second or third in all of the races. I came in around 10th overall in the men's races and just couldn't get by Elias, the current president of Qaannat Kattuffiat (the Greenland Kayaking Association), meaning I would have come in second if I was in the men's 35 to 50 year old division. Here the differences in skill level appeared again. The Greenlandic competitors in general were fierce sprinters and rocketed off the line, leaving me in the back of the pack. After a while though, I noticed that my racing stroke, borrowed heavily from surfski paddling with a wing paddle, was more consistent, and I could keep a better pace for longer. The second half of the races were always my best legs. I could draft and overtake by relying on my more consistent stroke to get me past. That doesn't mean I finished the races with anything left in the tanks. I was destroyed after the races, especially the portage race. Five km paddle, 300 meter portage, five km paddle, 300 meter portage, then 300 meter paddle around to the finish line. It was a slow walk home that evening. I





The kids running in the portage race

The second half of the competition was team rolling, the long distance relay races and Allunaariaqattaarnek (Greenland Rope Gymnastics), all of which were spread out over the next four days. The group rolling is scored like the individual event, except you only get the points if your whole team of three completes the roll. Hans, Wolfgang, and I rolled together, and we felt pretty good afterwards. We had a fun time rolling, and since we had planned out how we would capsize on the count of three, we were pretty well synchronized, much to the delight of the crowd, who braved winds and cold rain all day to watch the rolling. I skipped out on the 20 km long distance race so that I would be fresh for Rope Gymnastics on the second to last

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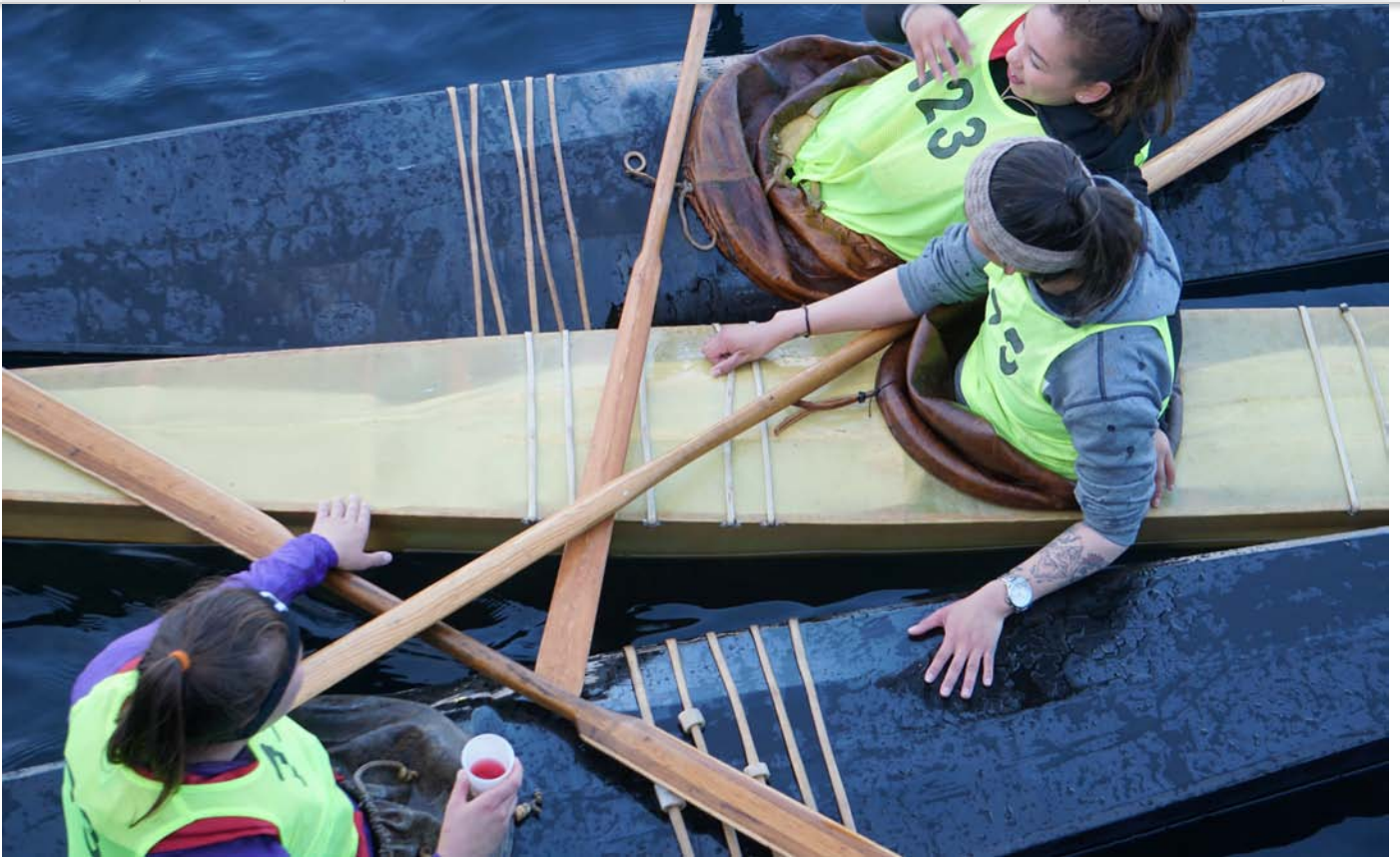
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The racers line up



Post race friends



Post race, friends and rivals



The best way to describe Allunaariaqattaarneq (Greenland Rope Gymnastics) is that it is a set of traditional exercises that is a bit akin to arial yoga done on a pair of suspended ropes. Many of the moves use body motions that are similar to motions you would use while paddling. A few moves even replicate almost exactly the motion that you would use while rolling. In this way, it is a great cross training. It trains the body motions, but also strength, flexibility, coordination, and body awareness, all at the same time. It can be an absolutely brutal workout. It is scored similar to rolling, with techniques becoming more and more difficult as you move through the list. I moved through the techniques I knew I could do and tried, with some coaching, a few moves I hadn't gotten before and even completed one of them. Near the end of my set, with sweat dripping down my face and my hands bleeding on the ropes, I stepped away from the ropes and called it a day. I scored 144 points, which isn't a personal best, but I was happy enough with it. As a perspective, the winners of the ropes competition were getting scores over 500 points.



Qajasaarneq

After I finished competing on the ropes, I had one of the most meaningful experiences of my trip to Greenland. It began with me messaging Wolfgang, before starting to walk toward the north side of the city. I was going to meet up with him and a local artist named Maya that he had met a few days prior while watching one of the races. I reached the apartment where she had a small studio, and followed her apprentice Paninnguaq upstairs to see Wolfgang and Maya, who were already there. He was having a commissioned art piece done. After a discussion with Paninnguaq, I settled on a commission of my own. She prepared her ink, and then started on the canvas, my upper arm. I was there for a tattoo.

I had never received a tattoo before. I had thought about it, but never gone ahead. I wanted my first tattoo to have some meaning behind it, and seeing the opportunity present itself, I jumped at it. Maya is internationally known in tattoo circles for her designs, both modern and traditional. She is leading the charge for Greenlandic people, especially women, to reclaim traditional tattoo designs as a deeply spiritual part of their culture. I sat in the small, quiet room and felt the fine poke of Paninnguaq's stylus and listened to the calming sound of each poke as she worked her way through the design. I felt a bit of pain as she worked, but it was nothing compared to what I was starting to feel in my hands as the endorphins wore off and my rope torn

Maya explained to us how tattooing in Greenland and in the Arctic in general was a woman's art and means of spiritual growth and beautification. Using a needle and thread dipped in pitch or soot they would pull the thread through the skin, making a series of fine dots. A woman was not seen as being fit to marry until she had her facial tattoos; typically a 'V' on the forehead pointing down to between the eyes, lines running from the lower lip to the chin, and often lines around the eyes, or shapes on the cheekbones. Women also tended to get lines and simple geometric forms tattooed onto their fingers and wrists. Men, on the other hand, were not allowed to give tattoos. They could only be given them by a woman as a gift. Usually this was done as a gift of protection, where she would tattoo a totemic amulet or specific marks onto his body for something along the lines of good fishing, safe travels while hunting in his qajaq or protections from malevolent spirits. There is a great diversity in traditional Greenlandic and Inuit tattoos in general. Different regions, and even different villages only a few miles apart, would have different styles and motifs, adding to the wonderful wealth of diversity in Arctic art.

Both being kayakers, Wolfgang and I decided on harpoon heads as our designs. We wanted something that would represent the hunter and the qajaq. A qajaq and a harpoon meant life for a hunter and their family. We can only hope it will give us good luck in future hunts.



Wolfgang's harpoon head tattoo

The next day was supposed to be the day for relay races and the closing ceremonies of the games. In the morning the weather was rough. There were whitecaps on the old harbor, and the wind was blowing the spitting rain sideways. The races were cancelled, and the day was a quiet one. We were glad the weather had been so sunny and warm for the other races earlier in the week. The teams gathered for dinner that night, dressed well, as it was a special night.

I sat in the back of the crowd as the Nuuk Qajaq club gathered on the stage at the front of the room. Being the largest team in the competition, there wasn't a lot of extra space on the platform. When they were handed the large trophy for being the overall winning team, they raised it in pride.

Eventually, the cheers from the crowd subsided, and the singing started. More songs were sung, Eric and Tanja were crowned Queen Man and Queen Woman of the Year, and goodbye hugs and handshakes were exchanged. My time in Greenland was coming to a close. I still had a few days to spend

before I flew back to Iceland on my way home, but this was the last chance I would have to spend time with this group of people. Their friendship and kindness made us feel welcome as we got to experience something that is so important to them. I know I will be back. There is no way I can live my life after experiencing this place and not go back.



Team Nuuk celebrates their win

I knew before I went to Greenland that the competition was more of a cultural festival than anything else, and after observing and taking part, I see even more how important it is to my Greenlandic hosts and friends. It is a way for them to preserve a huge part of their history and heritage. By competing, the Greenlanders preserve paddling and hunting skills, qajaq building and paddle carving skills, the skills required to make clothing with sealskin for some of their equipment, and most of all, they engage the next generation of paddlers. There are a huge number of kids that compete in the games in many age groups, starting from around age five. The kid races draw the biggest crowds on shore and the loudest cheering. The atmosphere feels almost carnival-like as people cheer and wave banners, with a few people sporting funny costumes. Seeing kids raise their paddles over their heads as they cross the finish line to a roar from the crowd tells you exactly what these competitions are really for.

Before everyone left we sang the Qajaq Song one last time. I had heard it many times over the week and had learned some of it phonetically. It was only after I got home that I learned the translation. The last few lines resonate with me. To me they are not so much about the qajaq, but about Greenlanders as a whole, as they navigate a modern world and hold onto their traditions:

Maligassaasutut

Isigiinnarpara

Imavissuup malissuinut akiuuttarnera pillugu

Sapilissanngilaq

Qunulissanngilaq

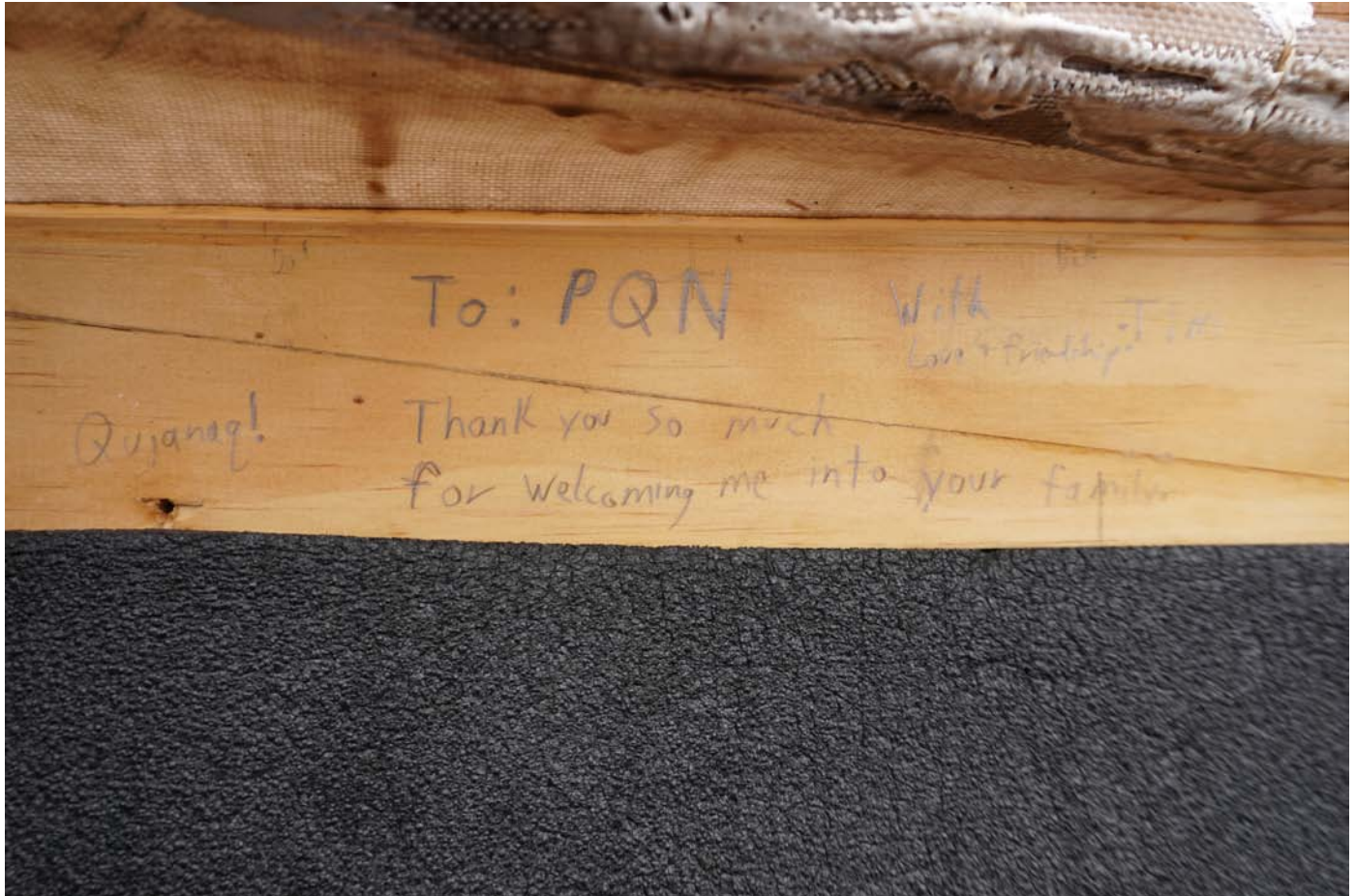
Aap inuttami kakkaqisup sungiulluavattarmani

It is made for big seas, it can resist big waves

YES, a kayaker who gets accustomed to it is very confident and impressive

It is never afraid

It will never give up



My thank you letter

Qajaq USA Sanctioned and Affiliated Events—2019

Traditional Qajaqers of the South

Lake Placid, Florida

March 21 to 24

www.traditionalqajaqingfest.org

Qajaq Camp—Qajartorluni tammaarsimaarneq

Lake Pepin, Minnesota

May 16 to 19

www.qajaq.mn

May 17 to 19

www.traditionalpaddlersretreat.com

South Sound Traditional Inuit Kayak Symposium

Twanoh State Park, Washington

June 14 to 16

www.qajagpnw.org

Hudson River Greenland Festival

Croton-on-Hudson, New York

June 20 to 23

www.hrgf.org

Qajaq TC

Frankfort, Michigan

August 22 to 25

www.qajaqtc.com

Traditional Paddlers Gathering

Merrifield, Minnesota

September 5 to 8

www.qajaqmn.org

Delmarva Paddlers Retreat

Lewes, Delaware

October 10 to 13

www.delmarvapaddlersretreat.org

Qajaq USA Membership

Your membership is vital to Qajaq USA! Without your generosity we would be unable to fulfill our mission and help share and promote the rich traditions and techniques of Greenland kayaking. Whether it's through participation in our online forums, reading our *MAS/K* newsletter or QAJAQ Journal, attending one of our sanctioned events (with Qajaq USA sponsored gear), being inspired by the Greenland guests we bring to events or paddling our expanding fleet of replica skin-on-frame kayaks—we hope you agree that your membership support delivers an outstanding value. Click [HERE](#) to become a member (or to renew your membership).

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