



Give Me My Father's Body: The Life of Minik, the New York Eskimo

Kenn Harper

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Everything -- my home, my eskimo culture -- all has been taken from me. Even my dead father's body could not be claimed for sacred burial.

In 1907 the *New York World* carried a sensational full-page article. Next to an artist's sketch of a pleading boy, his arms outstretched toward the American Museum of Natural History, the headline blared, "Give Me My Father's Body."

Ten years earlier the renowned polar explorer Robert Peary had sailed into New York harbor with six Eskimos as his "cargo." He deposited them with museum scientists as "living specimens" and then abandoned them. Four Eskimos died within a year. One returned to Greenland. Only Minik, a boy of six or seven, remained.

During his twelve years in New York, Minik learned English, played sports, went to church, and acquired a taste for big-city life. But all that ended abruptly when he found his father's skeleton on display at the museum. Disillusioned with white society and desperate to return to his people, Minik finally sailed for Greenland in 1909. He succeeded in relearning his native language and the hunting skills he needed to survive, and even assisted a new generation of polar explorers, yet the rest of his life became a search to find a place where he truly belonged.

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