

# Lament for the Land: Climate Change, Mourning, and Grief Work

With Voices from Rigolet, Nunatsiavut, Labrador

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January 21, 2012

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CHANGING LIVES  
IMPROVING LIFE



# What is Mourning?

- Mourning and grief in response to loss of someone or something
- Shared publicly
  - Small groups: funerals, wakes
  - Large groups: Columbine, 9/11, Montreal Massacre
  - Public memorials: AIDS Quilt, war memorials, Ground Zero
- Experienced privately
  - Ebbs and flows
  - Indeterminate & unpredictable

# The Power of Mourning



- We have all lost and we have all grieved...
- Mourning can never be avoided—a part of life
- Mourning transforms us, forever
- Mourning ties us all together, across gender, culture, politics, locale

# Inuit, Climate Change, & Grief

- Strong emotional reactions
  - Fear, anxiety, stress, worry, anger, depression, grief, mourning, sadness
- Place-based mourning
  - For loss of familiar land, lifestyles, culture
- Anticipatory Grieving
  - For losses and grief that are expected to come

# Absence of Eco-Mourning In....

- Media and News
- Politics
- Policy
- Academic Research
- Public Discourse



# Ethics & Politics of Mourning

- Grief offers a counter-narrative to environmental degradation, economic exploitation, and political stalling
- Grief can move beyond anger and rage
- Grief can unite in a single cause
- Grief can reconstitute nature as something grievable
  - Grievable = important
  - Grievable = intrinsically valued

# The Power of Grief

- Environmentally-based grief needs to be spoken aloud
  - Ecological eulogies, public acts, art, literature, video
- Grief needs to be witnessed and shared
- Understand our mutual vulnerability *and* our mutual strength
- (Re)Count nature as mournable and grievable
- Solidarity with those who already mourn

# Examples to Learn From I

- Mass Extinction Memorial Observatory (MEMO)
  - Isle of Portland, UK
  - Memorial to all plants and animals extinct in modern times
  - Bell will toll every May 22<sup>nd</sup> (International Biodiversity Day) for all extinct plants and animals
  - [www.memoproject.org](http://www.memoproject.org)



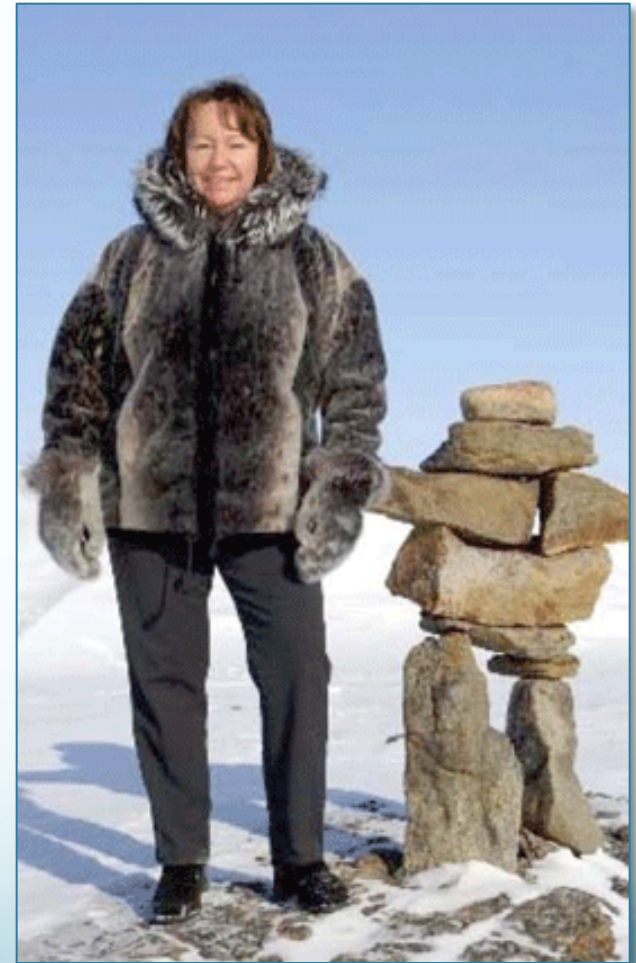
# Examples to Learn From II



- Ian Fry, Tuvalu Delegation, Copenhagen 2009
  - Made grief public in political sphere
  - Shared human side of the negotiations

# Examples to Learn From III

- Sheila Watt-Cloutier & other Inuit Advocates
  - Share personal narratives
  - Frame climate change as a human rights issue
  - Advocate for action and support
  - Bring together cultures



# Mourning is Work for Us All

- Climate change affects us all; Grief affects us all
  - Together: can begin to move forward in new stories, discourses, and values
- Testimonies of environmental grief may be healing
- Mourning “opens up the possibility of a social or political space to accommodate all others.” Michael Nass (2008)
- Nature becomes (again) something worthy to be mourned
  - Inspire action *before* we have to mourn

# What We Can Do

- Hold vigils for our feathered, furred, scaled, and insect kin
- Write eulogies for nature
- Stage funerals for nature
- Write letters to local MPs and MPPs
- Call Parliament and leave a voice message about your eco-grief
- Dictate names of extinct plants and animals in public setting
- Create works of art, literature, poetry, prose, photography: share them!