

THE MANY LIVES OF
KIVIOK



Man: A Course of Study

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THE MANY LIVES OF KIVIOK

**Have you seen the mighty Kiviok?
Have you met him in your travels?
In his many lives he has been
everywhere, and the most wonder-
ful tales are told about him.**

Traditional Tales of the Netsilik Eskimos

Adapted by **JEROME S. BRUNER**

Collected by **KNUD RASMUSSEN**

KIVIOK, THE MAN WITH MANY LIVES



KIVIOK is one of us, a Netsilik, but a man with many lives. He was here before the ice covered the sea, when the sea was open through the winter and people knew nothing of hunting seals through their breathing holes. He was here when people hunted seals with kayaks, when there was no fog to make the land invisible. He was here when animals turned themselves into humans and people could become animals, and before the wolves had learned to overtake the caribou. He was here, perhaps, from the beginning.

THE SEAL BOY LEADS KIVIOK OUT TO SEA

THIS is the story of Kiviok. It begins when he paddled after seal boy and was blown out to sea in a storm.

The Netsilik Eskimos had killed a man from another tribe, and the man's widow vowed that she would have revenge. Soon after her husband was killed, she gave birth to a boy, and she knew that he would help avenge his father's death.

She dressed the boy in the skins of unborn seals, sewn in the shape of his body so that they were like his own skin. And she trained him to hold his breath, putting him in her water bucket and holding his head down. Not until he shook his head to get his breath would she let him come up and breathe. At last he could hold his breath until the sun moved in the sky. Then his mother knew the time had come. She carried him to the sea and put him by the water.

"You must go now. First, rise and show yourself in front of the kayaks. Then dive down and swim away from land. Lead the kayaks out into the sea. And when it is far enough, I will raise a storm so that the men will drown." These were her words.

The day was calm when the kayaks came. The seal boy swam below the surface, rising just in front of the kayaks. A Netsilik man shouted, "A seal cub!" But as soon as the kayaks came near, the cub dived. And in this way the Netsilik were drawn out to sea. And then, when they were far from land, the storm broke on them.

The men in their kayaks fought the waves. One by one they capsized and drowned. At last, only Kiviok and one young man were left. For a long time they followed the seal boy. Then the young man too became exhausted and capsized like all the others, and lone Kiviok paddled on.

And so it was that the mother had her revenge against the Netsilik who had killed her husband.



KIVIOK VISITS A WITCH

THE STORM blew in fury. Kiviok was driven before it until he came to a strange land. He left his kayak in readiness at the edge of the sea and went to a great house by the shore, a house with no windows and no roof. He climbed the wall and looked down to see whether anyone was inside. There sat an old witch tanning a human skin. Kiviok spat on the bench by her side and then hid himself. The witch tried to look up, but her eyelids were so big and heavy that they fell over her eyes.

"A house whose roof has never leaked now leaks through its roof today," she said.

Once more Kiviok spat by her side. This time the witch took her ulu and cut off her eyelids, and Kiviok looked down into eyes so fearsome that they could frighten a man to death.

"Come in and be my guest," the old woman said. "I shall dry your clothing." Soon Kiviok's wet clothes hung on the drying rack, and Kiviok sat upon the platform.

The witch took her ulu and went out to fetch fuel for the fire. She was going to eat Kiviok, and she was so sure of her prey that before she had even killed him she gathered fuel for the fire that would cook him.

Alone, Kiviok looked about and saw with horror that there were clean-picked skulls everywhere! Suddenly one of the heads began to rock from side to side, saying, "Make haste,

make haste. Fly while you can! What happened to us can happen to you!"

Kiviok wanted to run, but he could not reach his clothing on the rack. Whenever he tried, the rack slipped aside, or it leapt into the air out of reach. So Kiviok called on a snow bird, his helping spirit, and it came flying into the house, sweeping the clothing from the rack with its wings. No sooner did Kiviok have his clothes than he ran out of the house, leapt into his kayak, and paddled out to sea.

The witch saw him go and hurried after him. She ran so fast that she ran right out into the water, but she could not catch him. In her great rage she slashed a granite rock with her ulu, and her strokes were so strong that she cut the rock like meat.

Then Kiviok seized his harpoon and hurled it into a rock jutting out of the water, and the rock fell into pieces. "That is how I would have harpooned you," he cried.

When the witch saw the great strength of Kiviok, she shouted to him, "Come, be my husband." Kiviok turned his back and paddled out to the sea. The witch raged in her anger, and finally she threw her ulu after Kiviok. Over the top of the water it skimmed until, finally, it turned to ice.

People say that all winter ice began with the witch's ulu.



Never before had the sea frozen in winter. And it was only then that the people taught themselves to hunt seals at the breathing holes.

As Kiviok was paddling away, he heard a voice crying behind him: "Beware! Beware! Danger is behind you." He looked around and saw a giant mussel ready to close its shell around his kayak. He paddled with all his might and escaped just as the mussel snapped its shell shut.

The giant mussel was one of the witch's helping spirits. But what caused Kiviok to look behind?

KIVIOK VISITS THE TWO SPIDER-WOMEN

OUT on the open sea Kiviok paddled on again. He passed many shores until he came to a village where two women had stayed at home when their husbands went out hunting. The women were small—they were spiders in human form.

Kiviok stayed with the women and became the husband to both of them. When he left, he took all their beads from them. The spider-women had so many beads that they filled both his boots and his mittens. When he left, heavy with their beads, the small spider-women wept.

Again he paddled out to sea.



KIVIOK RETURNS FROM THE LAND OF THE SNIPES

KIVIOK paddled far over the open sea and came to a country where snipes lived in human form. They were clever kayak people.

Kiviok said to them, "I have paddled far. I have been far out over the open sea and along the shores of many lands. Now I am tired and I must sleep. But I will sleep sitting in my kayak. Paddle me homeward, back across the sea, and wake me only when you see my old country."

The snipes obeyed. They paddled away, and Kiviok fell asleep at once. Only when they came in sight of the familiar shore of his old country did the snipes waken him. The moment Kiviok opened his eyes he knew that he was home, and he broke into such great cries of joy that the mountains rang with his echo.

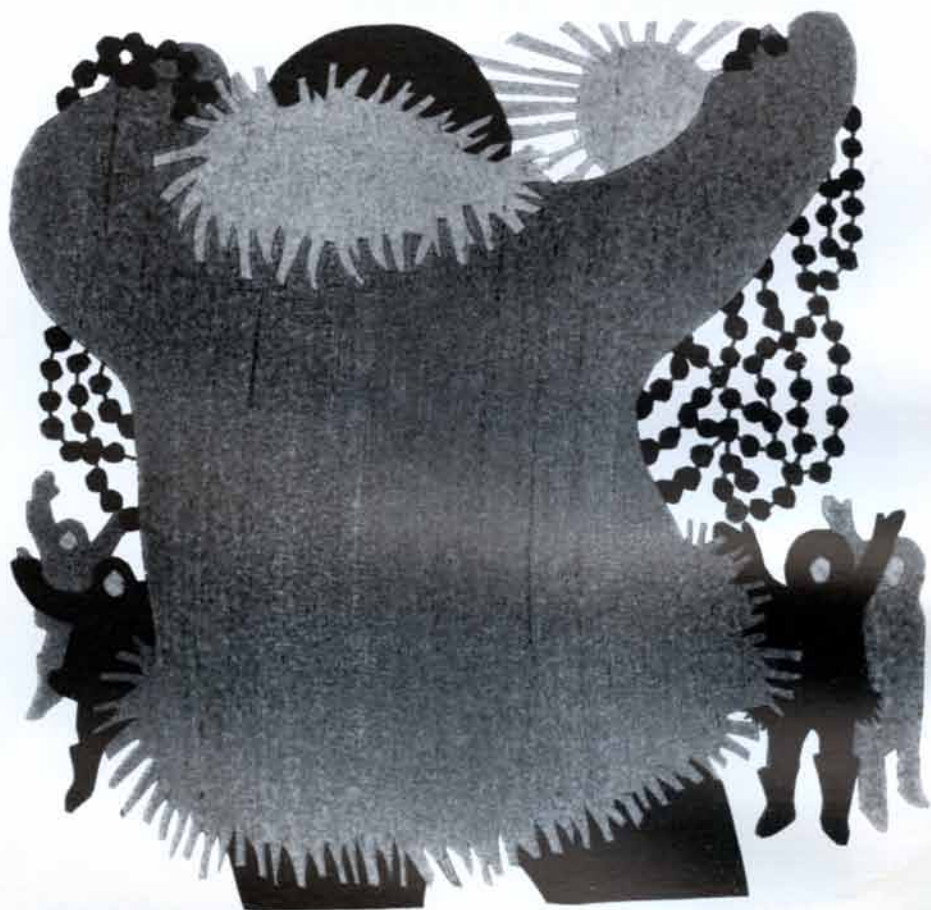
Kiviok's old father and mother were sitting by their tent and heard the echoes. They listened and peered out over the sea, as they had done ever since Kiviok had been blown out to sea in the storm.

The old father said, "Listen! That is Kiviok's shout of joy. He shouts as he used to shout when he came home from a lucky hunt."

Their hearts swelled with joy as they waited for their son. When they saw Kiviok coming in from the sea, they were so overwhelmed that their hearts broke with joy and they fell over dead.

When Kiviok put in to shore, all the people came down to

the beach. He could see only one of his wives, and so he knew the other had taken another husband while he had been away. Kiviok gave the beads of the spider women to all the women in the village but the wife who had taken another husband. As for her, when she heard that the other women had been given beads, she burst into tears.



KIVIOK TEACHES THE WOLVES TO HUNT CARIBOU

KIVIOK was lonely in his old village. His old parents were dead, and one of his wives had taken another husband. So before long he set out again.

Soon he came to a house where a mother and her daughter lived. They were big and strong, for they were wolves in human form.

Kiviok stayed with them and taught them to follow the caribou and run them down. From them, all the other wolves learned to hunt the caribou. The daughter could run fast and she brought down many caribou. So Kiviok took her to wife and lived with her.

One summer the three were living by a lake where the caribou came every year. There Kiviok followed the caribou in his kayak and speared them. When he came home towing a dead caribou, his young wife would come to meet him, wading out a little way into the lake. There she would take the caribou from the kayak and fling it over her shoulder, just as wolves carry their prey. So big and so strong was the young wife that she never trembled at the knees, even when she carried the heaviest caribou.

As time went on, the old woman grew angry, for she too wanted a husband. She envied her daughter more and more, until one day when Kiviok was out hunting caribou, she killed her. She pulled the young smooth skin from her daughter's face and hands, and with it she covered her wrinkled, old face and her bony hands.

When Kiviok returned, the mother went to greet him as her daughter always did. But Kiviok saw at once that it was the old woman. He knew, for she stood on the shore and did not wade out to greet him.

"Why do you not come out into the water and carry my kill as you always do?" Kiviok shouted. When the old woman took off her boots to wade out, Kiviok saw her thin, wrinkled, old-woman's legs. And when she lifted the caribou from the kayak, her knees trembled and she tottered to and fro.

Kiviok sorrowed for his strong young wife. Never again did he hunt caribou. Soon he departed, leaving the old woman forever, and he traveled again to new lands.

KIVIOK TAKES A FOX WIFE

ONCE more Kiviok was alone and had no woman to help him. For a long time he lived that way. Then one day he found boiled meat in his tent when he returned from hunting. The next day it happened again, and the next day and the next.

One day he pretended to go out hunting, but he stole back and hid himself behind his tent. After a time a little fox came creeping along and slipped into the tent. Soon a woman came out of the tent and laid a fox skin on the ground. Kiviok went to where the skin lay and took it in his hand. Just then the woman came out of the tent, and when she saw him, she was frightened. She begged him to give her back her skin. But Kiviok said, "When you grow fond of me, and think no more of leaving me, you shall have your skin again."

This was how Kiviok found a new wife. They were happy together through the summer. But when winter approached, two wolverines in human form came to live nearby.

The little fox was frightened by the wolverines and ran away. At once Kiviok followed her because he had come to love his little fox wife. Her trail went on and on until finally it disappeared into an igloo with many entrances.

Kiviok crept toward the strange igloo. A lemming in human form ran out to him and said, "I have been told to say that you should take me for a wife instead!"

"You, lemming, I will not have, for your nose bleeds too easily," said Kiviok. (People say that the lemming's nose bleeds at the slightest knock.) So the lemming went back in, and an ermine came out.



"Then you must take me instead," said the ermine.

"You, ermine, are too narrow about the waist for any man," said Kiviok.

And then a little marmot came out and said, "I am the one you are to have."

"Not you, marmot, for you have such a flat snout and such a big belly."

Then out came a hare. "Then it is I whom you will take."

"Never a hare," said Kiviok, "with eyes so wide apart."

A wolverine appeared and said, "You must take me!"

"You, wolverine, have a short and ugly snout."

Then a wolf came out. Kiviok hesitated, for he liked the way she looked. But he thought again of his little fox wife and said, "A wolf I will not have. You have far too long a snout."

Finally the lemming appeared again and said, "Then if you will take none of them, you must close your eyes and go into the igloo backwards."

Kiviok obeyed, and found himself in a large igloo with many rooms. In it lived animals in human form. By the entrance, the marmots had their place. Their looks pleased Kiviok so much that he was about to stay with them, but then he saw his little wife. He wanted to go over to her, but she moved away as he came close. So he spat on the place where she sat and so she remained sitting. This way Kiviok got his wife again, and he was so happy that he celebrated with all the animals.

KIVIOK SURPRISES THE WILD GEESE AND FINDS A NEW WIFE

ONCE, when Kiviok was traveling on, he came to a lake where young women were playing. They were naked, running happily around in the water. Kiviok crept unseen to the clothing that lay on the shore and picked out the dress that was most prettily feathered. Then he stood up and let himself be seen. The women ran shrieking to their clothes. When they had put them on, they flew away in the form of wild geese. The one whose clothing Kiviok had taken stood crying, for she could not escape.

"Will you give me my clothes?"

"No," said Kiviok. "I want you for my wife."

So he took the young woman to his tent and they lived together. After she had given birth to two sons, the goose-woman grew restless. She taught her sons never to eat meat. Instead she took them to the lake nearby and showed them how to eat juicy grass mixed with sand and pebbles.

"But you must eat the meat of the animals I kill," said Kiviok to his wife. But no matter how he begged, neither his wife nor his sons would eat the meat.

One day the woman began to pick up feathers. She gathered more and more, and when she had enough she put them between her sons' fingers and over their arms and shoulders. Then she put feathers on herself and they all flew off over the lake where Kiviok was fishing for salmon. They circled above him, crying, "We are going home to our own people now." And they were gone.



KIVIOK MEETS THE FATHER OF THE SALMON

KIVIOK walked over the land in search of his goose-wife and their sons. After a time, he came upon a man who was chopping driftwood with an axe. It was Ekalok, the Father of the Salmon. He was making salmon of driftwood. The splinters that flew from his axe turned into salmon and jumped right into a little river running alongside him.

"Have you not seen a goose fly by with two goslings?" Kiviok asked him.

"To be sure," he said, and showed Kiviok where they had gone. But there was a big lake which Kiviok could not cross.

"You must help me," said Kiviok.

So Ekalok called a giant salmon to the shore of the big lake.

"Take a seat there by the tail and close your eyes," said the Father of the Salmon.

Kiviok did so, and Ekalok commanded the salmon to swim after the geese.

"When the water in the lake becomes light-colored and you feel the salmon scrape the bottom of the lake, jump off," commanded Ekalok. The giant salmon swam off with Kiviok, with spray rising around its head.

That was how Kiviok came to the land of the wild geese and found the village where they lived in human form. His sons were running around outside a tent and saw him coming from the shore. The boys ran back to the tent, crying: "Father has come, Father has come!"



But their mother, who was now married to one of her own tribe, answered, "Do not expect to see your father here. We left him in a land far away."

The new husband of the goose-woman had made a tool kit out of his stomach when he took human form. And so he said to his wife, "This Kiviok would be dangerous to meet."

Just then Kiviok stepped inside the tent. The husband was so frightened that he scrambled out of the tent, forgetting his tool-bag stomach. But the wife stayed behind and burst into tears. And so Kiviok got his wife back again.

KIVIOK IS BURIED IN A MEAT CACHE TO CATCH A THIEF

IN A PLACE where Kiviok went, meat was always being stolen from a cache and no one knew who the thief was. So Kiviok hid himself in the cache to find out.

At night, when everyone slept, the stones on the cache were suddenly pulled away, and a big man, a bear in human form, seized Kiviok and dragged him out. Kiviok pretended to be dead, keeping himself quite stiff, although he almost cried out in pain when the bear made a hole through his lips to fasten the drag-line. Then the bear pulled him through the snow as though Kiviok were an ordinary seal.

When the pain in his lips was too great, Kiviok caught hold of some bushes to make the bear stop. And when they stopped, the bear looked for any sign of life in Kiviok, wondering how he suddenly became so heavy. But Kiviok kept himself stiff as a corpse, and the bear dragged him on.

In the bear's igloo Kiviok was laid out on the floor to be cut up. But the bear was so tired from dragging Kiviok home that at once he lay down on the platform and fell asleep. Then his wife took her ulu and prepared to slit open Kiviok's stomach. But just as she was about to cut he drew his belly in, and the wife, who thought that he was frozen, put him upside down by her lamp to thaw, just as she did with seals.

The wife went away, and Kiviok opened his eyes to look about the igloo. But two bear-boys who were playing on the floor saw him and shouted: "The food is opening its eyes!"



Their father was so tired that he only mumbled, "Well, let the food open its eyes. It was happy today to hold onto the bushes on the way."

Kiviok caught sight of an axe. He sprang up, struck the old bear a blow on the head and ran out through the passage. The boys screamed and the she-bear snatched at him as he rushed past, but she only caught the edge of his parka. Kiviok fled, but the bear-wife followed. She soon began to overtake her prey, but Kiviok, who was a great angatok, shouted, "Let a mountain ridge rise!" And a ridge rose up before the she-bear. But soon she reached the top, and once again she began to overtake Kiviok.

When she was quite close, he shouted this time: "Let a river spring forth." Immediately, a river sprang forth with thick reeds along its shores. When the bear reached the river, a wide and swift one, Kiviok stood on the other bank. The bear cried, "How did you get across?"

Kiviok answered, "By sipping and licking it up."

The bear did the same and crossed over. But she was so full of the water she had swallowed that she fell down on the bank and burst. And from inside her white vapor rose up.

People say that it is from this vapor that the fog first came. And they also say that the mountain ridge that appeared at Kiviok's command is the long ridge that runs through our land. It is also said that the river in the south called "The New River" is the one that sprang out of the ground to save Kiviok.

KIVIOK GOES TO THE LAND OF STRANGERS

LATER, people tell us, Kiviok went to the land of strangers, the men who live in the land toward the sun and who do not wear suits of caribou skin. He had killed a man in his native village and could not go back. The men of the sunland made him a great man with great possessions. It has been said that he has five ships, and sometimes he comes to a bay near us where another tribe lives.

It is also said that Kiviok has had many lives and that now, finally, he is living his last one. In earlier times, when he came to the end of a life he fell into a deathlike sleep, and when he awoke he began a new life. But he did not begin each time as a young man. He grew older from one life to the next, and his years showed on his face. People say that he is fearsome to look at now. The last time our people saw him, they were almost scared to death by his face. So now he goes about with his face covered up, for it is quite black, moss-grown and hard as granite.

From the time Kiviok settled among the men without fur clothing, we have known nothing more to tell about him. All we know is that he is alive, and before he ends his last life he will once more see his countrymen and his native land.

