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Repatriation of sealskin boots brings back memories



Rita Pigalak, front, and Wilma Pigalak pick up kamiks made by their mom Elva, as part of a repatriation process with Bata Shoe Museum. The sisters made the trip to the museum, located in Toronto, this summer. (Photo courtesy of Rita Pigalak)

Kamiks will be placed in Kugluktuk's heritage centre

Arty Sarkisian
Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

When Rita Pigalak entered the storage area of the Bata Shoe Museum in Toronto with her sister Wilma, they were already both getting a little emotional.

Surrounded by ancient Egyptian sandals, Queen Victoria's slippers, Elvis Presley's loafers and John Lennon's boots, they could feel the weight of history.

But they were about to see an item that was particularly special to them, as Pigalaks.

Accompanied by Justine Woods, Bata's curator of Indigenous collections, the sisters had the chance to see a pair of small white and red kamiks. The sealskin boots were embroidered with purple flowers and a red zig-zag near the top. With the boots was a photo of a seamstress in a red T-shirt and big white glasses.

The two sisters could not hold back their tears. The woman in the photo was their late mother, Elva Pigalak, and the boots were her creation, from 1986.

"It was just an amazing feeling. I still remember coming back home for Christmas from high school in Yellowknife and seeing her working on them," Rita Pigalak said in a phone call from Kugluktuk, about a month after the Bata Shoe Museum

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ᐊᕐᓇᓵᕐᓕᓴᐅᓪᓚᖅ ᐃᓱᓴᒥᐅᑕᑐᖅᓂᐅᓂ ᑲᒥᑦᓴᑭᑎᓂ, ᑯᐃᓐ ᕝᕙᐃᓐᓇᕐᓂᖅᓂᐅᓂ ᐃᓕᓴᐅᓱᖅᓂᐅᓂ ᐊᒥᓱᓂ ᐃᓕᓴᐅᓱᖅᓂᐅᓂ ᐊᒥᒪ ᓴᓐ ᓪᓚᓐ ᑲᒪᔭᖅᓂᐅᓂ, ᐃᓕᑦᐸᐃᓕᓴᐅᖅᑐᖅᓯᒪᑦ ᐊᑐᖅᑕᐅᓂᑯᑦ.

ᑭᓕᓴᐅᓂ ᑕᑯᓕᒪᓕᐅᖅᑐᖅᓯᒪᑦ ᐱᖃᑯᑎᒃ ᐱᑦᓕᓚᐅᔭᑐᖅᓯᒪᓂᖅᓯᑦ ᐃᓗᒥᔭᑦ, ᐱᒪᐃᓕᓴᐅᓕᐅᔭᑐᖅᓯᒪᓂᖅᓯᑦ ᐊᒥᒪ ᓴᓐ ᓪᓚᓐ ᑲᒪᔭᖅᓂᐅᓂ, ᐃᓕᑦᐸᐃᓕᓴᐅᖅᑐᖅᓯᒪᓂᖅᓯᑦ ᐊᒥᒪ ᐃᓕᓴᐅᓱᖅᓂᐅᓂ ᐃᓗᒥᔭᑦ.

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