



Art to Some – Lunch to Others

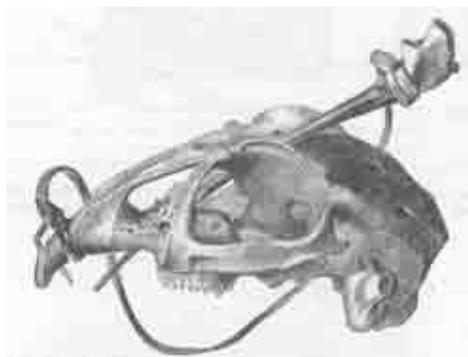
by Ernie Bies, January 6, 2018

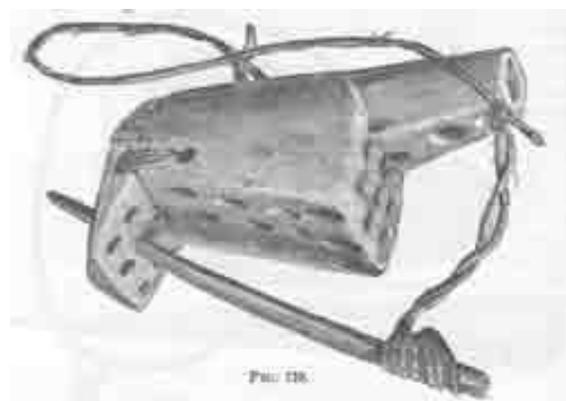
During my frequent surveying stints in the Arctic in the early 70s, I visited many communities. I was fortunate to be able to buy Inuit art and crafts, which made special Christmas gifts for friends and family.

In Igloolik I found a perfect gift for my sister Olga, a school teacher living in Brampton. It was an Inuit game, called an Ajegaung (pronounced aw-jah-gawk), made of a seal vertebra and rib and connected with a length of sinew made of gut – all-natural materials.



The object of the game is to hold the rib in one hand, toss the vertebra into the air and attempt to spear the hole as it came down. This is a traditional Inuit game and any local materials could be used, from a small skull to a larger piece of bone with various holes drilled in it. Different values could be assigned to different holes. Or, perhaps, the object of





a game could be to spear different holes in order. Simple games like this have been used by the Inuit to amuse themselves and their children for centuries. When confined in small spaces, like igloos or tents, it helped pass the time. This was similar to children's games in southern Canada,

such as ball and cup or ball and paddle.

I sent this unique gift to Olga one Christmas, thinking her students would be duly impressed in seeing an authentic Inuit game and learning a bit about the culture. Not getting a report, I finally called her and she sheepishly reported that it had been a great hit – but not with her students.

When she went looking for it after Christmas, all she found were a few fragments of the ajeguung on her dog's pillow. Gypsy had enjoyed a special breakfast of fresh seal bones imported from the Arctic, almost 3,000 km. away. A twist on the classic "the dog ate my homework" excuse.



Igloolik to Brampton, as the crow flies