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## Perfect symmetry in piluguugka

When people here talk about the Yup'ik world view, where science and art meet graceful philosophy and time-tested accuracy in many inventions, it might sound to outsiders like an unfathomable ideology that can only survive in opinion.

Yet the proof is plain in objects we might use everyday, if lucky enough to possess them.

Last week piluguugka arrived, these perfect boots sewn by Helen Nelson of Napakiak. Piluguugka tangnirquq maqapiarluteklu. Qu yana cakneq, Helen and Alexi. They are made of seal hide soles, calf-skin leggings striped by wolverine, beaver, river otter and topped in red velvet drawn at the knees by green yarn she wove into boot strings. Grasses go in the bottom for warmth, insulation and comfort. Helen made them entirely by hand. She is 89 years old.

I put them on that night they were brought to me at 11 p.m. or so, and walked around the house. It was time for bed but I didn't want to take them off. (I did though.) The next morning I wore them to work, a continuing journey in amazement.

The piluguug show sound science in their ability to keep my feet warm while walking in the 20-below-zero cold of that morning. They are museum-art-perfect, the kind of treasure like a Van Gogh painting kept carefully behind glass. They are flawless math; my feet were drawn onto a piece of paper and taken to Helen for her to gauge my foot size. It's not a number, but rather a precise calculation of my foot size.

And there's an element of whole-body comfort in these piluguug as though it's good for my mind and body to wear them, as if a massage is going on down there in my feet as I write this. I don't know if that's part of the Yup'ik philosophy toward life, but it feels like it.

When outsiders experience difficulties in understanding Yup'ik people or absorbing the completeness of how the disciplines – science, math, medicine and art – come together, the physical objects are here to help them gain insight. Would it be a stretch to wish all the legislators in Juneau could own a pair of piluguug? (Muk luks if they are men.)

I don't think so.

An ulu, for that matter, might straighten a lot of people out; it too is a scientifically sound instrument and artistically beautiful.

The tradition and scientific knowledge for making Yup'ik clothing and tools exists still, and may it go on forever. The world would be a sad place indeed if no longer the juncture for such wisdom could be found together in one bundle, such as in each pair of astoundingly beautiful and functional footwear. Quyanavvuaa.



### EDITORIAL

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