

# Reflections on Self, Race, Places, and Connections: An Exchange Journey Through Nuuk, Greenland

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

### **To Tracey, Ross, and Andrew with Maine Economic and Improvement Fund:**

Thank you for your generous financial support of my recent trip to Greenland. This opportunity allowed me to engage in meaningful collaborations, exchange ideas, and deepen connections between the University of Southern Maine and the University of Greenland.

Your support has been instrumental in making this experience possible, and I am truly grateful for MEIF's commitment to fostering international partnerships and advancing interdisciplinary research. Thank you for your continued investment in this important work.

### **To Paula Gerstenblatt and Jan Piribeck:**

I express my heartfelt gratitude to both of you for your support and thoughtfulness in including me in the Maine-Greenland Collaboration. I am deeply honored to be part of this important initiative, and I recognize that you could have chosen anyone to play a role in continuing this incredible legacy for future North Atlantic exchanges. It means so much to me that you chose me to contribute to this work.

Your dedication and diligence in nurturing this collaboration are inspiring. I know that such efforts often happen behind the scenes and may go unnoticed, but I want you to know that I see and deeply appreciate the care and commitment you bring to this project. Your vision and leadership create opportunities not just for those directly involved but for the broader communities we all serve. Thank you again for your trust and belief in me. I am excited to continue this journey with you both and to help sustain and grow the legacy of this exchange.

### **To Bonnie Jensen:**

I express my deepest gratitude for the incredible care and dedication you showed during my time in Nuuk. You took a significant part of your life to host me and ensured that every aspect of my experience was enriching and meaningful. From the university to the land, agencies, people, arts, and the city itself, you created a journey that I will carry with me always.

Although there were moments when I felt overwhelmed by the sheer depth and breadth of the experiences, I realize now that every single one was necessary and impactful. You curated an itinerary that allowed me not only to explore but to truly engage with Nuuk and people on a profound level.

I must also extend my heartfelt thanks to Severin for his generosity and support. The evening at your beautiful home, with the warmest hospitality and the best meal I had in Greenland, will remain one of my fondest memories. Please thank him for his thoughtful cooking and for helping with transportation—it was clear that his care and effort were deeply rooted in ensuring I felt welcome and at ease.

Bonnie, your kindness, thoughtfulness, and unwavering commitment to making this experience exceptional for me have not gone unnoticed. You have left an indelible mark on my time in Greenland, and I cannot thank you enough for your generosity and support. I look forward to staying in touch and finding ways to continue this meaningful collaboration.

**To Sandra Perez:**

Thank you for sharing this incredible Greenland exchange experience with me. It was truly a treat getting to know you—not only as a dedicated MSW candidate but also as a remarkable individual with such rich perspectives. I deeply appreciated the thoughtful conversations we had, exploring the comparisons and contrasts of our diverse backgrounds and experiences.

Our time together was both enriching and inspiring, and I am so excited about the opportunities ahead. I look forward to collaborating on our reflections from Greenland, particularly as women of color, and crafting a meaningful publication during the Spring 2025 semester. I believe our insights will contribute something truly valuable to the field of social work.

This journey has also laid the foundation for a lasting professional relationship and friendship, something I greatly value. Thank you for your energy, curiosity, and partnership throughout this experience. I'm looking forward to all that we will accomplish together in the future.

**To my Family: Joe, Dad, Sarah, Mom, Kenya, and Joe III:**

I want to take a moment to express my deepest gratitude to all of you for your unwavering support and patience during this incredible endeavor. Your encouragement gave me the strength and confidence to take on this Greenland exchange experience, and I couldn't have done it without knowing I had each of you behind me.

Joe, thank you for holding things down at home and being my steady anchor, always encouraging me to pursue my dreams. Dad and Sarah, your wisdom and reassurance have been invaluable, and I'm so grateful for the example of strength and love you've always shown me. Mom, your pride in my accomplishments fuels me to keep pushing forward, even when things feel overwhelming. Kenya and Joe (III), you inspire me daily with your resilience, curiosity, and ability to adapt to life's adventures.

This experience has been life-changing, and knowing that my family was cheering me on made it all the more meaningful. Thank you for your patience and understanding during my time away, for supporting my vision, and for believing in the work I'm so passionate about. I love and appreciate you all more than words can express.

**To my New Greenlandic Friends and Professional Colleagues**

I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to all my new Greenlandic friends and colleagues who welcomed me with warmth and generosity. Your support and hospitality made my time in Greenland unforgettable. From hosting events to sharing your insights and stories, each of you contributed to making this experience truly enriching and meaningful. Thank you for opening

your hearts and workplaces, and for allowing me to learn from and alongside you. I look forward to staying connected and continuing the relationships we've built. Your kindness and collaboration will always hold a special place in my journey.



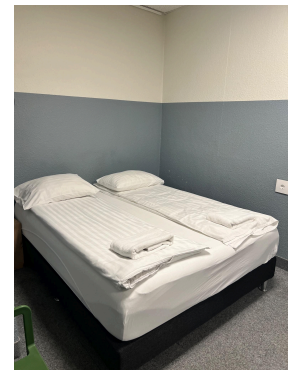


## Thursday, 10/3/24 - From Portland to Iceland & Friday, 10/4/24 Arrival to Greenland:

The journey began at the Portland bus station, where I met Sandra Perez, my MSW student companion for this adventure. We'd met once before, over Zoom, when she reached out about the MSW program at USM. Even then, there was an instant connection that felt like the start of something meaningful. As the bus hummed through the morning and everyone else slept, Sandra and I quickly sank into an enthusiastic conversation, weaving together stories, dreams, and the shared anticipation of what lay ahead.

Our anticipation was quickly tempered by the stark darkness of the Icelandic night. Despite knowing the hour, I couldn't help but hope for a glimpse of Iceland's landscape as our plane descended. Instead, what unfolded before me in the dim light appeared almost eerie—an industrial landscape dominated by monotone buildings and barren roads that seemed to mirror a prison complex more than a vibrant community. The buildings, uniformly white and sterile, and the gravel-like roads gave the impression of isolation and austerity. Without daylight or the opportunity to capture photos, I was left only with my perceptions and a sense of disconnection from the land beneath me.

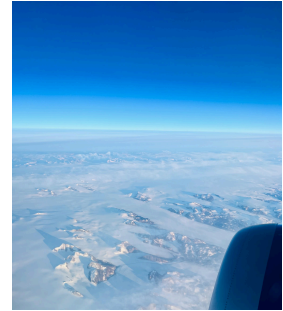
The next morning, however, the experience shifted dramatically. The Keflavik airport was a blend of efficiency and calmness, distinct from the chaotic energy of American airports. Unlike the hurried and often impersonal nature of U.S. security lines, there was no shouting or urgency as we moved through the screening process. I was briefly stopped for a bag check, but even this was handled with a level of patience and respect that caught me off guard. My misplaced makeup and toothpaste were simply placed back in my bag, and I was waved through without stress—a stark contrast to what I've come to expect from traveling back home.



Once through security, the airport opened into what resembled a shopping mall. This layout, with its variety of shops and eateries, seemed to transform the usually sterile experience of waiting into something more akin to leisurely browsing. I appreciated the fact that we wouldn't know our flight gate until one hour before departure—a curious departure from the rigid structure of American airports, but one that fostered a sense of unhurried exploration. Sandra and I found a small café and enjoyed breakfast as we waited, using the moment to reflect on the journey ahead.

The boarding experience brought a moment of humor and surrealism. As we made our way to the gate, I was struck by the long walk to the exterior of the airport where our plane waited.

Standing before the aircraft, I had a fleeting sensation of grandeur. The image of Michelle Obama boarding Air Force One popped into my head, and I found myself smiling at the comparison. Yet, as I climbed the narrow steps into the plane, I felt a rush of excitement and privilege at the thought of embarking on a journey that few get to experience.



Flying over Greenland was nothing short of breathtaking. The snow-capped, rugged mountains stretched out below us, majestic and serene. It was a landscape I had only seen in photographs, now made vivid and real from my tiny airplane window. The untouched whiteness of the peaks and the sharp contours of the rocks seemed to rise up to meet us as if welcoming us to this remote land.

Arriving in Nuuk, we were greeted warmly by Dr. Bonnie Jensen, who drove us to our rental house. I felt a wave of relief and gratitude wash over me as we pulled up to the home on Inspekktorbaahken 52, nestled along the fjord. The house itself was an embodiment of Greenlandic warmth and hospitality—clean, beautifully decorated, and brimming with local artifacts and literature and spectacular views. As I entered, I was struck by the intricate pottery mugs lining the kitchen, their textured surfaces and earthy tones embodying a sense of rootedness and artistry. I made a mental note to find something similar to take back home to Maine, hoping to capture a piece of this place's beauty.



**Lunch** that afternoon was a delightful introduction to Greenlandic hospitality. We met with Lars and Bonnie, and despite Lars's hesitations about his English, he was open and eager to engage. Our conversation meandered between comparing housing costs, tuition fees, and student loans in the U.S. and Greenland, revealing unexpected similarities and profound differences. Lars expressed a curiosity about American barbershops—an experience that seems mundane to me but represents a window into a culture for him. I was quick to offer my husband's services, imagining the cross-cultural exchange that even a haircut might facilitate. Lars also mentioned his interest in visiting a prison in Maine, a desire that, thanks to Paula's connections, will become a reality.



The evening drew to a close gently. Exhausted from travel and excitement, Sandra and I settled into our new surroundings, the quietness of the house mirroring the stillness of the fjord outside. The first day in Greenland had been a whirlwind of contrasting emotions—disconnection in Iceland, comfort in the Keflavik airport, awe over Greenland's landscape, and, finally, a sense of homecoming as I settled into the warm embrace of our rental house. As I drifted off to sleep, I felt the weight of anticipation ease, replaced by the steady pulse of curiosity and excitement for what was to come.



## Saturday, 10/5/24 - Camping and Fishing:

Today was a day of wonder, but also one that tested my endurance and pushed me beyond my physical comfort. We had a late start, setting off around noon, but despite the leisurely hour, my body was still adjusting to the time difference. I couldn't shake the nagging thought that it was only 9 a.m. back in Maine, and my internal clock seemed determined to keep me tethered to that rhythm.

Our day began with a hike led by Lene Møller and her partner, Simon. The moment I set foot on the trail, I was awestruck by the majesty of the landscape. Towering mountains, their rugged faces dotted with patches of snow, stood guard over an expanse of fjords speckled with drifting icebergs.

It was a scene pulled straight from a postcard—untouched and pristine. But as beautiful as the terrain was, navigating it was no small feat. The ground was unforgiving, a loose mixture of gravel and jagged rocks that shifted unpredictably underfoot. With every step, I felt the strain in my hip, a sharp reminder of the injury I've been managing due to osteoarthritis. Fear gripped me as we began the descent, the thought of slipping and falling playing over and over in my mind.



Yet, I pushed through, determined not to let my anxiety overshadow the experience. I focused on each step, taking my time, until we finally arrived at the campsite. There, the grandeur of the view eclipsed all my worries. Standing on the edge of that wild, untamed space, surrounded by towering peaks and glacial waters, I felt both small and profoundly connected to something far greater.



After the hike, we gathered around the campsite for lunch, where I sampled local fare: a sheep burger and a musk ox hot dog. I was initially hesitant as these weren't flavors I'd ever

encountered but both were surprisingly delicious, rich and savory with a subtle gaminess that spoke to Greenland's unique culinary landscape. Sharing this meal felt like more than just eating; it was a form of participation in the life of this place, a way of connecting with the land and its traditions.



Later in the day, we ventured into the Pissifik grocery market, where we marveled at the array of foods both familiar and foreign lining the shelves. While there, we received a quick lesson on how to spot the Northern Lights, a phenomenon I'd always dreamed of seeing but never imagined I'd witness on this trip.

As we drove back to the house, I kept my eyes glued to the sky, hoping against hope. And then it happened. A soft, green glow began to dance along the horizon, growing brighter and more vivid as we continued. The aurora borealis, this ethereal, swirling light, lit up the night sky, a living canvas that defied description. For a moment, I forgot the ache in my hip, the exhaustion of travel, and the unfamiliarity of this place. All that remained was the wonder of witnessing something so breathtakingly beautiful and so completely beyond my control. It was, quite literally, a dream come true.





## **Sunday, 10/6/24 - A Day of Rest and Unexpected Encounters**

Today was marked by frustration and a sense of limitation. My hip was aching more than usual, forcing me to sit out the scheduled history walk tour. My mind and my body felt energetic and eager. It was disappointing to miss out, especially since I'd been looking forward to learning more about the rich heritage of this place firsthand. Instead, I had to rely on Sandra to take detailed notes and relay the experience to me later...a reminder of the physical constraints I'm navigating on this trip.

With a quiet house and a full inbox, I took the opportunity to catch up on emails and get some work done, hoping that a day of rest would recharge me for the full day ahead on Monday. I also digested the beautiful views from the windows of the house. By late afternoon, I felt the need to stretch my legs and stepped out for a brief walk to the market, eager to find something simple to eat. But we were met with closed doors. Everything seemed to have shut down early. A local woman noticed our confusion and shared that there had been a battery explosion at the shopping center, prompting an unexpected early closure for safety reasons.

Determined not to let the day end in disappointment, we continued wandering until we stumbled upon a small restaurant called "Bones." They were closing in 15 minutes, but graciously allowed us to place a quick order. We opted for a salad and some fries, a modest meal, but comforting nonetheless. As we made our way back to the house under the dimming sky, I found myself reflecting on the day. Although it hadn't gone as planned, the kindness of the woman who stopped to share information and the restaurant staff's willingness to accommodate us were small but meaningful reminders of the warmth and generosity of this community. It wasn't the day I envisioned, but it offered its own subtle insights and moments of connection.

## **Monday, 10/7/24 - Engaging Conversations and Cultural Exchanges:**



Today was a jam-packed yet deeply fulfilling day filled with meaningful conversations and new experiences. Our morning began with a series of discussions at the University of Greenland's School of Social Work, where Sandra and I had the opportunity to connect with faculty members and learn more about their approach to social work education. I was particularly moved by the exchange with Poul and Charlothe, where we delved into the nuances of social work education in the U.S. compared to Greenland. We spoke not only about course structure and training but also about the unique social and cultural contexts that shape the profession in each country. Sandra added richness to the conversation by sharing her own experiences of world travel and her Colombian heritage, which seemed to spark genuine curiosity and admiration from our hosts.

After our discussions, Charlothe took us on a tour of the university. For an institution serving only 400 to 500 students, the campus felt expansive and modern. I was struck by the spaciousness of the facilities, the thoughtful design of the buildings, and the sense of pride that

radiated from each person we met. The blend of contemporary architecture and Greenlandic cultural elements created an inviting atmosphere that I couldn't help but admire. As we walked through the different departments, we touched on the various disciplines offered at the university, which make up a well-rounded liberal arts education. During the tour, we unexpectedly ran into our landlord, who, as it turns out, also works in the Office of Student Affairs underscoring just how interconnected this community truly is.

Before lunch, we found a private booth to rest and catch up on some work. I was charmed by the small details that made the campus feel so welcoming, like the use of real cups, mugs, and dishes across the university. We took advantage of the water dispenser and coffee station as we waited for the cafeteria, referred to here as the “cantina”, to open. This was my first experience with Greenlandic campus food, and I was pleasantly surprised by the selection of open-faced sandwiches. I tried a shrimp and boiled egg sandwich, which was both simple and flavorful. Once again, Sandra was the star of lunchtime conversations, captivating our hosts with stories of her travels and unique perspectives.

In the afternoon, we visited Adam, the U.S. Consulate in Nuuk. Bonnie had mentioned earlier that she expected a high-security experience, which made me laugh when all we had to do was buzz in and announce ourselves. I was prepared for metal detectors and bag checks like the standard protocol back home but none of that happened. Instead, we were welcomed in, and Adam immediately launched into eager questions about the exchange program before we even had a chance to formally introduce ourselves. I took this as a sign of genuine interest and enthusiasm, and I shared insights into the Maine-Greenland Collaborations project and the broader vision of the Maine North Atlantic Institute.

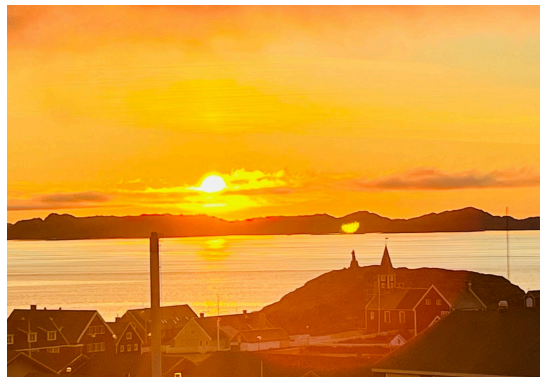


I explained that the project, led by Paula and Jan, combines art with social and natural sciences to explore the cultural, environmental, and socio-economic changes facing coastal communities in Maine and Greenland. Through interviews, arts-based workshops, and treks across diverse landscapes, the initiative has created a repository of transcripts, photographs, videos, and sound recordings that serve as a foundation for exploring intersecting narratives about changing ecologies and lived experiences. As I articulated the scope and impact of the project, I found myself feeling a deeper connection to the work and a growing desire to continue this legacy. I even shared my vision of expanding the program into a structured exchange course, where small cohorts of 3 - 5 students would spend a semester experiencing both Maine and Greenland, delving into cross-cultural research and community engagement.

When Adam asked what I needed from him, I realized that I wasn't fully prepared to answer. The website had been outdated, and I didn't have a clear understanding of what support the U.S. Consulate typically offers. So, I turned the question back to him, asking for a clearer picture of his role and what resources might be available. Once we established that, we discussed potential funding opportunities and the possibility of having the Consulate support our exchange efforts more formally. Sandra, insightful as ever, suggested that the Consulate's endorsement on our documents could provide credibility and help us secure additional funding and partnerships. Bonnie, too, took the opportunity to express her needs for student and faculty exchanges. We wrapped up our meeting with a group photo—symbolic of the shared vision we were beginning to build.



Later that afternoon, Sandra ventured off for a hike on Little Malene with Carstene while I rested, still managing the limitations of my hip. We ended the day with a lovely dinner at Bonnie's breathtakingly beautiful home, where I tasted reindeer for the first time. The dish was surprisingly delicious, reminding me of my grandmother's beef stew that was comforting and rich. We shared laughter, stories, and even conversations with their dog, Nova, who seemed just as engaged in the evening as the rest of us. As the evening drew to a close, Bonnie pointed out the stunning sunset, noting that such beauty often heralds the arrival of the Northern Lights.



Sure enough, as I laid down to sleep, I glanced out the window above my head and saw them - brilliant green streaks dancing across the sky. There, from the comfort of my bed, I witnessed one of nature's most spectacular phenomena, feeling deeply content and profoundly grateful for the unfolding experiences of this journey.

## **Tuesday, 10/8/24 - Exploring Greenlandic Social Services:**

Today, we had the opportunity to visit one of the local social service agencies in Nuuk, Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq, the municipality of Sermersooq where we met Susanne and Inutia. It was an eye-opening experience that provided valuable insights into the structure and function of Greenland's child welfare system. Upon arrival, we were warmly welcomed by the staff, who took time to walk us through their programs and services.

The conversations focused on how the agency addresses the unique needs of children and families in Greenland, particularly in light of the geographic isolation and limited resources that many communities face. I was struck by the dedication of the social workers and the way they balanced cultural sensitivity with the need to implement protective services. It was clear that the well-being of children and preserving family ties are at the forefront of their work. They also provided us with insight on how foster care placement is implemented which seemed like a faster process than in the U.S.

We discussed the similarities and differences between child welfare practices in Greenland and the United States, touching on the challenges of serving rural populations and ensuring that interventions are both effective and culturally appropriate. I couldn't help but reflect on the parallels with my own work in Maine, where social workers often grapple with balancing the needs of small, tight-knit communities with the demands of state regulations.

Sandra and I left the center feeling inspired by the passion of the staff and the resilience of the families they support. This visit added another layer of understanding to our experience here in Greenland, deepening our appreciation for the complexities of social work in this remote and beautiful land.

Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq is the municipal social service agency serving Nuuk and surrounding areas. It provides various services, including child and family support, education, cultural initiatives, and community engagement. The agency emphasizes creating safe and supportive environments for children and families through targeted interventions, family counseling, and community programs. The Center for Child Welfare focuses on safeguarding the well-being of children, offering both preventative and responsive services to ensure their safety and development.

In the afternoon, there was some confusion regarding our lunch meeting. The schedule noted "lunch with the head of department," which we assumed referred to our extended time with Susanne. Thinking the meeting had concluded, we headed back to rest. Shortly after, we received a text from Bonnie: "I'm waiting for you at the university!" It turned out that lunch was actually scheduled with the Dean. We hurried back and, despite being 20 minutes late, engaged in a productive discussion with the Dean and Matteo from the Office of International Affairs. Our conversations explored potential collaborations between UG and USM, with a cautionary note about lodging limitations for larger groups in the future.



## Wednesday, 10/9/24 - Greenland Institute for Human Rights Overview:

The Greenland Institute for Human Rights focuses on promoting and safeguarding human rights in Greenland. Their key areas include advocating for children's rights, supporting gender equality, and addressing discrimination against marginalized groups. The institute also engages in educational outreach, legal advocacy, and research to inform policy development and strengthen human rights protections. We met with Qivioq Løvstrøm, PhD Student and Leader of the Human Rights Institute.



On this day, we had the privilege of attending an in-depth presentation by Qivioq Løvstrøm on the human rights landscape in Greenland. Her presentation, titled [\*The Human Rights Situation in Greenland\*](#), provided a comprehensive overview of Greenland's struggle with self-determination, decolonization, and the unique challenges faced by its Indigenous population.

Qivioq began by outlining Greenland's colonial history under Denmark and the lasting effects of the country's integration into the Danish state. A key focus was the "Greenlandization" movement in the 1970s, which sought to reclaim Inuit culture and secure equal rights for Greenlanders. The presentation shed light on how Denmark's historical policies, such as forced relocations and Greenland's inclusion in the European Economic Community, have shaped modern Greenland's pursuit of independence and identity.

One of the standout topics was the establishment of Greenland's Human Rights Council in 2013, a body created to promote and protect human rights in the country. The council operates under the UN Paris Principles and plays a critical role in advocating for children, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and gender equality. Qivioq detailed the council's mandate, which includes monitoring and reporting on human rights issues, providing advice to public authorities, and supporting civil society's work on human rights education.

A particularly impactful part of the presentation was the discussion of the IUD scandal, in which thousands of Greenlandic women and girls were subjected to involuntary contraception between the 1960s and 1990s. This horrific event has recently resurfaced, with investigations underway to determine whether these actions can be classified as an attempt at genocide. The commission investigating this case has underscored the need for accountability and recognition of the trauma inflicted on Greenlandic women.

The session concluded with a focus on the future of human rights in Greenland. Qivioq expressed her vision for establishing a National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) to give Greenland more autonomy in addressing its unique human rights challenges. This institution would allow Greenland to speak for itself in international forums and further strengthen the country's efforts to uphold Indigenous and human rights.

The presentation was both eye-opening and deeply informative, illustrating the intersection of historical injustices, contemporary human rights issues, and the ongoing journey toward self-determination for the people of Greenland.

### **Thursday, 10/10/24 - The Rollercoaster Day:**

Wow, today was quite the rollercoaster! The day started off on such a relaxed note with sleeping in, cooking breakfast, and leisurely getting ready. We left early, feeling prepared for our 11 a.m. appointment with Ruth Montgomery, but things quickly went sideways. Despite my light breakfast of half an apple and a boiled egg, we planned to enjoy brunch later after our morning meeting and found ourselves completely lost and disoriented. The taxi driver took us to the wrong location. After scrambling around Nuuk via taxis and walking, we were disheartened to find that even locals couldn't direct us. No one seemed familiar with what we were looking for, adding to the frustration of the day.

Eventually, we decided to shift gears and head to the local market to pick up groceries and supplies for the weekend. It was a much-needed reset after such a chaotic start. Later, we ended the day by having dinner at the cozy local café where Bonnie had taken us on our first day in Greenland. The familiar space and warm food were a perfect way to unwind and regain some balance after such a hectic day.

### **Friday, 10/11/24 - A Day of Rest and Reflection:**



Today was a much-needed day of rest, a pause I had anticipated all week to process my thoughts, catch up on work, and reflect. It also happens to be my maternal grandmother Dorothy's birthday, and her memory has been with me all day. I can't help but imagine her delight at seeing a place like this. She would sing praises to Heaven, and I know she is smiling down, amazed that I've been given this experience. As I sit here, I reflect on how my surroundings spark stories and symbols that inspire my creativity. "The Window Above My Head," "Boathouse," and "Ulu" are images that have taken root in my mind, fueling dreams, imagination, and ideas for future stories. The Greenlandic ulu in the photo on the left is a traditional women's knife, and is a symbol of resilience and resourcefulness in Inuit culture. Its distinct crescent shape is designed for versatility, historically used for tasks such as skinning animals, cutting food, and crafting. The ulu not only reflects the practical ingenuity of Greenlandic women but also carries a deep cultural significance, representing the enduring traditions passed down through generations.

Yet, in the midst of inspiration, I also feel a pull toward home. Being in Greenland for over a week has brought up reflections of Texas - my family, my hometown, and the familiar sense of belonging. It's hard to ignore the exhaustion of being a Black woman in a place where no one looks like me. The weight of my Blackness has been pressing down on me, reminding me of how isolating this experience can be. I distracted myself by focusing on my surroundings,

assuming that the locals aren't phased by my presence as a Black woman. I also reminded myself that this trip is not solely based on my race and gender but on building opportunities for future educators and scholars to experience this exchange. However, I still can't fully shake the feeling of being different.

As I balance these emotions, reflection, creativity, and isolation, I remind myself that this is part of the journey. I continue to process the ideas and experiences that I will soon share during the panel discussion, wondering if I have gathered enough data to make my contributions meaningful.

### **Saturday, Oct. 12 - Concert Day:**

Today marked a new level of experience where I realized from the depths of my soul the absolute beauty of such a diverse culture. A depth that revealed a picture that is much bigger than myself as a Black woman from the deep Southern U.S. region. The arts always touch me in the most unexpected ways. I attended a [Pan Arctic Vision](#) music concert, and it was here that I encountered the profound art of throat singing, a tradition that touched the very depths of my heart and soul in ways I could never have anticipated. The moment the two performers began, their voices intertwined like ancient winds swirling across an endless tundra. Each sound carried the weight of history, echoing resilience, strength, and an unbroken connection to the land and its people.

The rhythmic exchange between the singers was mesmerizing, a dance of breath and voice that felt both primal and intimate. Their sounds, at times guttural and at others ethereal, seemed to come not just from their throats but from a place deep within their being. It was as if they were summoning the voices of generations past, weaving together a tapestry of memory and identity.

What struck me most was the profound sense of sisterhood and mutual protection that radiated between them. Each performer leaned into the other, supporting and amplifying her partner's voice, as if saying, "I hold you; I uplift you." Their connection felt unshakable, an unspoken pact of trust and unity. It was not merely a performance but was a living, breathing ritual of solidarity.

Through their art, I could feel the heartbeat of their community and the bonds that tied them together across generations. The intensity of their exchange pulled me in, making me feel, even as an observer, like a participant in something sacred and timeless. Throat singing, I realized, was not just music; it was a language, a story, a prayer—an unyielding affirmation of identity, survival, and shared strength.







## **Sunday, 10/13/24 - Whispers from the Window & Tales Beneath the Northern Lights:**

On this day, I was overcome by the overwhelming presence of my ancestors and elders, a sensation that felt as vivid and tangible as the aurora dancing across the sky. Every night in Greenland, I lay beneath a window above my bed, and when I opened my eyes, the northern lights would greet me with their quiet, ethereal whispers. It was as if the heavens were alive, offering reassurance, awe, and a connection to something far greater than myself.

That night was no exception. I saw the lights again, but this time, they felt like messengers, carrying the voices of my ancestors. I imagined them cheering me on, their voices mingling with the glow, amazed at the journey that had brought me to this distant and sacred place. This connection to them felt so profound as though the window above me became a portal, bridging time, space, and spirit.

Earlier in the day, I had a long conversation with Dr. Marcene Royster, a cherished friend who is more like a mother to me. No matter what she's going through, she always makes time to stop, talk, and pray with me. Her voice is like a balm, a grounding presence that reminds me of the strength I've inherited from the women who came before me. Our conversation was filled with

her unwavering love and wisdom, and it amplified the sense that I was exactly where I was meant to be, held not only by her prayers but also by the unseen hands of those who came before us.



Yet, amid the comfort of these reflections, I struggled with a familiar ache. I wondered if my Grandmama, Barbara, who raised me and passed away in March, would be proud. Dementia had stolen her from us long before her physical body left this earth, and in my adult life, we never had the opportunity to reconnect on a deep level. I carry the weight of regret, wondering if there was more I could have done, more I could have said.

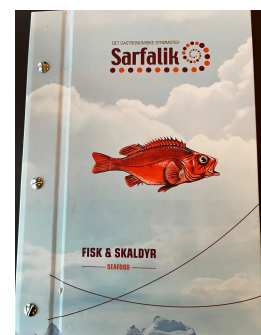
But as I reflected on the stillness of that day, I began to feel that maybe she was here too - her presence woven into the northern lights, watching over me, proud of the woman I've become and the places I've been. Perhaps she sees now what she couldn't see before, and maybe the connection I longed for is unfolding now, in ways I couldn't have imagined.

This day of stillness and reflection was a gift. It allowed me to hold space for the joy, the grief, and the profound gratitude I feel for the journey I'm on. As the lights whispered their tales above me, I felt blessed to be part of something much larger than myself, a continuation of the resilience, love, and legacy of the ancestors who carried me here.

## Monday, 10/14/24 - An Easy Work Day and Unique Culinary Experience

Today began with a visit to MIO, a vital organization dedicated to children's advocacy and rights in Greenland. Meeting Ditte and touring the facility, though brief, offered a glimpse into the incredible work being done to protect and uplift children in this community. The space was thoughtfully designed, reflecting the warmth and care at the heart of their mission. While our time there was short, it was impactful, a reminder of the universal importance of advocating for the well-being of children, no matter where in the world we are.

Later, the day took a different turn as we ventured to Sarfalik restaurant, where I had the chance to explore Greenlandic cuisine in a way that pushed me outside my comfort zone. For an appetizer, I tried reindeer tongue, a first for me. While I appreciated the cultural significance of the dish, I found it lacked flavor, and the texture was difficult to enjoy. I also





tasted whale, which had a steak-like appearance but carried a metallic, blood-like taste that was unfamiliar and overwhelming.

For my entrée, I chose trout, a dish I've always enjoyed elsewhere. However, this preparation was noticeably different and drier and less flavorful than I expected. Despite the unfamiliar tastes and textures, the experience was valuable. It challenged me to approach food with an open mind and respect for the cultural practices that make Greenlandic cuisine unique.



This day was a blend of meaningful encounters and new experiences, each offering its own lessons. From MIO's advocacy work to the bold flavors (and textures!) of Greenlandic dishes, I left with a deeper appreciation for the diversity of experiences that define this journey. While not every bite was enjoyable, every moment was memorable and enriching.

## **Tuesday, 10/15/24 - UNICEF Visit Day**

Today, I had the privilege of visiting the UNICEF office in Nuuk and meeting the phenomenal Tina. From the moment we arrived, her warm personality and genuine passion for her work were evident. She welcomed us with such openness, making it clear that her dedication to addressing the social issues in Nuuk is deeply personal and purposeful.

During our conversation, Tina provided valuable insights into the various social challenges facing children and families in Greenland. Her ability to articulate these issues with both clarity and compassion left a lasting impression. From educational disparities to the impact of climate change on children's lives, she painted a picture of resilience and the urgent need for continued advocacy. Tina's work highlights the complexities of bridging global initiatives with local



needs, a balance that she seems to navigate with remarkable skill.

As I listened, I couldn't help but reflect on the parallels between social work efforts in Nuuk and the challenges I've encountered in my own practice. While the geographic and cultural contexts are vastly different, the underlying themes of equity, support, and empowerment resonate universally. Tina's passion reignited my own commitment to advocating for those whose voices are often unheard.

This visit was a reminder of the global connections we share in addressing social justice issues and the importance of investing in initiatives that create meaningful change. Tina's work and the mission of UNICEF in Nuuk inspire me to think critically about how we can collaborate across borders to build stronger, more equitable communities for future generations.



Following the visit, I had the honor of another opportunity to meet with Ruth Montgomery, a remarkable African American woman residing in Nuuk. Her energy, intellect, and warmth were captivating, and I left our brief time together wishing for more opportunities to connect. Ruth's presence and story added an enriching layer to my experience, underscoring the global and local intersections of identity and community.

## Wednesday, 10/16/24 - Open Lecture at Ilisimatusarfik (University of Greenland)

Delivering my open lecture at the University of Greenland was a truly enriching experience. The topic, ["Social Work Education and Research in the U.S.: Regional Perspectives from Texas, Maryland, DC, and Maine."](#) sparked enthusiastic engagement and genuine curiosity from the audience. Their attentiveness and thoughtful questions reflected a strong interest in learning about the diverse practices and challenges of social work in the United States.



The lecture provided an opportunity to discuss not only the foundational values and competencies that guide social work education in the U.S. but also how these principles are applied across varying regional contexts. Highlighting the unique challenges and innovations in Texas, Maryland, Washington, DC, and Maine allowed me to demonstrate the adaptability and breadth of social work practice in addressing complex social needs.

One of the most rewarding aspects of the experience was connecting the content of my lecture to the Greenlandic context. The audience was particularly intrigued by



discussions on the integration of anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion (ADEI) in U.S. social work education, and it sparked meaningful dialogue on how these approaches could resonate within their own communities.

This experience also deepened my appreciation for the power of cross-cultural exchange. Sharing insights from my own journey while learning from the questions and perspectives of the attendees underscored the importance of global collaboration in advancing social work practices.

It was a privilege to contribute to this dialogue and to represent the University of Southern Maine in this international collaboration. I left the lecture inspired by the energy and interest of the audience, feeling grateful for the opportunity to share my work while forging new connections in this remarkable place.



## Thursday, 10/17/24 - Class Lecture on Aging and Disability:

My guest lecture in Steven Arnfjord's Social Society class at the University of Greenland was a deeply reflective experience. Focused on aging and disability, the [presentation](#) allowed me to share insights on social work practices and policies in the U.S., particularly their implications for empowering vulnerable populations. While the students were engaged and attentive, their quietness stood out, reminding me of cultural differences in classroom dynamics and interaction.

Their focus suggested deep contemplation, and I left the session feeling that the content resonated with them in meaningful ways.



The rest of the day was marked by my growing anticipation to return home. Although I had planned to visit the Qiajuk Art Museum, I found myself preoccupied with thoughts of travel and closure. Sandra, ever the explorer, visited the museum and shared her impressions, which I'll carry forward as inspiration for my eventual visit.

Later, I focused on packing and preparing for the journey home. The weight of the two-week experience, filled with learning, connections, and cultural immersion, settled on me. While I was ready to leave, I also felt a strong sense of gratitude for the people, places, and moments that made this exchange

transformative.

## Friday, 10/18/24 - A Day of Anticipation to Home in Portland

This is the final morning in Nuuk for me this year. I witnessed the most beautiful morning moonlight reflecting on the fjord as if Nuuk was wishing me a farewell!



## Final Remarks

As I reflect on my two-week journey in Greenland, I am overwhelmed with gratitude, inspiration, and a renewed sense of purpose. This experience, made possible by the Maine-Greenland Collaboration, has been a transformative blend of personal growth, academic exchange, and cultural immersion. It has opened my eyes to the unique social, cultural, and environmental landscapes of this remarkable region while deepening my understanding of global connections in social work practice.

Each day offered new opportunities to learn and reflect whether through meaningful conversations with colleagues and community members, immersive cultural experiences, or moments of stillness beneath the awe-inspiring northern lights. From engaging with the dedicated staff at social service agencies and the University of Greenland to connecting with individuals like Ruth Montgomery and Tina at UNICEF, this trip provided a mosaic of perspectives and experiences that enrich my professional and personal life.

The legacy of this exchange lies not only in the work that has been done but also in the foundation it lays for future collaborations. I leave Greenland with a commitment to continuing this meaningful work through academic partnerships, student exchanges, and publications that capture the essence of what I have learned here.

To all those who made this journey possible, thank you for believing in the vision of cross-cultural collaboration and for trusting me to carry forward this legacy. Greenland has left an indelible mark on my heart, and I look forward to the future work that will arise from this transformative experience.