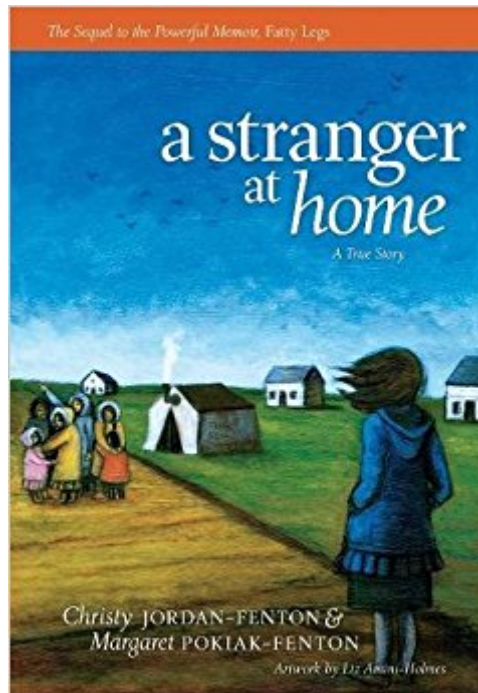




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# A Stranger At Home: A True Story



## Synopsis

Traveling to be reunited with her family in the arctic, 10-year-old Margaret Pokiak can hardly contain her excitement. It's been two years since her parents delivered her to the school run by the dark-cloaked nuns and brothers. Coming ashore, Margaret spots her family, but her mother barely recognizes her, screaming, "Not my girl." Margaret realizes she is now marked as an outsider. And Margaret is an outsider: she has forgotten the language and stories of her people, and she can't even stomach the food her mother prepares. However, Margaret gradually relearns her language and her family's way of living. Along the way, she discovers how important it is to remain true to the ways of her people—and to herself. Highlighted by archival photos and striking artwork, this first-person account of a young girl's struggle to find her place will inspire young readers to ask what it means to belong.

## Book Information

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Age Range: 6 - 7 years

Grade Level: 3 - 7

## Customer Reviews

This is a book everyone should read. (Betty Gelean edwardsmagazinebookclub.com 2011-07-19) This memoir, detailing a woeful piece of Canadian history and demonstrating Margaret's strength of character, compassion, courage and her willingness to sacrifice herself for her family's sake, gives the reader a lot to ponder. Highly recommended. (Shelbey Krahn Canadian Materials 2012-02-17) A Stranger at Home will speak to anyone who has experienced displacement

or assimilation into a new culture. This fabulous story enhances the Grades 6 to 8 social studies curriculum. (Professionally Speaking (Ontario College of Teachers 2012-04-01)) Olemaun's spirit and determination shine through this moving memoir. (Kirkus Reviews 2011-09-14) While it may not have the same drama and tension of the first memoir, this tale provides a compelling and moving story of a girl searching for the strength to find her place in the world. (Jody Kopple School Library Journal) Without being graphic or overwhelming, the Fentons recreate a tragic moment in Canadian history through the innocent reflections of a child...a must for any classroom library. (Canadian Teacher Magazine 2012-05-01) This book realistically portrays the impact of residential school life on Aboriginal children. (Myra Junyk Resource Links) This tale provides a compelling and moving story of a girl searching for the strength to find her place in the world. The writing is unpretentious and accessible and readers who enjoyed the first book will find this an interesting follow-up. Vivid paintings are a beautiful accompaniment to the storytelling. Photographs from Pokiak Fenton's own collection add important points of reference for readers looking to visualize the characters and the unique setting of the Arctic Circle. A welcome addition to biography collections. (Jody Kopple School Library Journal 2011-12-01)

Christy Jordan-Fenton is the author of *Fatty Legs*, which was named one of the 10 best children's books of 2010 by *The Globe and Mail*. She is currently working on several children's stories, a novel for adults and a short story collection. Margaret Pokiak-Fenton spent her early years on Banks Island in the Arctic Ocean. She now lives in Fort St. John, British Columbia. Liz Amini-Holmes' illustrations have appeared in children's books, magazines and newspapers. She lives near San Francisco, California.

*A Stranger at Home* is the third true story by Christy Jordan-Fenton about the impact which residential schools had on her mother-in-law Margaret Pokiak-Fenton. It's also my favorite thus far in the series. *A Stranger at Home* poignantly portrays the struggles which Olemaun faces as she attempts to rediscover her place within her Inuit community and even within her family, both of which Olemaun has been apart from for two years. Although Olemaun had been desperate to return home, she now finds herself just as much of an outsider among her own people as she had been at the church-run school. When her parents pick Olemaun up to take her home, Olemaun finds the Inuit language strange to her tongue. Her mother assumes Olemaun will be hungry and so she brings a package of what used to be Olemaun's favorite foods. However, two years of eating only the white man's food have taken their toll on her body and the

food which once brought Olemaun comfort now sicken her and cause her nose to crinkle. When the family finally reach their canvas tent, the family dogs almost take Olemaun's hand off because they no longer recognize her scent. Nothing feels the same anymore, not the hour her family rises or the games her sisters play or even the clothes everyone wears. On some levels, because of my relocating from Canada to the United States, I relate to Olemaun's attempts to hold onto her heritage. The minute I cross into my home province of Newfoundland, after being away for a year, I start soaking up the unique accent. I also start searching out local foods. There are also naturally changes in family. Although my dog whom I left with my parents is now gone, the first year I returned home after a long absence, he growled at me. Moreover, my siblings were in primary school when I initially left home, which means every year I return being less and less connected to their world. Hence, part of the appeal of *A Stranger at Home* is that whether one has moved simply from a town or whether one has taken the bigger step of embracing a new culture, everyone will find common ground with Olemaun and will be subsequently moved. What compounds Olemaun's struggles is that her family has decided not to return to Banks Island, where they normally spend most of their year. Moreover, they are feeling the pressure of needing to adapt to the white man's world. Olemaun's father is picking up extra work as a special constable to the RCMP, who rely on his skills to help them adapt in an environment colder than what they are familiar. Olemaun's mother doesn't understand the store clerks who speak English, which means she is often charged for goods that she didn't purchase. Last, the government is continuing to encourage Inuit parents to send their children to school. While Olemaun had to years ago convince her parents to send her away, now they want her sisters to attend because they need not just the wisdom of their people but also the knowledge of the outsiders. I have not read many stories about those who both want to hold onto their heritage, while embracing that of an alien culture, and so this is another positive about *A Stranger at Home*. It helped me understand how challenging the situation can be and should resonate strongly with those students who face this dilemma. Years ago, Thomas Wolfe made popular the sentiment, "You can't go home again." While the end pages of *A Stranger at Home* make clear that many Inuit children such as Olemaun have proved this phrase wrong, Olemaun's story also shows how hard of a fight it was to reclaim their heritage. Today Aboriginal people are trying to provide support through classes in traditional language, instruction by elders on customs, and celebration of culture through powwows, traditional arts and crafts, and stories like those told by Christy and Margaret. *A Stranger at Home* is an amazing story about the resilience of a special Inuit

girl.

*A Stranger at Home* by Christy Jordan-Fenton & Margaret Pokiak-Fenton, illustrated by Liz Amini-Holmes, Annick Press, 2011 It is impossible to read *A Stranger At Home* and its prequel, *Fatty Legs*, without becoming angry at the injustice that was perpetrated upon the Aboriginal people in Canada in the name of "civilization" and "assimilation." As I read both books, I was overwhelmed by conflicting emotions of shame, anger, and sorrow at how systematic and cruel the residential school system was and how early this misguided endeavour began and how long it lasted--the first residential schools were set up in the 1840s with the last one closing as recently as 1996. The purpose of the schools, which separated children from their families, has been described as "killing the Indian in the child" -- that is, robbing Indian children of their culture, language, family, community, and sense of place in the world into which they were born and belong, in short, their humanity. *Fatty Legs* and *A Stranger at Home* are stellar memoirs. In the first book we meet Olemaun, whose name is changed to Margaret by the nuns. Margaret longs to know how to read (her older sister Rosie spent four years at the residential school and reads *Alice In Wonderland* to her). Each year when the schooner the *Immaculata* docks to "pluck" the children and take them to school, she asks her father whether this is the year she can go. He's had the experience of being "plucked" from his family to go to school and resists passing this legacy onto his daughter. But, finally, he agrees because he knows that Margaret must learn to read and write in order to get on in a world that is changing, because it is increasingly being taken over by "outsiders." The ice returns early that year. Margaret cannot return to the family home on Banks Island and spends two full years at the school in Aklavik, in the Mackenzie River Delta, without a summer break. Her experiences, at the school, are depicted in *Fatty Legs*. In *A Stranger at Home*, Margaret's return to her family completes the story. In Tuktoyaktuk, Margaret is finally reunited with her family and can't wait to get home to Banks Island, far away from the school she has come to despise. But a few shocking surprises are in store for her. She no longer remembers how to speak Inuvialuktun, her native tongue; she can't stomach the food she once loved; and is astounded when her mother announces upon seeing her, "Not my girl. Not my girl." The last shock is the hardest to bear. Father has decided to live in Tuk and get work with the Whites. Banks Island will no longer be home. There are just one too many changes for Margaret. The pain of Margaret's re-entry into family life is perfectly rendered in Christy Jordan-Fenton's poetically dark and emotionally sensitive prose. I asked her how she created the flow of the narrative from stories told to her by her mother-in-law, Margaret Pokiak-Fenton. "Basically, she (Margaret) doesn't drive and being elderly I drive her to

town a lot for appointments and such. She's always telling me stories and I have a memory like an elephant for conversations. So, I try my best to keep inside her voice, while also trying to make the words fit in a literary way. I stitch it all together, asking questions as I go and doing research -- Maggie's great (that would be Maggie De Vries, super editor) for hounding me to research -- then I let Margaret read and change anything she doesn't like."A Stranger At Home is as finely crafted and beautifully illustrated as the first book. Both are works of art in every way -- the text is completely accessible for children ages 8 to 12, and a joy for adults to read; and the illustrations are exquisite, with the photographs featured in the margins gathered, as an added bonus, at the back of each book. The illustrator, Liz Amini-Holmes, painted the drawings in acrylic, then scanned the art and made final adjustments to colour in photo shop. If you'd like to see more of her technique visit Liz's blog at [...] "My goal in all of my work," says Liz, "and certainly with Fatty Legs and A Stranger at Home, is for the reader to feel the art, not just look at it, making an emotional connection." Both artists have exceeded this goal and the emotional connection the reader feels with Margaret is strong and authentic. Finally, I asked the author what the response from the aboriginal community has been. "The response has been amazing for FATTY LEGS! It has been short listed for the First Nation Communities Read program, which is really exciting. A STRANGER AT HOME is still so new I don't think many people have read it yet. We were invited to speak at the Truth and Reconciliation National Event in Inuvik, which was a great honour. I was completely overwhelmed by the gratitude shown to me by the elders there. Margaret of course, has become an overnight hero and I think it is fantastic to see her celebrated in that way!"Fatty Legs and A Stranger at Home are unique and compelling stories, and I highly recommend both.

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