But the changes kept coming. In the 1970s, rising seawater chased the Inupiat from their homes at the edge of the sea. They built new homes, farther inland. The Inupiat used wood and stone instead of bones. The Inupiat houses are now made of wood and stone instead of bones.

The Inupiat used wood and stone instead of bones. Photos courtesy of Terry Feuerborn, Flickr.com.

Today, the Inupiat way of life is changing again. Temperatures in the Arctic are rising, and it means that the bowhead whales are harder to find than ever before. Bowhead whales feed on tiny animals called zooplankton. Zooplankton live near the edge of the sea ice that covers the Arctic Ocean. But as temperatures in the Arctic go up, the ice melts. The zooplankton follow the shrinking ice, and the bowheads follow the zooplankton. Zooplankton live near the edge of the sea. Bowhead whales are harder to find than ever before. Bowhead whales feed on tiny animals called zooplankton.

The Inupiat used wood and stone instead of whale bones. But the changes keep coming. In the 1970s, rising seawater chased the Inupiat from their homes at the edge of the sea. They built new homes, farther inland. From their homes at the edge of the sea, they built new homes, farther inland.
Then changes came. First, large whaling ships from the south came for the whales. Whalers from Europe and the United States killed bowheads, one after another. Soon the whales became scarce. By the time commercial whaling ended, the whales were almost gone. For a short time, even the Inupiat hunt stopped. But small groups, hunting as they had for hundreds of years, finally resumed the hunt.

GLOSSARY

HARPOONS – spears used in hunting whales and large fish
ZOOPLANKTON – floating organisms, such as krill, found in the oceans

The Inupiat live along the coast of the Arctic Ocean. Map courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.
The Inupiat of Alaska’s Northwest Coast sometimes call themselves the “people of the whale.” The whale they mean is the bowhead whale of the Arctic Ocean. To the Inupiat, the bowheads are life itself. For hundreds of years, the Inupiat lived along the coast of the Arctic. They built their houses from the jawbones of the whales. They lived by the rhythms of the sea. Each year, they awaited the migration of the bowheads. The Inupiat believed that their survival depended on the bowheads. They believed that the whales could help them feed their families. The Inupiat believed that the whales were the赠予者 of life. The Inupiat believed that they were connected to the bowheads. They believed that the bowheads were their ancestors. The Inupiat believed that the bowheads were their friends. The Inupiat believed that the bowheads were their protectors. The Inupiat believed that the bowheads were their teachers. The Inupiat believed that the bowheads were their leaders. The Inupiat believed that the bowheads were their rulers. The Inupiat believed that the bowheads were their gods. The Inupiat believed that the bowheads were their heroes. The Inupiat believed that the bowheads were their saviors. The Inupiat believed that the bowheads were their victors.

The Inupiat hunters find themselves traveling farther and farther to find whales. The trips become more dangerous. The weather is harder to predict. When the hunters return to land, the shore ice is not as strong as it once was. This makes pulling the whales from the water more difficult and dangerous than before.

There are other threats, as well. The North Shore of Alaska is rich not just in whales and their food but also in oil. The oil is buried beneath the ocean floor. It is often right below the bowhead’s migration path. As the ice melts in the Arctic, drilling for oil becomes easier. Oil exploration threatens to drive the whales even farther from shore.
When the whales arrived, the Inupiat paddled small boats out into the sea. They carried harpoons of stone and bone. They used these tools to kill the animal they cherish above all others. When the hunters returned to shore, the entire community helped to pull the whale up onto land and butcher it. Everyone shared in the meat. And the jawbones became the walls of their houses.

Still, the Inupiat are adapting. They are finding new ways to hunt the whales. They are adopting new techniques. They are learning to live with new realities. They are doing what the Inupiat have always done. As the ice melts, they remain dedicated to their way of life, and to the whales they cherish.

In some places in the world, people still argue about whether climate change is real. The People of the Whale live with climate change every day.