Shishmaref, Alaska

Many Strong Voices MSV

"…that sea wall is no longer there…"

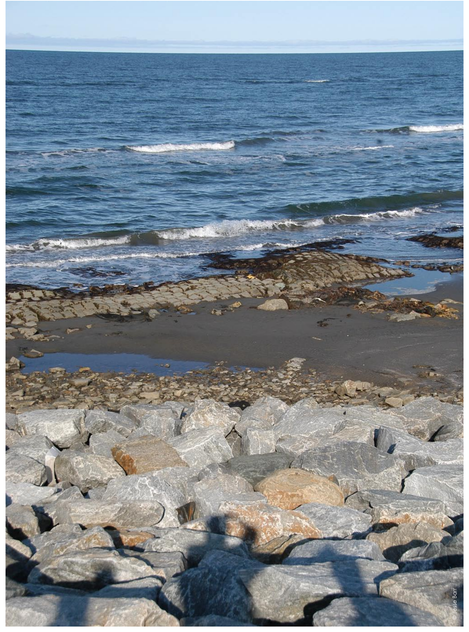
The Old Sea Wall

When I was a small child, my friends and I used to go on top of the sea wall and play. Our parents didn't want us to go out there but we would rather play there than be at home. The sea wall was made out of cement blocks. They were one-foot by one-foot square. The blocks were laid against the shore in an attempt to keep the ocean from washing the sand out from under our houses. Since our land is made of three layers – permafrost, loose sand and sod – it is very dangerous when the sand washes away.

The Army Corps of Engineers built the sea wall because our village was slowly being washed into the sea. The sea wall I played on as a child was the second such wall used to stop the erosion. The first wall was made of sandbags. How are sandbags going to help us? We're made out of sand!! We had such high hopes for the second wall made of cement blocks.

Recently, I tried to go see where I played as a child. Unfortunately, that sea wall is no longer there, it is 15 feet out into the ocean behind the current sea wall and 10 feet below the surface layer we walk on. At low tide, if I stand on the new seawall, I can still see some bricks sticking up out of the water. Hopefully, this new seawall made of large rocks will stand.

— Heather "Anunuk" Sinnok



Portraits of Resilience is part of the Many Strong Voices Programme. It illustrates in a personal way what climate change means to young people in the Arctic and helps communities create their own visual archive of the changes they are experiencing. More @ www.manystrongvoices.org

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