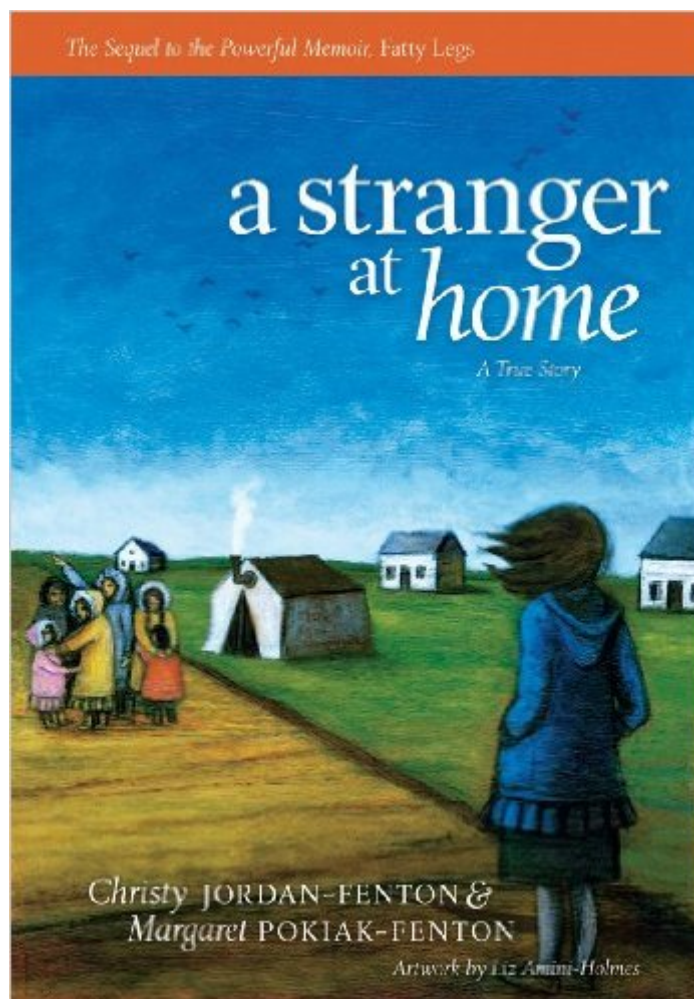


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# A Stranger At Home: A True Story



## 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

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.

*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.

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