

**Dana Lixenberg**

***The Last Days of Shishmaref***

Published by Paradox & Episode publishers, 2008

Reviewed in *Source* no. 59, Summer 2009, p.74

---

The prospects for the Alaskan Inupiaq residents of the remote village of Shishmaref – described by Al Gore as “the first climate refugees” – are bleak: Their island, consisting of a narrow sandbank that stands no higher than 19 feet above sea level has been protected from erosion by an ice ring that forms a defence against Atlantic storms throughout the autumn and winter months. But due to rising temperatures over the past 30 years the freeze arrives ever later, resulting in increased erosion of land and loss of the islanders’ property. The ancient Inupiat legend, which introduces this modest yet elegant volume, prophesies the day when the ocean from which the island rose will reclaim it.

Over a winter and summer visit to Shishmaref, Dana Lixenberg catalogued some of the families who inhabit the village, documenting their modest homes, austere landscape and endangered culture. A sense of intimacy between the photographer and her sitters perseveres throughout the collection and the images taken around the midnight hours during the summer period particularly add a sense of exoticism to the severe existence of the Inupiaq. The images are accompanied by several texts written by the author providing a comprehensive historical and geographical context for the work.