Life Stories of Northern Leaders

We Call It Survival

A Biography of Abe Okpik

The story you are about to read will take you from the mountains of the Noatak River in Northern Alaska to Baffin Island in Nunavut. It will also carry your imagination from the traditional nomadic way of life of the Alaskan Inupiat to a federal government office building in Ottawa. Abe's interviews are northern exploration in themselves. They are both a geographical exploration, as Abe Okpik travelled in most communities north of 60, as well as an exploration through time and the concept of time itself. During his life, Abe Okpik travelled through many different and changing worlds. But life rapidly took him to some other spaces; like other Inuit of his generation, Abe hunted and trapped, travelled by dogteam and built *igluit*. Simultaneously, he also was an avid reader with a knack for historical detail, a man who eventually took a leading role in the development of political institutions in the Canadian North.

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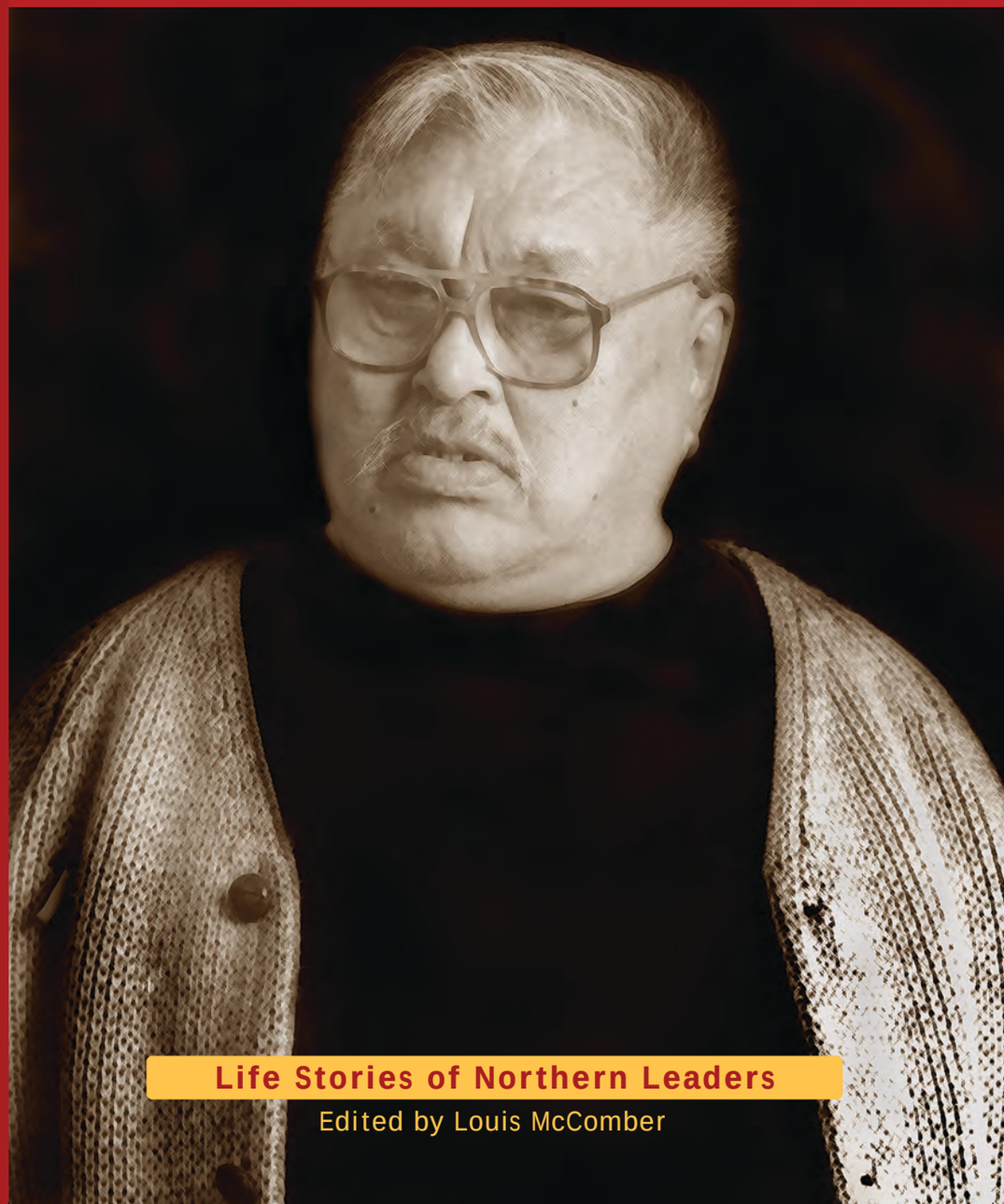
LIFE STORIES OF NORTHERN LEADERS

Abraham Okpik — We Call It Survival

Nunavut Arctic College

Abraham Okpik

We Call It Survival



Life Stories of Northern Leaders

Edited by Louis McComber

We Call It Survival

THE LIFE STORY OF ABRAHAM OKPIK

I think that a child, from the beginning, is a special gift to everyone of us, whether we are in Alaska or Greenland or in other parts of the world. It was always a special gift to all of us that when people get older like me, the new generation will carry on our culture, language and values.

– Abraham Okpik

We Call It Survival

THE LIFE STORY OF ABRAHAM OKPIK

Abraham Okpik

Edited by Louis McComber

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Nunavut
Arctic College

Life Stories of Northern Leaders
Volume One

Life Stories of Northern Leaders Series Volume One
We Call It Survival

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Photographs courtesy: The National Archives of Canada, The Northwest Territories Archives, Elijah Allen, Kathy Okpik, René Fumoleau, Louis McComber.

Maps design by Julie Dussault with the contribution of Eileen Devinney from the Alaska National Park Service.

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Back cover photograph courtesy: Elijah Allen. Boating on the Cumberland Sound out of Pangnirtung. From left to right: Rose Okpik, Kathy Okpik, Kevin Okpik, Abe Okpik, Josh Hunter (back), unidentified boy, Kilabuk Kullualik (front), Wendy Hunter (front).

Front and back cover design: Stéphane Cloutier.

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements 9

Introduction: Memories from a Storyteller 13

Chapter One
Childhood in the Mackenzie Delta 27

Chapter Two
First Contacts with Christianity 43

Chapter Three
From Noatak River to the Mackenzie Delta 57

Chapter Four
Naming 81

Chapter Five
All Saints Residential School 93

Chapter Six
From All Saints Residential School to Trapping in the Delta 103

Chapter Seven
From the Trap Line to the Edmonton Hospitals ... 115

Chapter Eight
The DEW Line: 1954 135

Chapter Nine
Working with the Federal Government 157

Chapter Ten
The Emergence of Aboriginal Political Leadership 179

Chapter Eleven
Project Surname 203

Chapter Twelve
You Call It Supernatural; For Us It is Survival 225

Chapter Thirteen
Working with the Language 247

Chapter Fourteen
The Mackenzie Valley Pipeline 255

Chapter Fifteen
Looking Ahead 271

Chapter Sixteen
The Co-operative Alternative 289

Chapter Seventeen
The Beginning of Aboriginal Political Organizations .. 309

Chapter Eighteen
A Special Way of Communicating 327

Chapter Nineteen
Put Your Mind in the Right Direction 343

Glossary 359

References 367

Index 371

Acknowledgements

Abe Okpik travelled extensively geographically, culturally and intellectually, and this book is the culmination of his journey and his unique contribution to northern history. It was stimulating to meet with Abe; he always had the right word and the right smile to make everyone around him feel good. When I was interviewing Abe, I was fascinated by his story, and later, reading the transcripts of the interviews over and over again for editing, I was still captivated. So, here is your book, Abe: thank you for working with me!

An essential contributor to this project from beginning to end has been Susan Sammons, from Nunavut Arctic College's Language and Culture Program. I offer many thanks to Susan for her dedicated work on Abe's book: she put in untold hours patiently editing the manuscript. It was Susan who agreed to publish Abe's biography as a Nunavut Arctic College publication and, most importantly, helped to find the funding to have it printed.

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I would also like to acknowledge the particular contribution of Karim (Kimo) Rholim who, back in 1997, took the beautiful picture of Abe that is on the cover. Equally important is the contribution of Stéphane Cloutier who artfully designed the cover page. The book would not be complete without the maps prepared by Julie Dussault with the generous collaboration of Eileen Devinney of the Alaska National Park Service.

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The project was first supported by a financial contribution from the Northwest Territories Department of Education, Culture and Employment and later by a grant from Nunavut's Department of Culture, Language, Elders and Youth. This financial support is greatly appreciated.

At the beginning of 1999, Inuit in the newly created territory of Nunavut had the opportunity to correct the official spelling of their names at no cost for a period of eighteen months. Some people chose to do this; many did not. In view of this, we have chosen to use the official spelling for people's names in this book, as well as for place names. The standard orthography adopted by the Inuit Cultural Institute in 1976 has been used with the above exceptions.

Finally, I reserve a special thanks for Shannon L. Partridge, my dear life companion, who so patiently discussed with me most steps of the production of this book and who, with dedication, proofread all my English writing, and for my children, for their interest and encouragement during the eight years it took to bring Abe's story to print.

Louis McComber
mccomber@nunanet.com
Iqaluit, September, 2004

Introduction: Memories from a Storyteller

A teacher at All Saints Residential School in Aklavik once told Abraham Okpik that he had a photographic memory. Just a few weeks before he passed away in 1997, Abe could still remember events from some fifty years back and could tell the year, the date, and even the hour of the day when a particular event took place.

I, however, cannot tell precisely when Abe and I first met. I would guess around 1994 or 1995, probably in the fall. I was new to Iqaluit and as far as I can remember, we probably first met in a cab.

Taxi cabs in Iqaluit are part of the public transportation system and, when needed, will take several customers at a time. I was riding in the back of a cab one evening when Abe, waving his cane over his head from the side of the road, caught the attention of the driver. The taxi slowed down and came to a halt just beside him. Because of his impressive stature and his stiff leg, Abe had to sit in the front seat. With an energetic motion, he first heavily leaned on the driver in order to pull his stiff, right leg into the car. When I saw this man climbing in I was intrigued, not only by his general appearance, but also by his T-shirt that featured an aboriginal design with the words Manitoulin Island written in psychedelic colours across the front.

I had heard from some Iqaluit friends about an aboriginal healing workshop that had been held that summer on Manitoulin Island where aboriginal medicine

men performed their art. So, when Abe Okpik hopped into our cab, I almost immediately asked a question about his T-shirt. He explained with great interest that he had actually attended this gathering and had enjoyed it very much, partly because he had many old Indian friends who were also there. But then he added that the Indian way was not "our way," for "us Inuit."

I was impressed by Abe's ease in sharing his personal views and by the fact that he took the time to answer questions from a stranger sharing the same taxi for a few minutes. Later, I came to realize that for Abe there was no such thing as a complete stranger. Any human being was within his reach and interest.

I must have asked him about the Inuit way of healing. Abe answered something like, "Well, if I knew myself, I wouldn't tell you! Ha, ha, ha!" Laughing was an important part of Abe's eloquence. And then he said, "Look what happened to Jesus Christ! They made books out of what He said and next thing you know, many people made a fortune out of Him. So it's no good for Inuit to tell about their wisdom because too many people would rush up here and try to make a dollar out of it! Ha, ha, ha!" He then paid the driver and got out of the cab with the reverse swing he performed to get in.

About a year later, Nunavut Arctic College asked me to deliver an introductory course in northern studies. Susan Sammons, from the Language and Culture Program at the college, provided a list of elders in Iqaluit who could address the students on different topics. Abraham Okpik was one of them. He was the first one I called and he spontaneously accepted the invitation. I came to appreciate that Abe was a self-made historian, a fascinating storyteller, and also a kind of philosopher who constantly reflected on the meaning of life. I never missed a chance to invite him to talk to my class. He would just mesmerize his audience.

When I got to know him a little better, I visited him at his house a few times. Abe lived in a small house

behind what is now the Iqaluit post office. I met Martha Ningeok, Abe's last companion before he passed away, and her daughter Annie, who would drop by once in a while to say hello, and then Lionel, who was then a young boy and who was surely Abe's favourite.

One day when I was visiting and mostly listening to Abe's numerous stories, he walked into his bedroom and pulled out an old envelope from a drawer. In this envelope, Abe kept a résumé, a few pictures and a stack of loose sheets covered with his own writing. Some time ago, Abe had started writing a book of his own. He asked me to type this text, which I did. That is really how we started working together.

Eventually, I suggested we try some formal taped interviews at his house. After only a few recordings, I learned more about him, his life, the North, the Inuit, and the development of government services. I was amazed by what this man had experienced, what he knew and how he could remember everything in such vivid detail. It became clear that the interviews should be systematically planned, recorded and transcribed.

We met once a week at the Iqaluit Research Centre where Lynn Peplinski, who was then the manager in Iqaluit, welcomed us and supported our work. Abe would arrive five or ten minutes early and would take the time to chat with Lynn about dogteam management and make a few jokes with the staff. Lynn would have prepared coffee and biscuits. After Abe had a quick coffee we would be ready to begin.

I had divided our interviews into themes and started the questions accordingly. But Abe was a storyteller; his story would pull us in the direction he chose. As in The Arabian Nights, one story would lead to another, then that one would encapsulate the beginning of a third, and eventually we would get back on track.

Abe's interviews are northern exploration. The story you are about to read will take you from the mountains

of the Noatak River in Northern Alaska to Baffin Island in Nunavut. It will also carry your imagination from the traditional nomadic way of life of the Alaskan Inupiat to a federal government office building in Ottawa. They are both a geographical exploration, as Abe Okpik travelled in most communities north of 60, as well as an exploration through time and the concept of time itself. During his lifetime, Abe Okpik travelled through many different and changing worlds. He was so proud to tell that he was born in a traditional way. But life rapidly took him to some other spaces; like other Inuit of his generation, Abe hunted and trapped, travelled by dogteam and built *igluit*. Simultaneously, he also was an avid reader with a knack for historical detail, a man who eventually took a leading role in the development of political institutions in the Canadian North.

Abe Okpik's namesake, Auktalik, was a powerful Alaskan shaman. Abe had great respect for this aspect of ancient Inuit wisdom and would enthusiastically talk about it as an important component of his culture. For him an essential role of the *angakkuq* was to help the community to survive, to find food that would "keep the mind and body together."

Retrospectively, I believe that Abe did just that during his lifetime. He explored new trails to wealth and health for his fellow Inuit. Another of Abe's remarks about shamans was that "they really knew what was going around!" This statement could also apply to Abe. He knew what was going on for Inuit in the Canadian Arctic and internationally. He had an outstanding grasp of the culture of the North and most of all, of the important challenges now transforming the daily life of Inuit.

I was also intrigued by the biblical connection with his Christian name; Abraham. As a pioneer of Inuit political development, he led the way for further Inuit involvement in government and politics.

An Historical Backdrop to Abe Okpik's Story

During his lifetime, Abe experienced and witnessed a radical shift in the central government attitude toward Inuit. When Abe grew up in the vicinity of Aklavik, Canada was still exercising a very autocratic style of administration on aboriginal peoples and Inuit, then referred to as Eskimos. Inuit had no say in the decisions impacting their everyday lives. It was only in 1962 that Eastern Arctic Inuit were allowed to vote for the first time in a federal election and in 1966 that they elected Simonie Michael, as the first elected Inuk member of the Territorial Council.

Since 1905, decisions had been made unilaterally in Ottawa by the Northwest Territories' Commissioner, at best after consultation with his appointed Council. From the turn of the twentieth century, life in the Arctic evolved around three main actors; the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the two rival churches, Anglican and Roman Catholic, and the Hudson's Bay Company. Until 1950, most decisions impacting the daily lives of Inuit were taken by the Hudson's Bay Company managers, the RCMP officers, or representatives of the two main churches competing for Inuit souls.

This state of affairs in the North evolved rapidly after the Second World War. Multiple factors converged to bring desperately needed changes in the administration of the North. One of these factors was the new post-war international political makeup and the collapse of colonial empires under the pressure of the cold war. The successful uprisings of the poorest peoples on earth in places such as China, India, Indochina/Vietnam, Algeria, and Cuba, also impacted the cultural landscape in dominant countries. Oppressed minorities in opulent countries started to organize and fight for their rights. Afro-Americans, as well as many indigenous peoples from North America, organized and demonstrated to make their voices heard and to improve their living conditions. In that context, the United

Abe Okpik in Edmonton, probably at the Charles Camsell Hospital with an unidentified nurse, circa 1947.
Photo courtesy of Kathy Okpik.

Louis McComber and Abe Okpik at the Nunavut Research Institute in Iqaluit after an interview session, 1997. Photo Lynn Peplinski.
Courtesy of Martha Ningeok.

Nations became an international stage for the debate on the universal rights of peoples, nations and individuals.

Canada took a leading role in the creation of the United Nations after the war. One of the driving forces behind the Canadian involvement in foreign affairs then was Lester B. Pearson. Pearson led the Canadian delegation to the United Nations from 1946 to 1956 and became president of the United Nations General Assembly in 1952. He won the Nobel Peace Price in 1957 as one of the important architects of the post-war United Nations and as the initiator of the first United Nations peace keeping mission. In that post-war context, where Canada positioned itself as a champion of peace and democratic institutions, the miserable conditions of Canadian aboriginal and Inuit peoples became a national embarrassment for Canada and even an international concern. Canada was challenged to transform its colonial style of administration toward its First Nations and northern communities. In 1965, Lester B. Pearson appointed Abe Okpik as the first aboriginal councillor ever to sit on the Northwest Territories' Council.[1]

Other factors motivated the Canadian government to pour more money into improved services for northern communities. From Captain Bernier's first arctic patrol in 1905, to the voyage of Henry Larsen and his crew on the ship *St.Roch* in 1942 across the Northwest Passage, and to this very day, Canada's northern policies always have had to address the question of its sovereignty over the arctic water and islands. The best argument for sovereignty still today is the occupation of the territory. In improving the standards of living of northern communities, the federal government could progressively increase its northern population and at the same time it could eventually restrain the flow of migration of aboriginal people and Inuit into the major Canadian cities. The *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* made clear that Canadian sovereignty was a central concern of federal bureaucrats in the series of relocations

that took place at the beginning of the fifties to Resolute Bay and Grise Fiord.[2]

Linked to the sovereignty factor, the cold war became another very important historical reality shaping Canadian Arctic policies in the 1950s. Canada was seen by Russian generals[3] as a strategic ground for the United States to launch an invasion of the USSR. Particularly, the Canadian Arctic sky was the Soviet bombers' route to American industrial centres. The Russians were sufficiently interested in the Canadian North to broadcast radio shows in English on a daily basis in the fifties to Canadian northern audiences.[4] These Russian radio broadcasts reached Canadian northerners long before Canadian broadcasting reached them in 1973. The progressive increase in tension between the two major post-war superpowers led to the construction of the Distant Early Warning System (DEW line) in 1955. This gigantic construction of a chain of radar stations all across the Canadian North provided many job opportunities for Inuit all over Canada. Abe Okpik was one of them.[5]

Another important factor raising the level of interest of Canadians in the Arctic, was the development of mining exploration and, most importantly, of oil and gas drilling in the Beaufort Sea area. The importance of Canadian northern mineral resources even became a slogan in John Diefenbaker's campaign of 1957. Pressured by corporate interests, Ottawa had to open the way for major investments into exploration, drilling and mining in the North. But whose land was it? The ancestral Inuit occupants had never been conquered and had never signed any treaty with the Crown. Somewhere down the road of mineral development, Ottawa would have to clear any aboriginal claims to the ancestral land. In order to do so, Ottawa had to support the development of an aboriginal leadership. Abe Okpik was among the first crop of Inuit leaders introduced to politics by the federal government; in fact, he was hired as a federal civil servant.

The publication of *People of the Deer* by Farley Mowat in 1952 graphically exposed, in Canada and abroad, the neglected conditions of Inuit in Canada. Some influential individuals who were very well informed of the situation, such as Henry Larsen, the Commandant of the RCMP "G" Division, Anglican Bishops Archibald L. Fleming, and from 1950, Donald Marsh, and Roman Catholic Bishop Marc Lacroix had for years informed Ottawa of the plight of Canadian Inuit. The renowned anthropologist Diamond Jenness had made some very clear statements to alert Canadian authorities. In fact, all the reports, comments and pleas of these direct witnesses of Inuit living conditions had had some impact on Canadian authorities. In 1951, recognizing that Inuit communities were plagued with tuberculosis, Ottawa put into service a hospital-vessel, the *C.D. Howe*, to provide medical services to remote arctic communities. In 1952, the then federal Department of Resources and Development organized a conference on Eskimo affairs in Ottawa. This conference created the Eskimo Affairs Committee to address the problems of the Canadian Inuit, now widely acknowledged by a large public.

Death was never far from Abe's youth. When collecting berries around Tuktoyaktuk as a young boy with his mother, he was bewildered by the numerous graves lying everywhere on the tundra. His mom told him not to bother these dead people buried there and not to disturb anything from their burial grounds.[6] At the All Saints Residential School in Aklavik, which Abe attended, many young students suddenly had to stop playing to spit blood from their infected lungs. Around the age of fourteen, Abe witnessed a terrible epidemic of flu in the Aklavik area. "They buried thirty-five of us, both Indian and Inuit, within three weeks."[7] Everybody was sick. The RCMP officers had to feed the dogs because their masters were lying on couches, dying. A little later at the age of sixteen, Abe himself spent three years at the Misericordia

and Charles Camsell Hospitals in Edmonton to cure his own tuberculosis.

Farley Mowat's book attracted harsh criticism, particularly from the Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources, Jean Lesage, who qualified the book as fictional.[8] But it also attracted the world's attention to the prevailing living conditions of the Inuit. The same year another indicting book for the Canadian northern administration was published, Richard Harrington's, *The Face of the Arctic*. Harrington was a photographer and he displayed, for the first time, images of the Caribou Inuit dying in inhumane conditions. In their agony, some of them were still wearing the Canadian identification tags, distributed by the RCMP, that Inuit referred to as dog tags.

It was only in 1959 that the Eskimo Affairs Committee finally decided to invite a few Inuit to their deliberations as indigenous advisers. Abe Okpik was one of them. This was the first time ever that Canadian authorities consulted Inuit on crucial decisions impacting their daily lives. This is really when Abe Okpik's political career began. Within the next thirty years, Canada transformed its style of northern administration to include more aboriginal peoples and Inuit in northern development.

A series of progressive measures were swiftly introduced by the federal government such as the creation of the Eskimo Loan Fund (ELF) to support the emergence of co-operatives and the development of Inuit art. Northerners saw increased federal funding for health and education, the first federal housing programs, the creation of electoral ridings in the Eastern Arctic in 1966 and the transfer of the territorial administration from Ottawa to Yellowknife in 1967. The Territorial Council, under the leadership of Commissioner Stuart Hodgson, suppressed the identification numbers that had been used by the government of Canada to identify Inuit since the 1930s. In 1968 Abe Okpik took charge of the operation called *The Surname Project* and for the next two years relentlessly toured most

Inuit communities of the Northwest Territories to register surnames for all Inuit individuals.

Most scholars place the beginning of Inuit political organizations in 1971 with the creation of the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada.[9] The narrative of Abe Okpik places it much before that. Parallel to the Eskimo Affairs Committee initiative, a non-profit organization called the Indian-Eskimo Association was established in 1960, from a sub-committee of the Canadian Association for Adult Education (CAAE), mostly to deal with the Indian problem in Canada. Initiated by benevolent non-indigenous participants, this association recruited more and more aboriginal grassroots leaders and evolved toward the creation of representative aboriginal organizations. The Indian Brotherhood of Canada and the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada emerged from this early initiative. According to his résumé, Abe served two terms on the board of directors of the National Indian and Eskimo Association, from 1962 to 1965, and became a field worker and the president of the Northwest Territories section that he started[10] in Yellowknife, from 1965 to 1967.

This Autobiography is Abe's Story

This narrative does not tell everything about Aklavik, the Inuvialuit/Inuit or Abe's own life. In telling the story of his life, Abe Okpik's intention was not to create an encyclopaedia or a theory of northern government. In fact, during this interview project, he used to tell his friends, "We are working on the fifth gospel!" He was sharing his repertoire of stories that probably his friends and relatives had heard many times. In doing so, he was passing on his experience and reflections on the North. Nevertheless, this autobiography allows us readers to journey through recent northern history from a genuine indigenous perspective; important events that have shaped the current Canadian North form the foundation of Abe's narrative.

The manuscript published here is the transcription of fifteen interviews. After reading the text, many aspects of Abe's personal life remain unknown to the reader. Possibly, Abe wanted to focus on that part of his professional life where he was directly involved in politics. He does not tell much about his own family life, for example, or his more recent doings in Iqaluit in the last twenty years of his life. Soon after our fifteenth interview, Abe was sent to Montreal for medical treatment and came back under heavy medication. We never had the chance to work together on editing the manuscript.

One of the difficulties in editing this text without his contribution was to find the right people and books to confirm the spelling of a place or person's name or to corroborate dates. Abe Okpik was a living memory of the North and to verify the details of each story he told is an ongoing process. Supported with a grant from the Nunavut Department of Culture, Language, Elders and Youth, I travelled to the Mackenzie Delta to meet with family members such as Elijah Allen (Abe's younger brother), Victor Allen (cousin), and Rosie Albert *née* Stefansson (cousin). I flew to Aklavik to take pictures and to meet with people at the city hall and school who had known him. On my way to Inuvik, I stopped in Yellowknife and consulted the archives at the Prince of Wales Heritage Centre and at the Northwest Territories Legislature library. I photocopied twenty copies of our original manuscript and distributed them to family members and northern specialists. I visited George Koniak, an old friend and colleague of Abe in Kuujjuaq, Nunavik, to learn more about his side of the story. I consulted Ernest Benedict and Russell Moses who had known Abe in the Indian Eskimo Association.

While this book is the product of a series of interviews with Abe, I have edited out some questions, where desirable, in order to create a consistent text. Further, for the sake of clarity, I have provided endnotes to establish the historical context of different episodes of Abe's story.

Although every effort has been made to verify and corroborate spellings, dates and facts mentioned in this first edition of the book, we look forward to any corrections or comments from readers.

Louis McComber

NOTES

1. Globe and Mail, First Eskimo Appointed N.W.T. Council Member, October 19, 1965
2. For more information, see: Canada (1994), the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples report.
3. Editor's translation

   "From the Soviet leaders' perspective, Canada was a transmission link between the imperial power of Great Britain and the United States. It was also believed to be the strategic launching ground for an invasion of the USSR. Therefore Russia's interest in Canada increased drastically after 1945. Canadian communists supporting a Stalinist world view, as well as the Canadian peace movement were disproportionately covered by the Russian media. As the conflict developed with the United States, the last capitalist empire, Canadian political leaders were pictured as the pawns of the Americans. The Canadian working class was seen as a potential ally of the Soviets, and Canadian territory as the battlefield."

   http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/department/history/coldwar_section06-en.asp
4. See Chapter 8.
5. IBID.
6. See Chapter 1.
7. See Chapter 3.
8. Marcus, 1995, p. 20.
9. Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami was formerly named Inuit Tapirisat of Canada. http://tapirisat.ca
10. News of the North, December 26, 1976; "He travelled quite a bit promoting the Indian and Eskimo Association that he started in Yellowknife."

The Circumpolar World
Russia
Arctic Circle
Finland
Sweden
North Pole
Norway
United States
Alaska
Greenland
Iceland
Canada
Inuvik
Yukon
Whitehorse
Northwest
Territories
Yellowknife
Nunavut
Iqaluit

CHAPTER 1

Childhood in the Mackenzie Delta

I was born in the year 1929, January the 12th, in a place called Kipnik.[1] I was born there, in the old way, in the middle of the winter. Maybe I was one of the last to be born using the customary way of being delivered. According to this old way, no child at any time should be born in a winter dwelling place; that was the culture. They set up a tent for my mother with a stove and wood. On the 12th of January the sun had just come back. It was still dark and I was delivered into the world by my mother's cousin. She was a midwife.

Prior to my birth, my father's uncle, my grandfather's oldest brother, had just passed away. His name was Auktalik, and I assume his name was also Abraham. When I was born, my mother's cousin,[2] the midwife, and my mother agreed that if I were a girl, they would name me after somebody who had recently died on the female side. If I were a boy, they would call me *akkaga*, which means my uncle. His name was Auktalik. So therefore, when I was born, my mother called, "What is it? A boy?" They said, "Yes, it is!" They called me Auktalik, *akkaga*. To the day they both died, they never called me by my name. They always called me *akkaga*, which means uncle. They believed in these practices.

Auktalik was one of the last medicine men. They called him a medicine man or shaman, but he was an

Kipnik, the birth place of Abraham Okpik in the Mackenzie Delta. Kipnik is still used as an outpost camp by the Allen family.
Photo courtesy of Elijah Allen.

A nine-dog team coming into Aklavik, 193?.
Credit Fleming/NWT Archives. N-1979-050-1181.

angakkuq, along with my father's father, who was also an *angakkuq*. But Auktalik had a special gift. He used to cure people when they were very sick or had gone beyond. He used some kind of shamanistic power, whatever you call it. He could cure people by performing some rituals for that purpose.

So, I was born on January the 12th, 1929. We used to joke, Billie Davis and I, another guy who was born around February. We were about the same age. I told him, "We were born in a tent!" He said, "Yes, I was born in a house but with the door wide open!" That was the joke we made! Ha, ha, ha! But actually, I was born naturally, according to the culture.

At that time the Hudson's Bay Company and the Northern Traders Company[3] were in the North and they used dogs. They delivered supplies to the trappers on the land, because, while trapping furs, the trappers had no time to go back to the main store because it took two or three days. So they hired dogteams to deliver whatever they needed and to buy the fur on the spot. This was the last time those things happened.

I don't remember the early part of my young life, but I do remember once when we were in a schooner. At that time, I didn't know what it was. According to what people said, they had inboard motors. Not only my father, but my uncles, too, and other people around, they all had boats.

I remember after the spring hunt; I'll start in the spring. We used to take our dogs, toboggans, everything from our camp, put them in the boat, and take the whole family or two families, or three families and travel. Well, this would be in June, just shortly after what we called ratting[4] season. At the end of the muskrat season, it would be June 15th, we took everything from our camp, and everyone would go to a place called Aklavik.

Aklavik[5] was not established until about 1913. Fort McPherson was the main depot on Arctic Red River for all the Inuit in the Delta. The Northern Traders came up and

they established stores at a main place like Aklavik. They also had outpost camps. I happened to be born in one, a place called Kipnik. But, what they used to do is, they all went there with their boats and congregated around Aklavik; the Inuit on one side and the Indians on the other. If you belonged to the Roman Catholics you had your camp on their side and if you were Anglican, you had your camp on the Anglican side. There was never really any visiting between the two churches except among the old timers who sat outside the Bay (the Hudson's Bay Company), and talked about how good the fur was or how bad it was. They yarned for months. They always communicated with people who had come from different parts of the region, up from the Fort McPherson side, or from the coast. They talked about the environment, I am assuming. I know that they talked about it because they discussed whether there was any increase in muskrats.

If any increase in muskrats was coming, we knew. I remember that we would know if there was going to be an increase in foxes! Somehow, some old timers used to see into the foxholes. If they saw ten, twelve or thirteen in the litter then they knew the numbers were increasing. If there were only five or six, they were decreasing. They knew that cycle themselves. They also talked about the mice, the ecosystem and all that. Anyway, that is just one part of it; but they used to go to Aklavik and they sold their furs for the best deal. There were several traders there. They were independent traders, and they were looking for the highest bids they could get.

My father would deal with the Hudson's Bay Company because he was able to get his freight in advance for the fall. He gave all his fur to them, and whatever credit he had, he could use to pick up some more supplies later on. Then he would fill up the old schooner and go back to the winter camp. They took all their equipment with them, the dogs and canoes and toboggans, whatever, for a reason. If they heard, during the same trip, that there was

going to be an increase in foxes in one place or another, they would talk to the trader and go and stay one more winter there.

My father went as far as Pearce Point.[6] They used to hunt on Banks Island before my time with the family, and there were a lot of white foxes. Whenever they predicted an increase in foxes, they moved, not every year but maybe every two years, and then they went somewhere else. That was the way they operated. They didn't stay in one place all the time. But when my father got older he went back to the same place where I was born.

We stayed in Aklavik for some time. I remember when I was growing up, they used to talk about the first airplane to come to Aklavik. The plane arrived and I think Wop May or "Punch" Dickens[7] was the pilot. This was the first aircraft people there had ever seen. There were some old shamans sitting outside, wondering what kind of creature was coming. Older people who were around at the time heard some remarks made by the shaman Apakaq. He looked at the plane as it was approaching and he remarked, "It is a little slower than when I was travelling when I was a shaman. You know, it is quite a bit slower! I could go quite a long way within seconds!" That was his story. Not only him; there were others who also knew how to *inikmaq*. This means that you leave your body and travel with your spirit to some other part of the world to visit people.

Every summer we used to go down to a place called Shingle Point.[8] There were schools there at one time. The Anglican mission school was set up there. The Hudson's Bay Company also had a store. We would also go trading to Herschel Island[9] in the Yukon. Captain Pedersen[10] used to come with a ship with freight and supplies from the Canalaska Company. When I was a little boy, I remember going to Herschel Island after whaling at Shingle Point because it was whaling time there. There was an Anglican school, and Inuit students from all along the coast, as far east as Cambridge Bay and even Spence Bay, were brought there.

The people used to send their children there to the missionary school.

In the summer we would whale and make dry fish, and get enough blubber for the winter. In the winter when you were travelling, you had to have blubber for your dogs. You had to cook dog food for the winter every day. When you travelled with dogs, you had to keep them alive as it was your only transport. When we would go to Herschel Island, I'd meet old Captain Pedersen. He wasn't as old then as he was when I met him later, after he sold out.

He had a boat, a ship, called the *Patterson*.[11] I'd been on it when I was a little boy. I saw it as a huge ship but not compared to the ships that we have these days. It was just, maybe a five hundred ton freighter or so, but it supplied all the people, along the northern part of Alaska to Herschel Island. That was his main trading area, together with Banks Island. Just like us, the people from Banks Island had their own boats. They delivered their white foxes and they got their provisions and they would go back. George Porter was one of them. He has grown-up children in Gjoa Haven now. Pedersen had a few people working for him when there were foxes. So there; that's the way it was!

In the fall when we were not travelling, we would go back to our camp and fish from around October until November. Almost every day we would set a bunch of fish nets and pile up enough fish for the winter. November 1st, my father used to get ready to go trapping. He'd go for a week, maybe three. A week that way, and a week the other way, and he set three or four lines. One year I followed him when I was young. I was only fourteen but it was an opportunity to see how they worked on the land. They always brought an axe, traps, bait, dog food, a tent and a stove. You could at least sleep in your bag, and change your clothes, but that was it. Sometimes you would run into a little bit of luck. You might get an odd ptarmigan, or snare a few rabbits, or hook up a few fish. You just kept going!

Receiving supplies by plane in Aklavik in 1937.
Credit: National Archives of Canada.
PA 73873.

Captain Pedersen's ship, the *S.S. Patterson*,
at Herschel Island in 1930.
Credit: Indian and Northern Affairs/National Archives of Canada.
C-66709.

Every now and then we stopped at a place, about this time of the year, in October, just shortly after freeze-up. There were a lot of loach, what they call ling fish, in the mouth of the river and we used to set hooks at night. They are like catfish. We would set twenty or thirty up in one night and we left them there for the next trip. We didn't have to re-place our things. That's the way we operated.

When I was growing up, there were elders, some old people that my father's relatives used to know, who stayed with us sometimes. At other times they used to stay with my uncle too; they were all related. They used to tell us many legends, sometimes so scary that you didn't want to hear them! You got very apprehensive about the stories and you believed them. It was like going to a horror movie or something like that. It was the way they told them.

We also had our own games whenever we congregated. Even the elders had their own games and we used to watch them. They played baseball whenever they found a good place. They learned it from the American whalers when they were at Herschel Island. There were Siberian Inuit there, and Canadian Inuit, and Alaskan Inuit, all on the ships' crews, and they used to play baseball with them! They taught them how to play baseball! I saw a few of them after, when they were older, but they still knew how to play. They had to follow the rules really well because if you did not know too much about it you got mixed up. There was always somebody that had the rules in his head. If they wanted you out, they called strike!

We used to congregate on Herschel Island and at Shingle Point, and then we would go back on the land to our own camp. Our uncles would go to theirs, and the other people would go on to their own camps. We would not see anyone until after freeze-up. Somebody driving dogs would come and visit us and inquire how we were doing. They trapped from November 1st until the 21st or 25th of December, and they got loads of furs. There were several kinds of foxes, cross fox, red fox and lynx, mink, anything

that had fine fur. They would take their catch to Aklavik around Christmas. That was the first time we saw anybody. We'd go back before New Year, to attend to the traps. Then we would go back at Easter time when the muskrat season opened on March 1st. We trapped a few muskrats and took the furs to trade. We had four main trips to the town with the family; in September, December, Easter and in June. We never went at any other time.

In the summer, would you go by boat?

Yes.

And in the winter by dogteam?

Yes, by dogteam. If you were a young man and had five or six dogs, you provided your own transportation. You did what you could and that was the rule. That was how we travelled. Then in springtime, March 1st was the day to start hunting muskrats. We had to set up tents and the camp. We started catching muskrats through pushups[12] in the lake. When the water rose we would go by canoe and shoot them with .22 short bullets. You got as many as you could, because when there were plenty, there were plenty! What I am saying is that you could get two or three hundred a night when they were plentiful. Then you had to skin them, stretch them and dry them.

Was this a woman's job?

Her main job was skinning, but we had to skin our own sometimes when somebody was not well. We all learned how to do this. You had to skin them the same day you caught them. You didn't get much sleep, especially when the price was two and a half or three dollars per pelt. Some guys hardly slept; they wanted to do as much as they could! From about the third week in May, when the water came in, until the ice went away, those lakes were full of muskrats. There were plenty!

Because the Mackenzie Delta is low, when the Mackenzie River broke up and the ice was melting and

coming down, sometimes within twenty-four hours everybody would be in a boat! No more land! Everything was under water. That was no emergency for us because we were always safety conscious. Lately, they say it is a dangerous place, but nobody ever said we were flooded out. Sure, we were flooded, but we always had some plans to cope with it. Some people stayed on the high ground and never encountered flooding because they knew how high the water would go. It was not an annual event. Most of the time, if you got three floods in five years, you were doing well.

It used to flood the whole camp sometimes, but that was nature! You couldn't change it. You had to expect it. That's why, when you see pictures, or when you go down the coast, there is driftwood all the way. From way up the river it drifts down the Mackenzie, and for miles all around it is just white with driftwood. You don't need to haul too far! All you need is a good stove, haul the wood and you're doing okay. That was the way we used to live.

Some people went further when they were going trapping. Most of the people went in their schooners. They used to go to Holman, Sachs Harbour, Banks Island, Paulatuk and even as far away as Gjoa Haven.

Would you go there for the summer or for the trapping season?

For the summer. They would haul their stuff and stay there one whole winter without communication with anybody. Two or three schooners would go to Banks Island and trap.

Did they come back the next summer?

The next summer, yes, but only when the ice went away. Sometimes the ice didn't go, so they had to stay an extra year.

Were the boats stuck in the ice?

No. They were hung up. They put them on the beach until the ice went out. Sometimes people didn't get back

Schooners at Aklavik, 194?.
Credit: Fleming/NWT Archives. N-1979-050-0011.

Rat Sunday. Muskrat skins were put on the collection plate. Akavik 1933.
Credit: Fleming/NWT Archives. N-1979-050-0092.

home to Banks Island or Holman[13] and had to try another time. When they couldn't get over, they had to winter on the mainland. It happened to us one time when I was a little boy, before I went to school. We wintered at a place called Booth Island. Not only us; there were several other boats there, other families.

Would all the outpost camp be aboard the boat, your mother, uncle, and so on?

Dogs and harnesses and everything went. One time we went with my brother and his wife, my sister and two other men; one of them was a cousin, and my father and my father's mother. There were about nine of us. Three were children. When we landed we unloaded everything, set up camp, and trapping would begin. The First of November was the big opening for trapping.

In your childhood, would you leave like this in the schooner every summer?

In the summer we would go with the schooner to Aklavik and hunt whales. Our chances were good sometimes because with good weather you could go where you wanted. At other times the weather wasn't good. You didn't have the weather report like you have today. They went more or less by instinct. Some years, when Captain Pedersen came, he would almost predict whether it was going to be a bad summer or a bad winter. He'd been a whaling captain in the North all his life. He did his weather report in his own way!

There is a story about him coming in the fog in the fall of the year. The people were living in their camps along the coast, waiting with their furs and whatever they had to trade. You couldn't see anything. After Captain Pedersen passed Point Barrow, you could hear a foghorn. You knew he was out there, so you got your boat ready and went to find him. There he was, anchored, waiting for his customers. When it was a windless day, just dead fog,

you had to wait till you heard a foghorn out there. Even on the foggiest night or the foggiest day we got ready to go and see what was on the boat. The funniest part is, he would bring oranges and apples, right from where he came. Ha, ha, ha!

Was he coming from the United States?

Yes. He actually came from Oakland, California. San Francisco was his main port. He started with a whaling commission, I guess, for a whaling and trading company. Charlie Brower[14] was a partner, but later on he went on his own as a captain with his own ship.

NOTES

1. Kipnik, a few kilometers outside of Aklavik, had been the location of a trading post for a company named the Northern Traders Limited. The Allen family used the building of the old trading post as their home. Today the family is still using Kipnik as an outpost camp, travelling back and forth from Inuvik where they now reside.
2. Alice Simon or Anuktuk.
3. Northern Traders Limited established a chain of trading posts in the Mackenzie Valley at the beginning of the twentieth century. Formerly named Hislop and Nagle, they rapidly became a serious competitor of the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) until the fur market collapsed in 1929. The company was bought by the HBC in 1938. [Coates: 1985]
4. Muskrat hunting season.
5. Aklavik was established as a trading post of the Hudson's Bay Company in 1912. At first, white fox skins were the main trade staple at the post, but around 1925 Aklavik became the Canadian capital of the muskrat trade. As were many Arctic communities, Aklavik was divided into two sections; the Anglican side and the Roman Catholic side. The Church of England Anglican order was called the Protestant Missionary Society founded in London in 1799. Most of its ministers came from England. The Roman Catholic order, called Les Oblats de Marie-Immaculée, was founded in France in 1814, and most of its priests came from France and Belgium. Anglicans and Roman Catholics both opened up residential schools, Immaculate Conception and All Saints respectively. That is where Abe learned to read and write in English. The Anglican All Saints church was built in 1924 and the Immaculate Conception Roman Catholic church in 1925. In 1926, the Anglicans built a hospital, followed by the Catholics who built their own in 1927. Abe was treated for tuberculosis at the All Saints Hospital. Beside becoming the main trading post for the Western Arctic, Aklavik also evolved into an important service centre for the area until Inuvik was built in 1958. The federal plan at the time was to shut down Aklavik because every few years, the Mackenzie River would flood the town.
6. In Amundsen Gulf. It was a seasonal camp for Inuit. The RCMP opened a seasonal station at Pearce Point in the 1920s. A Distant Early Warning station, PIN-A, was built there in 1963. For interesting pictures of Pearce Point today, see: http://www.spiritofplace.com/travels/003997.html
7. On July 1st, 1929, the first aircraft landed in Aklavik. C.H. "Punch" Dickens was piloting a Western Canada Airways Fokker Universal. [GNWT Department of Education: 1987]

8. Tapqaq, in Inuvialuktun. Reverend Fry maintained an Anglican station from 1909 to 1919. The church was built in 1922 and the residential school in 1929. Reverend Shepherd was the principal. The school was closed down and moved to Aklavik which was becoming the main trading and service centre of the Canadian Northwest. (Nagy, 1994: p. 40)
9. American whaling in the Bering Strait began in 1848. The catches were so good that within a few years, some one hundred and fifty American whaling ships sailed annually along the coast of Alaska. Many "Eskimos" joined the hunt from the coast in their *umiat*, or as workers on the whaling ships. From 1890 to 1910, whaling ships wintered at Herschel Island to catch whales in early spring and save annual trips back to San Francisco. Some Alaskan inland Inuit travelled to Herschel Island by dogteam with their sleds loaded with caribou, sheep and musk ox carcasses to supply the crews of sailors with fresh meat. Abe mentions that his father and grandfather used to go to Herschel to trade with the whalers.
   From 1910, whaling was in rapid decline until it vanished completely from the Arctic after the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. With the decline of whale stocks, the traffic of whaling ships decreased to nothing on the Arctic seas. Some isolated traders such as Captain Pedersen continued to barter different kind of goods with Inuit. They would buy sealskins, bearskins, musk ox skins, and ivory, and in return would sell guns, ammunition, tobacco, flour, tea, sugar, fabrics, shawls...all commodities that Inuit had incorporated into their lifestyle.
10. Captain Carl T. Pedersen was a well known character all along the northern coast of Alaska, Herschel Island and the Mackenzie Delta. He first came to Herschel Island as a whaler in 1894 and joined H. Liebes and Company in 1914. He eventually established the Canalaska Company which traded goods with Inuit all along the Beaufort Sea coast. [Nagy, 1994. p. 49]
11. In 1925, Captain Pedersen bought a five hundred and eighty ton former coast guard vessel, the *Patterson*. Bockstoce, 1986, pp. 338-343.
12. Breathing holes in the ice.
13. Ulukhaqtuuq in Inuinnaqtun. The Northwest Territories government uses the word Uluqsaqtuuq, meaning, where there is copper. Holman is located on the shore of King's Bay and Queen's Bay on the western side of Victoria Island. In fact, in his interviews, Abe always used Holman Island to refer to Holman. The official name now being Holman, that is the designation that we kept. Holman has a population of four hundred and seventy. The first Hudson's Bay Company trading post was established in 1923.

14. Charles Brower became a legendary figure for whalers and explorers sailing north to the Arctic Sea. He established a trading post in Utqiarvik, Barrow, Alaska, in 1886. Advised by his friend Vilhjalmur Stefansson, he wrote a fascinating autobiography, *Fifty Years Below Zero* re-edited in 1997 by the University of Alaska Press.

Chapter 2

First Contacts with Christianity

You asked me about people being converted to Christianity. That was quite a while before my time, about the turn of the century, I guess. The first Anglican missionary, when my mother and her cousins were teenagers, was Isaac Stringer.[1] Eventually he became a bishop, but he went to Herschel Island from Fort McPherson where he was working with Bishop Bompas[2] at that time. I didn't know these people, but my father and mother had seen them.

That was in the early part of the century when Isaac Stringer went up there, but people already had contact with whalers. Herschel Island was their main depot, and a lot of things were happening there.

There was no law! The Northwest Mounted Police[3] finally came in 1904, under the direction of the Government of Canada, because this was Canadian territory. Already by then, there were all kinds of people from the ships, and they were not the best groups to deal with, let's put it that way![4] They knew how to sail! Some of them have grandchildren and great grandchildren in the Delta.

My father told me when Bishop Stringer, he wasn't a bishop then, but I'll call him Bishop anyway, first came here he was single. When he came back he had two daughters, I guess. I believe they were about the same age as, or younger than my mother and her cousin. They kind of grew up with some of the local teens. They spoke

Inuktitut fluently, too, according to them. What they said was that when the missionaries first came, religion for Inuit was different. What was it all about? They didn't know. But they converted some people in the community, the people that were hanging around the whalers.

If you know the culture of Inuit, then you know that the weakest people always hung around influential authorities. The strongest people survived on the land. They would never be bothered by the little they had, and only when necessary would they go trading.

My grandparents on my father's side were from a mountainous area. That's where they lived. They hunted sheep, and according to one book I have read, by one of the captains who wrote about Herschel Island, they used to buy sheep meat for extra food. My father was one of those young guys at that time hauling sheep saddles, what they call back rumps, to the ship. They sold them for whatever they could buy. Molasses mostly, because there was no sugar, I guess, in those days.

He would go there by dogteam. My mother and he got together when they were young, according to the custom. They grew up together and had three children. The oldest was Colin, the second was Owen and then Herbert. Eventually, they baptized and confirmed us in the Anglican religion. My mother told me that my father already had a few ideas about religion. When living in Herschel Island for one year he went to, what do you call it, Sunday school?

My oldest brother's name was Colin, but he's not around anymore. He was registered as Colin Kisoun. Owen was born on a Tuesday, but my mother couldn't say what date he was born. She knew there was Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday. She knew that Sunday was an important day. Then I had a brother named Herbert who was born on a Friday. So they named him that. They didn't know what date it was, but they assumed that he was born around 1910 or 1913. My

oldest brothers were already young boys when they finally got baptized. They named Owen because he was born on Tuesday, Owen Tuesday, and, Herbert, Herbert Friday!

So that was the first contact, really the first communication they had with Christianity. They didn't have any books or anything else to go by, only hearsay. When they were converted they tried to follow the religion solemnly, I am assuming, like everybody else did. But there were so many rules to follow that they couldn't understand. I don't really know. It was different from their old religion.

About that time, there were some shamans who still practised their old supernatural communication. Some of them were still practising until late, even up to my time when I was born. They refused to give it up. In fact, I once saw somebody older refuse to accept Christianity. They still believed that what they thought was the best. But the younger generation started to take over, and they wanted to forget shamanism because it was the work of the devil, the work of Satan and so forth. They had something better. That's when they left most of their supernatural communication and things that they used to do for assurance a long time ago. It is all gone now, but that was when things started to change.

With the new religion, shamanism was called evil?

At that time, they said everything that the Inuit believed was evil. I think they themselves didn't study the real purpose of what Inuit used to do. You hear stories that Inuit could cure people. They had a gift to cure people, and they could raise them from the dead and so on. There was some kind of symbolic power and we didn't have it written up. It was a gift to the people to take responsibility for certain parts of our society. I think that when religion came, the missionaries brought their biases, and said that ours was no good and theirs was better. I guess they had trading goods, too, and all the other things that came along with it! That was...

Convincing?

Yes. Because they had better equipment, rifles, stuff of that sort, traps, fur, etc. They could get more fur, and I guess that was the main source of what they took to their hearts.

It's interesting, because you mentioned that when you were born, you were born traditionally, with a midwife. They gave you the name of your akkak *and at the same time you were baptized in the Christian religion.*

And I went to an Anglican school eventually. But according to the people who wrote about the whalers who were there, some of them didn't believe in religion very much! They were rough people, tough men, hard people to deal with. Their captain was their policeman. There's nothing else that could change them. The captain had power wherever they landed, and I'm assuming that's the way it always was.

When the whalers came, they had all kinds of influences on the people. My parents were on an island somewhere with their parents when a whaling ship landed at Baillie Island, at a place called Uqaluk. This is around Atkinson Point, just east of today's Tuktoyaktuk and Kittigazuit.[5] Somebody had, I think it was chicken pox or measles, and after they left the whole settlement died. The same thing happened before that in Point Barrow in my grandfather's time, and they had to leave that area. In Alaska they called that the Big Death, the Curse of the Big Death. They didn't know what had caused it. They said the people got red with spots all over. Of course, today they call that smallpox.[6] They didn't have any medicine to combat it, so you were lucky if you survived! They never had any plague like that before, or such bad colds.

Even not too long ago we had influenza, and someone almost died because we were all from the land! We had no aspirin or castor oil to combat some of our sicknesses. My

parents were lucky and also my grandparents. They were inland and were never touched. They went to the coast when everything was happening for one or two summers. A fellow by the name of Bob Cockney who was also called Nuligak wrote a story about how people died from this smallpox.[7]

He and his nephew were the ones who survived. Everybody else died. Just a few of them survived, about one hundred and twenty some odd people out of twelve or maybe fifteen hundred. When I was growing up we used to go down the Mackenzie River towards the Tuktoyaktuk side, and we walked inland to pick berries with my mother and her friends in September. There were old graves all over the place! Logs were piled up there, with the implements and everything. They were everywhere, all over the land. Some still had old skins on them. My mother said, "Don't bother them. Don't bother graves." We'd pick berries all around there, but it was not our business to even question who was buried there.

When religion came for the first time my grandfather and father were both buried in the same place. The missionaries said that when you bury someone you have to put them in a box and bury them. That was to be the funeral, which later on we adapted from another source. Most of the people who were recognized as Inuit at that time, before coffins and religion came in, were taken to the highest place on the land and put on a knoll or a mound. They put them up there as an honour. That was the way they used to do it.

There's too much permafrost over there to put them in the ground in boxes. Although, I was walking around one summer on Baillie Island, it was in 1952, I think, and there were some old graves sitting on top of the ground. Whalers had been there. I think what happened was, they actually buried them in the permafrost but every year the

ground heaved and the boxes came out of the permafrost because of the movement.

Before the modern influence, would the Inuit put rocks over the body?

No, no. Logs. First they put a skin, and then they put logs, and maybe a few rocks if there were any around.

On a high spot?

Yes.

So predators couldn't come?

Yes. If you go there and see a high knoll, you see that different grasses grow there. You know someone has been buried there. You know something is there. It's an indication that somebody died. Here, they used to put rocks around, that's all, and let the wind or whatever do what it wanted. In fact, in Spence Bay when I was there, we had no place to bury the dead. We just put rocks around the coffin and left it there! You had no jackhammer, nothing. But that was the burial season.

So when you were a small child you were living in two worlds, growing up with Christianity and traditional customs?

Well, it is like when you travel. You see new things every day and you hear new things from other people about what's happening, new places, new lands! I remember when we first wintered beyond Herschel Island, close to Alaska at a place called Nunaluk.[8] My father built a cabin and it was kind of on a knoll. That's where I started remembering almost everything on a day-to-day basis.

People used to come from the Alaskan side. That same winter, I believe it was 1932 or '33, one of those reindeer herds, a Canadian herd now, was trekked from Alaska from a place called Kotzebue. People from that project brought old herders and young herders right from Kotzebue, hired by the company to bring the reindeer herd. The Canadian

government bought them from the Lomen Brothers, who owned a big ranch over there. They only brought 2,800 reindeer to Canada.

My father was with my uncle on their last trek, crossing the Delta by dogteam and leading the herd to another place, now called Tununiq. I remember when the Laplanders came in. They had to dry their clothes, so they stayed in their cabins. I didn't understand. They were different! They all wore grass duffels. They used it on their skis and they all had funny little colours on their boots. It was fur, of course. They were right from Lapland. One of the families stayed in the Delta; others went back. It must have been '33 or '32. I would have been three or four years old, but I can remember.

It took them five years to get to where they were going, because they had to stop for calving season. They moved on when winter came. They couldn't move in the summer. There were too many mosquitoes. The families travelled on reindeer sleds with their provisions. They re-supplied them through another dogteam. So they made it. They had Inuit dogs with them. One or two of them stayed in Canada; others went back with Captain Pedersen or some other way. When I went to Kotzebue in Alaska, in 1986, one of these men recognized me. I had met the man long before. He was a teenager when he came through our camp. My older brother knew him better than I did because I was young then.

As a child, do you remember any drum dancing, or ajaaja *songs or traditional activities in the camps or in the gatherings?*

Oh yes. We always had entertainment at festivities like Christmas and New Year, and, upon request, after Easter. We never danced before Easter! We believed in Lent and forty days of being noble. We were taught that. After Easter we were able to dance. My father was one of those who always kept his drum, just in case. Later on, when everyone moved out of Shingle Point, there were just me, my parents

and my uncle and his family. My father always had his drum. When people came from Alaska or groups came from other places, they always drum danced. It was a different kind of feast! There was always somebody who had a drum.

So your parents knew old ajaaja *songs?*

Oh yes! That's the way they were raised. They believed in those things.

Was there throat singing in the west?

No, no. Throat singing is from around here, I suppose.

When you were a young child, Abe, were there still some women who were tattooed?

Yes. My midwife mother was. She had a tattoo, my grandmother had one, and some other people had them, older people. In fact, I never did really see my grandfather, but I saw some of the old people who had a hole in their lip, a labret hole. I remember one old guy had an ivory thing made that he put through his lip. Another one he had was made of jade. These were two important types of ornaments at that time, and he wore them at special dances or occasions.

When I was in Kotzebue, Alaska, I met some people from Gambell; that's on St. Lawrence Island. The old people still had tattoos on their faces. Some of the tattoos were very symbolically rooted in those places. A tattoo could symbolize that a person had murdered one, two or three people; that kind of thing. It might also signify he didn't have to be trusted, I suppose!

That went away, too. We never had any incidents for years. Even in my time, until just recently, for forty, fifty, sixty years, nobody had any conflict of that type. There were no homicides, in other words. Now it has started to come back in different instances.

I was raised in an era where we had mechanization. In the summer we went by boat. We had outboard motors, maybe not the fastest ones, like you have out here, but we weren't paddling. Ha, ha, ha! One or two horsepower, a two and a half horse; a five horse was a big engine in those days, in those canoes!

No Inuit, or Indians even, would ever live in Aklavik. But there were people who were partially blind or couldn't help themselves, and they were under some missionary's or a doctor's wing. They lived in town, but they were adopted by people who came in to trade. There was no welfare in those days. Every time we came through we usually left something for some family that was there.

On special occasions my father used to go to Aklavik, on request. When one of his cousins died, he had to go and bury him. Another time he had to go to Aklavik because of some incident; there was an accident or something.

So in your childhood, contact between your family, your kin, the priest, the RCMP, and the traders occurred in Aklavik?

Yes. A lot of that was happening. The RCMP were always available for information about game laws. People had heard of these laws, but when the Inuit were on the land, the RCMP never bothered to say, "That's the written law and you have to do this and that." Like people say, "a hungry stomach has no rules," and they used that exception. They didn't report any incident where Inuit were doing wrong. The RCMP sergeant, or whoever was in charge, used to tell them, the real hunters, "Don't worry about that! As long as we don't see anything, and there is nobody complaining, you know."

There was a natural reason for that. They knew we had nothing else. They themselves used to go out hunting because there were no services. We did not have a plane every day. We had a plane once a month for mail, maybe.

Four seasons we had, four times for communication, June, September, Christmas and Easter. At other times we were out on the land. Occasionally the RCMP would have patrols in certain areas at different times of the year, just to develop contact and let us know they were around. They stayed in the Inuit camps.

There was a really nice fellow there.[9] I got to know him later. He was an ex-RCMP officer. He had dogs, and he was married to a local Métis girl. He lived there until he was very old. He was a good friend of my father. He took a job as a special constable when they released him from the police. We all liked him. He was an honest guy, and he used to come to our camp to see my father. "This guy is all right," they said, "He's not looking for trouble."

"As long as we don't see anything, we can't do anything. We're not going to force you," he said. We used to hunt swans!

Can you tell us about the kind of implements and equipment you had at the time? You had a stove. What else did you have? What equipment did you see in your parents' house?

Yes. My father had quite a few provisions. I saw some of the old things that he still had. For example, he had a device for making shotgun shells with powder. I never saw him work with it because eventually he started buying locally from the store. But he used to have all these things. I wouldn't know how to work it, but it was simple. The other thing that he had was a forge to shape iron. In our home, which was a fairly large cabin, we had what you call central heating! In the center there was always wood burning in a big oil drum.

Was it all softwood, like spruce or poplar?

When you would go to sleep, you put green logs in there and closed all the dampers, and the stove would be red hot! But in one corner, we had what we called a

McClaren cook stove with an oven, where you put special wood, dry wood to make bread and bannock.

It was not a large house, you know, but it had a floor. There was no rug or anything, but we had a table and dishes and all that. Outside the door we kept our chisel, axe, saw and rifles, just in case. We also had woodpiles. There was always somebody working to keep fuel in the stove. The way we saw it, this was the normal way of doing things. We always had a cribbage board and a deck of cards in the house. Eventually, we got magazines and there were pictures to look at.

You didn't have toys, manufactured toys?

No, not really. What we played with was mostly hand-made. Cat's cradle, you know, the string game? I know a few string games. I'll play it later on just to show that we have not lost this game yet. Ha, ha, ha!

In the summer we made our own toy boats to run around. Sometimes we made our own little sail boats just out of poplar bark. The wind came and took them out, and we couldn't see them any more. It was very easy. You put a stone on them and let them go. We would just watch them. It was something else!

Sometimes someone had a bow and arrow to shoot birds. They were just small things. It was a non-violent activity. Nowadays, if we put a bow and arrow in the hands of young children, we think that they will become violent. They don't know how to use them.

We did a lot of snaring in the fall. After the first snow fall, we would set snares and catch rabbits. Sometimes we got an odd ptarmigan in the snare!

NOTES

1. Isaac Stringer, known in the Arctic as the bishop who ate his boots, was the first Anglican missionary to set up a mission at Herschel Island in 1896. He first came to the Arctic in 1892 to replace Bishop Bompas at Fort McPherson. See: http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/Exhibitions/Herschel/English/Stringers/stringers01.html
   Also see: Peake, Frank A., 1966, *The Bishop Who Ate his Boots*, A Biography of Isaac O. Stringer, Toronto, The Anglican Church of Canada.
2. Bompas was the first Anglican missionary to try to convert the Mackenzie Delta Inuit in 1870. As happened to the Roman Catholic Petitot five years earlier, Bompas was expelled from the region by the Inuit leaders. Bompas eventually became Bishop of the Arctic and moved to Whitehorse.
   See also: http://www.arctic.anglican.org
3. In the first part of the twentieth century, the Canadian North was administered on behalf of the Canadian government by three main actors, known as "the big three": The Hudson's Bay Company, the most influential of the three, the missionaries and the Royal Northwest Mounted Police (RNWMP), which would eventually change its name to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in 1920.
   The RNWMP moved North for different reasons. It was surely to maintain law and order, control the American whaling activities in the Arctic seas, and eventually to collect taxes.
   The RNWMP became the official representatives of the Canadian government in the Arctic. They took on different roles such as explorers, postmasters, census-takers, doctors, tax-collectors, geographers... and policemen.
4. Here is how historian Keith Crowe describes the Herschel Island era:

   > Now every man, woman, and child was placed in contact with other Inuit from Alaska and with men of many countries of the world. The sailors were a rough and wild crowd, so that Herschel and Baillie Islands had terrifying times of drinking, crime, and violence.
   >
   > The Mackenzie Inuit learned new customs and new languages, but they died in hundreds as liquor caused murders among them and diseases swept through the villages. The measles epidemics of 1900 and 1902 were very bad, and smallpox took many lives. By 1910 only about 130 Mackenzie Inuit were left out of a population that had once numbered 2,000. [Crowe: 1991]

5. The new spelling for Kittigazuit suggested by the Northwest Territories government is Kitigaryuit. For clarity, in this text we will keep the more popular spelling of Kittigazuit.

According to explorers such as Mackenzie and Richardson, Kittigazuit was an important settlement of the Mackenzie Inuit in the nineteenth century. With frequent contacts with the whalers, the population was decimated by diseases at the turn of the twentieth century. For more information, see: http://www.canadianarchaeology.com/canadianarchaeology/cmcc/pinuva.htm

6. Abe later states that it might have been measles or chicken pox. See endnote fifteen in chapter 3.
7. For more information on this see Métayer, Maurice [ed.] 1966.
8. Nunaluk, Yukon, near Qamaqaaq, Bagnell Beach. “Besides the major settlement at Herschel Island which had about 100 local residents in the mid-1910s, small agglomerations of three to six Inuvialuit families could be found along the Yukon coast […].” [Nagy: 1994] Nunaluk was one of these camps.
9. Abe mentioned a name that sounded like Constant Ethier.

Chapter 3

Noatak River to the Mackenzie Delta

In our conversation earlier, you asked me about the origin of my people, who they were about a hundred years ago. I had a grandmother who was about eighty, who was my father's mother's aunt. I guess you would say my great, great auntie. She came to Canada before I was born and died in Canada. She had all the information about where the frozen river flows into the Chukchi Sea. On the map it's called the Noatak River.[1] She grew up in that area. She was from the people that originally were called Noatagmiut. In the east, I guess, they would say Nunatangmiut,[2] meaning the people from the interior of Alaska. At that time Alaska was still a Russian territory.[3]

She talked about the trading trips they used to take down the river to Sisualik.[4] Some of the people lived in Kikiktagruk, which is now Kotzebue. They used to trade there. They used to go there because they needed blubber for the winter. There was nothing else they needed because they had their own food from caribou, sheep and fish. There was wood around there, and they could build a shelter because there were trees. They did not call this a *qammaq* in that area. They called it an *illu.* It was made out of logs and sod.

The only people who talked about a *qammaq* were the people who lived on the coast. They made it with sod and a structure of whalebones. There are still a few of

them left. In fact, when I was in Alaska in ‘86, the people of Kotzebue had a couple of traditional houses built for demonstration purposes. They dug into the ground, in the gravel, and covered them up with peat moss for the winter. You had to decline the entrance because if you made it level, the draft would spoil the house. So they put the entrance below the level of the floor.

She told us that, and I heard it from my father, too. She also told my mother that when they were young, they used to travel to Sisualik; that’s right at the mouth of the Noatak River. To the right hand side and then south of there, was another place called Kuuvak.[5] People from there had a little different dialect and they lived differently. There was a lot of fish there, salmon and bears. Then south of there, towards Norton Sound, close to the mountains, is a place called White Mountains. That’s where gold was found. Johnny Horton sings about it. It’s actually called Selawik[6] River and it goes into the interior. The Selawik people had a different dialect also. They could go into Athapaskan country. But on the Noatak River, where they could go up and down to the very end by rowing, they could reach the coast.

They travelled by *umiat* at that time. Most of them used to tell us they trekked their boats. When they trekked a boat, people got on the land and put a line and a support under the *umiaq*, or they pulled it up the river, walked and pulled, that’s the way they did it. When I was travelling in my days, I met a fellow who was an archaeologist named Doctor Bill Irving. He is dead now, but he showed me pictures of the Noatak *qajgiq* council house. He actually had pictures, but it had fallen down. He also had pictures of stone seats, rock seats. It was like people had been sitting there for years. Traditionally, people had their clans and the successful hunter and good provider had the opportunity to give some advice. He told me that every seat had its mark, like a groove!

Just before my grandmother's time they still had their feuds with the people from the south, the Kuuvagmiut. They would chase the Indians away and they would chase other people from their land. They used to have their disputes sometimes. My grandmother told us that. Just before her time, she heard about an experience some of the hunters had. If they went into a certain place and were spotted, some of them would be killed.

By Indians?

No, by another Inuit group called the Kuuvagmiut. They had a different dialect. I met some of them. They're all Americans, of course, now. There is a legend I told in Alaska about a man and his sister who were hunting a giant-sized beaver. Some archaeologist dug up giant beaver bones in Old Crow. I went to the archaeological camp, and there were beaver teeth about that long, big beaver teeth. He had a drawing of the beaver. These beavers weighed about four hundred pounds and according to him they disappeared somewhere around ten to twelve thousand years ago. When we play string games, we still talk about *kigiarjuaq*.

But this man and his sister were hunting and waiting for the beaver to come up. The sister yelled, and he looked up and saw that some Indians had grabbed her by surprise. He didn't know what to do, so he dove into the beaver hole and landed in their house. That's how he escaped. He spent a whole winter there. Beavers like to eat tree bark, and he learned how to survive by eating the bark from the trees. He ate poplar trees and birch trees and some other roots from the bottom of the river. At last, as soon as spring came, he got out and found that his sister had been burned at the stake...his sister! So he went back home. He had absolutely no hair on his body because he had not been exposed to sunshine.

He told the story, and they decided to get revenge for his sister. They went in the fall to where the Indian tribe

was camped around their fires. They circled them with bows and arrows, and the Indians couldn't see them. They made noises like owls at night, or ptarmigan, or crows. The Indians couldn't see into the dark because they were all around the campfire. The Inuit shot and killed them. This is how they got their revenge. They shot them and they went back home and said, "Well, they got paid back for what they did to one of us." That was their system of justice.

Were there a lot of people living there, a large group of people?

At that time, yes, because they were industrious. They had learned to trade with the Russians. I heard that on my great grandfather's side, they used to set up snares using bait. They also used a lance with three prongs, what we call a *nuujaaqpak*. They handled it from the *qajaq*, and they got little muskrat or mink or otter. They had all those home-made implements, which they used to get money then.

I guess at that time nobody knew how to make sugar. So the sailors put molasses in barrels, brought it up, and then used that as a sweetener. There was also another group that went from the Noatak River to get blubber. Another group went later on when the whalers started coming. They had heard about a ship in Tikiraqtaq[7] through their contacts. They used to meet inland somewhere during their summer hunting for *uqqujuaq*, at the time of year when the caribou and calf skins are warm and light and are good for making parkas. They used to hunt them just after they shed their old fur in July. They would meet with people inland, walking from Tikiraqtaq, Point Hope, and Kivalina to the south. People would hear about how others were, and what they were doing.

They would exchange gifts, and maybe a wife or some women and would trade. They were kind of inter-related. When the Russians were first trading, they had these funny looking boats that I saw in a museum. They were all tied up with willows, and then they sewed them and tied them

together. The bottom was all water, but it floated. It was like bamboo.

They used to go up and down the river trading. They went down to Kotzebue or to Noatak or to Sisualik. One of my cousins, the one I told you about that was there when I was born, was a little girl when she went down to that place for the last time before they trekked to Canada.

Her name was Alice Simon. She had a tattoo. My great grandmother also had a tattoo. They told us that when the older people stayed home to prepare winter clothing from sealskin, or caribou boots with the skin out, they sewed it well. When you put seal oil on it, it's like using linseed oil; it becomes waterproof.

During my great grandmother's and grandfather's time, the Russians sold the land to the Americans. They didn't know that themselves, and they were sailing from the Bering Strait and trading with people in Siberia. They were all independent traders, like sailors more or less. There were people from a country called Mongolia. Even they used to go up there. There were pirates all along the coast, and they told stories about them, too.

Around that time they found gold in Nome.[8] They used to talk about another group of people they traded with who were called Qaviararmiut, the people who live in Norton Sound. In fact, my great grandmother told us that when she was young, she went on a trip over there to see what was going on. She said there were a lot of ships coming in and out then. Somebody discovered gold in Nome, Alaska, around 1890 something. They had found gold before that, but nobody really bothered with it. They didn't know what it was.

I met this old man when, well, he must have been eighty something. He used to tell us about when they first found gold. There was an Inuit village with a *qammaq*. As I said before, it was a sod house made out of peat moss and they used to dig a hole in the gravel. People found gold in

the gravel. The white men were panicking. He finally found some nuggets. They were all over that peninsula.

When I went to Nome, Alaska, in 1986, they showed me some huge dredgers. They had two of them and they were moving through the shallows. You could see them working, out on the horizon on the ocean.

I asked the old man if, when he was young, he had heard about the guy who found the gold. "Oh! You mean Taktuk? Yes. He's the one that was a speculator." He told the people that he bought a *qammaq* from the Inuit and sold it to the white man for I don't know how much. He knew that money was like gold and that tobacco was, too. He became an in-between man. This old guy really told us exciting stories.

The Lomen Brothers brought in some reindeer to Nome, Alaska, from Siberia. I saw on television that it was once a big, big, big reindeer herd and that Canada had a few herds from them. They started their trek in 1928, and they didn't get to Canada until 1933 and '34. You know it took them five years. I met some of them when they were trekking. We were just little boys that played together. They stayed in our camp one time.

I only met one of them who was still alive when I went to Kotzebue. He was a young man when he visited our camp that time, a young teenager. My brothers and sisters knew him. His name was Qailutailuk[9] in Inupiat. He was a Kuuvagmiut. His last name was Wood, because he served in the National Guard. He was already an old man when I was talking to him.

The stories tell us that the people who lived in the interior used to be hunters, and they had their meetings in their *qajgiq*, which is like a council hall, a dance hall. One year there were no caribou around and a hunter from another clan, whose name was Inuasuruk, wanted to find out why. I met his namesake later, but he was already an old man. He had this great shamanic gift, which showed him where the animals were. At that time they had no

rifles. Even muzzleloaders had not been introduced yet. He said, "I'm going to bring you a caribou herd from one direction. When you see me, I will have only one antler. Make sure you don't shoot the caribou with only one antler. Kill all the others."

So he flew to some kind of supernatural place and they didn't see him leaving. Then they saw a caribou herd coming, and a caribou that had only one antler was leading them. They killed many caribou and then had enough food. They had their own way of communicating with all kinds of animals.

One of the things that they told us was that the greatest bird flying in the whole universe was the peregrine falcon, because it flies very fast and very high. The other ones were the eagle, and the loon; these were the spirits of the air. Then there were the weasel, wolf and ptarmigan. They were the spirits of the land. Then in the sea, there was Sedna that you talk about. They believed in the sea mammals too, like the whales and the seals. They had their own communication through a supernatural world.

There is another story about this. Some people would see an animal in the sea, like a bowhead whale for instance. They wouldn't know how to get it close to the shore. They would get some old man or old woman who knew their language and they would chant and the whale would come closer. That's when they would get it. They called that *atulluk* which means that through your song you hypnotize the mammal to come near.

It's like when you go out hunting seals, if you have a guitar, piano, accordion or something, and you make noise, they will come right over. It's the same with the snow geese. If you play the accordion, they will come right down to you. They hear different things and they get curious like anything else. If a person felt somebody was around, he would jump up and say cautiously, "What's going on?" It's a similar idea. They learned how to communicate with the animals.

My grandmother also told me, that, when she was a young lady, I guess, she had her husband then, she went to the coastal camp around Tikiraqtaq. Bowhead whales were pretty common for the Point Hope, Alaska people. After a whaling day they used to have a blanket toss; it's like a trampoline. They put girls and boys on the blanket to see who could go the highest. She won one of those contests.

But she also told us why they made the *nalukkujaq*. When people were out hunting, in some places it was flat. There was no place, no logs where you could stand to take a peek and they had no binoculars. They used to put a young guy with good eyesight into the blanket and they would toss him up as high as they could, maybe twenty, twenty-five feet up. He looked out to sea beyond the ice ridges, to the open water to look for a whale. That's how that blanket toss was invented. It was not a game. It also became part of celebrations when they found out that the blanket toss worked for that purpose, too. So that was one of the things they did. I did read about it in one of the anthropological books from Alaska. She also heard the story from some old man at Tikiraqtaq, Point Hope.

Tikiraqtaq was a big place with lots of people, and they were always competitive in native sports, like strong-man acts or fast runners or proficiency at the *qajaq*. Noat-agmiut, too, were involved in this because they could outrace them. They could almost out-run and out-walk anyone. That's the way they were raised. They walked in snowshoes most of the time in the middle of the winter and in the summer they walked all over the land. They had good vitamins!

So Abe, your grandparents were living there?

At that time both grandparents on my mother's side were living there. You mentioned those *tuniit*[10] houses you see around here, the old archaeological houses with big rocks in them. We didn't have those legendary *tuniit*,

but we did have in our own community long ago people called *inugarulliit*. These are small people who live on the land, you probably heard about them. In Cambridge Bay someone saw some not too long ago. They don't mix with us. One of the stories she told us, and even my father's uncle told me, quite a long time ago, was about a family of *inugarulliit* that came to our Noatak camp. They said, "We want to stay with you. We want to stay with you and raise our family and live among you." There was a male and a female and their little daughter.

So there was one family, according to my father's uncle and that old lady, who wanted to live with the common people because they were good providers. Those people always had big Inuit dogs for packing and so on, and they looked after them. After the *inugarulliit* were living there for a while, and after the ground started to freeze a bit, one of the dogs accidentally bit the little girl and she died. They begged the family to stay but they said, "We can't stay, because traditionally we don't do those things. We're going to leave you because we don't trust you; you did something to our girl." They parted and they said, "We'll see you in the region sometime."

But this guy had a little bow and arrow and he shot the dog. When he shot the dog his arrow went through the dog and landed in the ground. They knew it landed in the ground. When they left, the people looked for that arrow. It went through and into the ground. They found it in the permafrost. That's how powerful the arrow was.

So the legends tell us that they were not weaklings. They had some strange power and they could do things that we couldn't do. They told us to never, never communicate with them because they were a very powerful group. They are just small people. So, Inuit in Alaska, Inuit in Canada and even in Greenland, talk about these little people. Some people here say that they have seen their tracks. The latest report I heard was from the Cambridge Bay area about six or eight years ago. I believe there were some actual pictures.

Family reunion in Alaska in 1986. From left to right: Roosevelt Paneak (An Allen family relative from Alaska), Victor Allen (Abe's cousin), Abe Okpik and Elijah Allen (Abe's younger brother). Photo courtesy of Elijah Allen.

The S.S. Distributor at Aklavik in 1945.
Credit: Fleming/NWT Archives.
N-1979-050-0007.

They were living close to the garbage dump on the DEW line. There are several places where they actually saw the camp where they lived. They never did see the people, because they apparently hide somewhere or become something. That's one of the things that's a mystery to us all because they are there.

When they danced at their festivals, and this is all throughout Alaska and even in Greenland, they played the drum and danced as a group. Someone who was from the coastal area would imitate a walrus, another would get up and dance like a bird; someone would dress like a bear. They imitated all these living things. They had their own way of making people understand and communicating their feelings.

Not everybody had supernatural abilities like that. Some people, who had a gift to do these things without having any problems, had to deny themselves certain things. My mother told me that when they were still living in the mountains and living with my father, there was a tradition that they had to follow. When they killed a caribou or even a sheep, she was not allowed to eat certain parts of it while she was menstruating. She could not eat parts of the animal because it would be a breach of taboo. This was passed down from generation to generation.

Tuktoyaktuk lies east of the Mackenzie, right on the mouth of the river, and there is a legend about how it got its name. I read about it; it means the place of caribou. I was a young boy when we first went there and the people used to play around with *tuktuit*. We went down to the shore. The tide was really low and we saw three stones in the water. I mean huge stones. I said, "*Tajga tuktuujaqtuq*, which means, over there, it looks like caribou" They looked like three caribou and there was not another rock for miles around.

I asked my father, "Why do you call it Tuktoyaktuk?" He said that years ago, when people used to live with shamans and the supernatural, a young girl reached

puberty. When her parents found out, they put her in a tent for three days, a skin tent. She was ordered not to look out, not to eat and to meditate. The caribou were passing through that area. There are two points going across to the mainland around the big harbour. The caribou used to swim across. The girl broke her taboo and they found out how it happened. There was a seam in the caribou hide tent, which she opened, and she saw the caribou walking by and they turned into stones.

They still tell that legend today. There are three stones… sometimes I wonder if they are still there because of all the dredging. That whole area is made of gravel and pingos. It would be rare to see a rock or a few rocks together.

So, Abe, can you tell us how your grandparents came to the Mackenzie Delta?

After Alaska was bought from the Russians in 1867, whalers from around here[11] were surveying. The Boston whalers came around and started looking for some whales. They heard from traders about Inuit getting bowhead whales around Point Hope, out west. They went around and tried to penetrate into the Arctic Ocean and the area called the Beaufort Sea. They did find whales after they got through, and that's when they opened up the whaling stations, around 1882. There were boats arriving then when my great grandparents were old. My grandparents were young and my parents were soon to be born during that period.

The Inuit predicted, by using their supernatural powers, that the ships would come. They called it *uivaqtuq*. They predicted that people would go around the point into our land. The Inuit went down to the point and found a couple of shipwrecks there.

You mean they knew that? They saw that through their shamans?

Yes. They saw that. The shaman said, "There are people coming around the point to come to this land."

The Canadian Western Arctic
and
Northern Alaska
N
Gambell
Diomede Islands
Bering Strait
Point Hope
Kivalina
Sisualik
Point Belcher
Barrow
Nuwuk
Point Barrow
Ikpikpuk River
St.-Lawrence Island
Teller
Noatak
Nome
Kotzebue
Norton Sound
Selawik River
Noatak River
Kobuk
Colville River
Prudhoe Bay
Beaufort Sea
ALASKA
Nunaluk Spit
Stokes Point
Herschel Island
Banks Island
Sachs Harbour
White Mountains
Fairbanks
Old Crow
Shingle Point
Mackenzie Delta
Kittigazuit
Tuktoyaktuk
Baillie Island
Victoria Island
Aklavik
Inuvik
Anderson River
Cape Parry
Holman
Anchorage
Fort McPherson
Mackenzie River
Paulatuk
Amundsem Gulf
Horton River
Dawson
YUKON
Colville Lake
Fort Good Hope
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES
USA
CANADA
Snag
Mayo
Pelly
Gulf of Alaska
Arctic Red River
Norman Wells
Carmacks
Fort Norman
Fort Franklin
Great Bear Lake
Arctic Circle
Whitehorse

They found the shipwrecks and they found some things that drifted ashore. I heard from another Inuk in Alaska that they saw wooden barrels on the shore. They didn't know what they were, so they decided to try to break one open. They knew it was wood and there was something in it, so they opened it. They didn't know it was flour, and they started playing around with it. They found out that it was snow that didn't melt and their clothes were all white. When they came home everybody saw that they looked like ghosts. Their faces and hair were all white. They didn't know what it was. They had barrels of flour in the olden days, wooden barrels, and that's what they found.

The whalers also had barrels of hardtack, about an inch thick, big whalers' food they called it. They put that in barrels, and one of them drifted close to the shore. They opened it and all they saw were these flat discs, and they made them skim on the water. Gee, they went a long way skimming on the water! But then later on they saw the seagulls eating them, and they said, "It must be some kind of food." They started tasting it, and sure enough it was food. It was called *qaqqulaaq*. You really have to bite hard at it. That's the kind of experience they had.

When my great grandparents were getting old, they sent some young people to trade in Point Barrow. Charlie Brower[12] was there already with his first whaling company, but he also became an agent for the government. He described how these people came down the Colville River, which is the only river that goes toward the Arctic Ocean over the summit. You could go down at certain places in an *umiaq* right to the coast. They called it the Ikpiqiuk River, I think. They went to trade with their furs and waited for the whaling ships to come. They packed their stuff up, and in the fall they came over with their dogteams and toboggans. They were looking for molasses and sugar and tobacco and maybe shells and ammunition, and tea! When the Russians left they were desperate for a while,

too, because the Americans didn't have any power in those days. When they started whaling it changed.

They went down to Barrow at that time. It was not called Barrow then. Inuit called it Utqiarvik. There were two camps, Utqiarvik and Nuwuk.[13] The mapmaker, Franklin,[14] called it Point Barrow but Inuit called it Nuwuk. They had two different dialects there too, even though they were close. They practised their traditional values and never bothered each other. They lived about ten miles apart. One place is on a point of land. The others were living in sod houses and they started playing sports when they came. According to Charlie Brower, they had foot races and games of strength. He said, "Our boys didn't have a chance with those guys from Noatak." They were actually exceptionally big people. I had two uncles six feet tall. It's not big for you people, just big for us!

When the whaling ships came, they traded their furs through Charlie Brower because he was living with an Inuk then. They went back in the fall, before the freeze-up. Later on, somebody found coastal people who were coming from another place.

In these old camps there were a hundred and twenty people who died from measles or chicken pox.[15] They buried them in wooden boxes. These coastal people were found dead going back to their camp. There was only one man and a woman who eventually came home and told the others that there was a curse of death. They didn't make it. They had children and some of them just died.

In one camp they found eight in a family, all dead in the same tent, dogs and all. It was a terrible shock to them. My great grandfather decided that we better leave this land. We couldn't live in this cursed land. They called it the Big Death. They had never experienced anything like this before. So they decided to trek to Canada.

My grandfather from my father's side and my grandfather from my mother's side were both young, and they decided to move. My mother and father were both born

just around then, and it took them a few years to get to Canada. Even when they were in Canada, they still thought they were in Alaska, because it was part of their land. They didn't have any border. Then they made contact with the whalers staying at Herschel Island. My father and my uncle used to go down and trade with them.

The whalers started bringing rum too, kegs of rum, and they sold it for a price. They didn't think too much about what they did, because that's how sailors are! They didn't think too much about the inland people. They just came there to find out what they could exploit, and that's what they were doing. That's why they started selling rum.

The Inuit never really abused rum in those days because it was used for medicinal purposes. The Siberian Inuit claimed that when the whaling ships were going whaling they would go to the Kiggirmiut, right at the tip of Nome, Alaska, They'd get people from Diomede Islands and from Cape Smythe, and even from Russian territory.

They are Yupik, but we call them Kutlit and Kiggirmiut, but they speak the same dialect. They would take them in a ship, some from Teller, Alaska, too, and bring them over. Sometimes they got stuck with them for the winter, two winters sometimes. Because they were seamen themselves, they lived along the sea. When they got caught by the weather, some of them ended up in San Francisco. Others went to Hawaii and never saw their relatives again. Some of their descendants are still there according to the North Bureau[16] of Inuit. They have never seen their relatives. They took them as whalers and brought them to Canada, but they couldn't get back because of the ice conditions. They took them down south and they stayed in California and Hawaii. There are some people who have not been identified. They talked to us about that during the Alaskan land claims. They set up the North Bureau Thirteenth Corporation. My aunties and my cousins got their money from the North Slope Settlement. The

Thirteenth Corporation tried to identify people who had relatives outside Alaska, as in California and Hawaii. That died off soon enough because you had to be one eighth Inuit to qualify as a land claims beneficiary.

That's when my parents and their parents came to Canada where they have lived since. They left the country because they didn't know what was happening. Some curse had come upon them, which was beyond their control.

So they left with the family, cousins, a whole group of people?

Yes. As they travelled they died. They got older, moved on, and decided to come to this holy land. I'll put it that way.

So that was the strangest story. I also read about it in a book called *Fifty Years Below Zero* by Charlie Brower, which co-ordinates pretty powerfully with the stories told by my ancestors. There used to be three brothers who were wrestlers, but nobody could compete with them. One of my brothers was named after Tipuk, the oldest, who was a strong powerful man. The others were called Ikilliqaq and Nujaq. When a young man was growing up, people used to challenge him to wrestle when he'd come to a camp, and if he would beat them all, he was respected. As he got older, because he had learned how to defend himself on certain principles, they didn't challenge him. They knew where they were and they knew where he was. They never really accepted a challenge from some malicious guy that would try something. He would have a hard time getting up. Ha, ha, ha! That's the way they thought.

Do you know what year your grandparents arrived in the Delta?

Well, one of my great grandparents died in the early part of this century. His name was Napujaq and his son died about ten years later. He would have been somewhere around eighty. The grandmother I talked about, my

great, great aunt, was the same age as my mother's father. Anaksaq[17] was his name. He had a labret hole.

Anaksaq had a hole in his lip. He used to put polished jade in there before he would go to a drum dance. He also had an ivory one. I don't know what the purpose of it was, but I think it was to prove that he wasn't scared. How would you like it if somebody made a hole through your lip? Ha, ha, ha! You have to have some strange strength to say yes.

My mother used to tell us stories about eclipses of the moon. She remembered that when there was an eclipse my grandfather used to gather wood and put a new floor in the *illu*. They put new clothes on and threw everything away. She used to argue with other people that there are thirteen moons in a year, which I never understood for a long time. I had always thought there were twelve, but one day I counted. My studies as an astronomer! I found there were thirteen moons in a year. She was right. She didn't have anything written to tell her this. We believed in stars, too, and they told different stories about them.

There are Mars and Venus; they are very close now. In winter they come almost in line when the moon can be seen. They say that when they are in line, the daylight is going to come back.

Did they have names for stars?

Yes. They had.

For constellations?

Yes. They had a name for the one where all the stars are really close. I've seen that. It's a bunch of stars together with one big one in the centre. It's like a polar bear hunting with the dogs; all your dogs are around and the bear is in the centre. The other one is Tukturjuit.[18] Is that the Big Dipper? That's a caribou with antlers or something like that.

So they had their own constellations and they had names for stars?

Not all, but some, yes. They more or less believed in the Aurora Borealis, the Northern Lights. They used to tell us not to play outside when there were a lot of them. And not to whistle! But some of us would whistle, just for fun. We could see them getting brighter and brighter and we would rush in because we were scared. They say if you bother them, they are going to cut your head off and you become a football. There is a book written by Michael Kusugak similar to this. The Northern Lights cut your head off and they take it for a football, kicking the ball all around. That's the legend.

So Abe, when your grandparents arrived in the Delta, they met other Inuit living there?

The people from Herschel Island and Shingle Point were their first contacts. They spoke another dialect, too, and they called themselves Tujurmiut. There was another dialect from Siglit. They were a Mackenzie Valley people who lived at Kittigazuit. The people from Bathurst Inlet, were called Utquluk. In the Horton River area, they had their own dialect. They were fishermen and seal men. They also hunted caribou but they all lived along the coast. There's lots of wood around there, which they used to build their houses. They were the first ones to convert to the new Christianity because they got fishnets from the missionaries, which made it easier to catch fish!

Around what time?

At the turn of the century.

At the turn of the century. The Inuit of the Delta were sick, too, with measles and smallpox.

Just before I was born, in 1928, there was a big flu. It came from down south through the Hudson's Bay Company steamboat, called the *Distributor*.[19] They brought

that epidemic. The only name for it is the big flu. Every settlement, all the way from Fort Smith to Fort Chipewyan was infected. Every community lost older people who were infected with flu, even Aklavik. I never saw them, but I'm named after one of them. All of them died of this simple flu because they had never been touched by it before.

Later, when I was about fourteen or thirteen, we had a flu, just around the wartime. Somebody got a letter from down south, and the flu hit us around Christmas. Oh, gee! Well, I survived. I was young and my parents and my brothers and sisters survived. But people who were weaker or were not well dressed caught pneumonia. They buried thirty-five of us, both Indians and Inuit, within three weeks! It was just a bad, bad Christmas. They quarantined some. We had hospitals, but we weren't immune to anything. The common cold could kill. That's how my father died later on. There was another type of flu. He caught it out on the land, and he just got worse and worse and died.

People were infected with tuberculosis or some other sicknesses, perhaps cancer. They didn't last long. There was measles later on, in 1953. I had measles when I was a little boy. People were kept in isolation at the time. Thirty years later, they had measles and some seventeen of them died within a week. They had hospitals and doctors, but they were not used to treating it. They got hot instead of getting cold. The nurses covered them, but they took the covers off. They weren't trained to deal with it. They got pneumonia and they were gone. They didn't know that with pneumonia you have to stay in an upright position, for if you lie on your back you will choke. Now they have penicillin and all kinds of pills and so on, and it's not that bad anymore.

So when your grandparents arrived in the Delta they probably met the first missionaries like Bompas?

They did, yes. Missionaries were coming in from Fort McPherson. The Loucheux Indians were already Christians.

There was Bishop Bompas and Isaac Stringer. Stringer didn't come as a bishop, but he eventually became one.

In the Yukon, when the gold rush was on, this brought missionaries, along with the gold and money and all that. It didn't take us long to give in to what the missionaries demanded.

I met this old man in the Catholic mission. He was Roman Catholic, but he was from Alaska. He was one of the greatest shamans who ever existed around there, along with my namesake Auktalik. When the first aeroplane came, he looked out and said, "That surprises me. It makes a lot of noise and it flies a little slower than I do." Ha, ha, ha! That's the kind of people you hear about. There was another fellow by the name of Kublualuk,[20] but he was different. He had supernatural abilities. They told us that he could disappear and appear again. The story could grow from small things to big things like gossip. But people that knew him said it was true.

NOTES

1. Noatak River is approximately two hundred miles north of Kotzebue, Alaska. It was home to an inland band of Inupiat Eskimos called Noatagmiut. There is still today a community of Inupiat in the Noatak Valley, called Noatak with a population of some 425 people. The Noatagmiut were inland people, unlike most Inuit people who are sea mammal hunters and coastal people. Another interesting difference is the fact that trees grow in the Noatak Valley. People could build houses from wood and burn wood to keep warm during the long winter months. Men would hunt caribou, musk oxen and mountain Dall sheep. According to Abe's story, these people were tall and big and were renowned to be fast runners. They speak a dialect of the Inuit language called Inupiat
2. In his book *My Life with the Eskimos*, Wilhjalmur Stefansson refers to the *Nunatagmiut* as a different group living to the north of the *Noatagmiut*. On his map, the *Kuuvugmiut* live south of the *Noatagmiut*.
3. United States bought Alaska from Russia in 1867.
4. A traditional fishing camp on the north shore of the Kotzebue Sound, Sisualik was traditionally also a place of festivity and trade for all the different groups of people living in the northwest of Alaska. It has been spelled Sheshalik, but now the spelling Sisualik is more accepted.
5. Abe is most probably referring to the Kobuk River, east of Kotzebue.
6. Abe pronounces it Silivik.
7. Point Hope, Alaska.
8. In 1896, gold was discovered in Nome, attracting thousands of prospectors and adventurers. Around 1897-1898, the same phenomena happened in Dawson City, Yukon; the Klondike gold rush. Thousands of *desperados* tried to reach Dawson by different routes. One such trail had significant crowds of prospectors and adventurers entering the traditional hunting grounds of the Cree, Beaver, Chipewyan and Métis. Gold seekers migrated northward, from Edmonton to Athabaska Lake, then beyond to the Great Slave River and Lake, and from there down the Mackenzie River. As they travelled, they damaged traplines and wildlife, creating conflict with the bands whose land they crossed.

   The federal government was thus compelled to send additional police officers to northern Yukon as well as a treaty commission in 1899-1900 that would negotiate some kind of right of passage through the Athabaska region. The commission asked Father Lacombe, himself a Métis and able to speak aboriginal languages, to accompany the commission and convince the different native tribes

to sign Treaty 8. In the treaty the government promised to pay five dollars a year to each treaty Indian, payable to the head of the family. The arrangement also provided agricultural equipment for tribes who would accept to live on a reserve and farm. For those who preferred to continue hunting and fishing, the value of one dollar in ammunition and fishing-net thread per year was allotted to each family.

9. *Qailutailuk* means a bundle of wood.
10. Oral history in the Eastern Arctic mentions the existence of *tuniit* who are said to be human-like beings but small and very powerful magically and physically. Archaeology has identified an Arctic culture which developed in the Eastern Arctic from 1000 BC to 1000 AD, that they have called Dorset. The Dorset people seem to share many features with the *tuniit* of the Inuit stories.
11. The interviews were held in Iqaluit, Nunavut. The word 'here' refers to the Eastern Arctic.
12. Abe is referring to Charlie Brower's book, *Fifty Years Below Zero*. 1997, Fairbanks, Alaska. University of Alaska Press. Brower recounts this dramatic event from pages 225 to 230. In fact, the Pacific Steam Whaling Company had built its whaling station in the ancient Inuit village of Utqiarvik in 1884, ten miles southwest of Point Barrow. The Company hired the twenty-three year old Brower to operate the station in 1886. Brower spent the rest of his life in Utqiarvik. Utqiarvik, or Cape Smythe, was renamed Barrow, creating a lot of confusion with Point Barrow.
13. Nuwuk, also written Nuvuk.
14. In this case, Abe is slightly off about the name Barrow. In his second land expedition to the Canadian Arctic in 1825-27, Sir John Franklin attempted to trek from the Mackenzie Delta to Icy Cape, Alaska, where Sir Frederick W. Beechey (1796-1856) commanding the ship *HMS Blossom* was expecting him. Two of Beechey's men, Thomas Elson and William Smythe, reached Point Barrow with a lighter vessel in 1826 and were the first British sailors to encounter Inupiat. Sir John Franklin eventually reached Herschel Island and Prudoe Bay, but turned back because of the cold temperature. Barrow was then named by the Beechey expedition in 1826. Sir John Barrow (1764-1848), was a geographer with the British Admiralty.
    See: http://www.suite101.com/article.cfm/north_america_crosswords_puzzles/100944
15. In Brower's story, the epidemic "comes from a germ of some sort, probably a kind of flu" [Brower 1997:228]. Abe himself is not clear about the disease as we read in Chapter 2, page 46.
16. Land claims corporation for native Alaskans living outside of Alaska. Formally called the North Bureau Thirteen Corporation.
17. Anaksaq was the son of Napujaq.

18. "A constellation involving various arrangements of the principal stars in the European constellation *Ursa Major*, particularly the seven stars of the Big Dipper." (MacDonald 1998:78)
19. Archibald Lang Fleming, the first Anglican Bishop of the Arctic was aboard the Hudson's Bay steamer, the *Distributor*, in 1928 when the epidemic erupted. In his book *Archibald of the Arctic*, he briefly described the impact of the epidemic on local populations. Surprisingly, he does not comment on the victims of the epidemic in Aklavik or among the Inuit population of the Mackenzie Delta.

    > At about this time an outbreak of influenza followed by lobar pneumonia attacked the passengers on the Distributor, (Hudson's Bay steamboat, editor's note.) Nurse McCabe, who was travelling with me on her way to All Saints Hospital, Aklavik, was kept busy tending to those who were stricken. Since there was no doctor on board, we were all much relieved when we reached Fort Simpson and Nurse McCabe could get help from Dr. Truesdale, the government medical officer stationed there. At each settlement after the steamer departed, the people succumbed, and the epidemic raged up and down the river, taking a final toll of more than three hundred Indians. (Fleming: 1959)

20. For more information on Kublualuk, see Nagy, 1994.

Chapter 4

Naming

Ullaakkut, good morning.

This morning we will work on naming, and we will talk about people who were named after their ancestors or uncles or brothers and sisters.

I'll give you an example. When I was doing that Project Surname, I arrived in Igloolik and met the family of Noah Nasuk. He was an Anglican minister and he had three sons; one was adopted. They all had disc numbers. I had a meeting with their mother and father, and I asked if they wanted to come under one name, Nasuk. They talked among themselves and Nasuk said, "Apak had his grandmother's name," although he was a male. I understood that because I knew that was how it worked. Josiah Kadlutsiak was given the name of his grandfather. Evaloarjuk who was adopted, had the name of his adopted people. So, they talked about it because we know, even us in our culture in Alaska, as do all North America Inuit, that the name never dies. It always lives from generation to generation. Some of the elders that I met from Greenland or here have genuine original names.

I'll give you an example. When I first moved here, I heard people talking about hunting bearded seals. They said they caught a *tirigluk*. I said, "I know that word *tirigluk*. It's a name." They said that someone got a seal that day and I started thinking where does this word *tirigluk* come

from? Eventually, people from here and from out of town, like Kimmirut (formerly Lake Harbour) said that a bearded seal pup was called a *tirigluk*!

I do know that people from Siberia and from Prince of Wales, Kiggirmiut, right on the tip of Norton Sound, are coastal people, and they have this word. I heard it being used there as a name. Tirigluk is an ancient, ancient name. Some of the names you hear around here like Saila, Salluq, Kuutu, those have lost their meaning. I do not think they have a meaning these days because of the way they were used as names for generations.

Now getting back to the namesake; when I was born they named me Auktalik. The old man who died was my father's uncle, and his name was Auktalik. He had a wife named Tutaq, which is another name, but she was a female. Then, when a baby girl was born, her parents gave her the name Tutaq. When we were growing up, we were supposed to live together eventually when we reached maturity.

Most people who are about my age, and maybe even a bit younger, still practised the namesake tradition. You promised your son to my daughter, or my daughter was promised to somebody's son, if they were born about the same time. There was a reason for that. They were happy if a man and a wife had a daughter. They knew that another young man and wife would eventually get a son. They were looking to the future.

Another thing is that the firstborns were always the ones that got the attention and were treated as the best. They were the new generation within their group or clan.

When there were three females born in a family, all together, one of them had to be adopted to someone who could not have children. It was the same with males. If you had three boys you had to adopt one out. In some cases this was because of necessity. They didn't have enough animals to provide for their needs. This was the only way to survive. Or, if a woman had three or four children and

her husband accidentally died, then she had to ask others to take them. These children were going to grow up, so somebody had to take the responsibility for them. Not all of them were fortunate. Some of them grew up to be very aggressive because they grew up maturing in other families.

Are you saying, Abe, that there was a relationship between namesakes and arranged marriages?

Yes.

If a boy was the namesake of an old man, he could be promised to a girl who was the namesake of his wife?

That was one part of it. You could be promised within your extended family. People would say, "This is my *ukuaksaq*, or my daughter-in-law to be, or my *ningauksaq*, my son-in-law to be." That used to be pretty well established because people didn't often gather in those days. It was important for them to understand that they would some day become part of a productive family; that was the whole idea. It not only happened with me. People older than me knew more about it, and people younger than me tried it. But nowadays some parents have ten or twelve children. The whole structure of that meaningful thing has broken down in many pieces. People do not believe in it any more.

It is not working any more as a system?

It's not working, in many ways because the missionaries destroyed it, I suppose. They didn't understand that the rudiments of what the people believed in had real value.

How many kids would a woman have traditionally?

If you had two boys and a little girl in the olden days, when there were no provisions, you were doing well. No one had any more than maybe three or four children. Others were snatched away by sickness, or they were abandoned, while the people were travelling.

In my grandfather's time, I'm assuming this was a necessity. If you had a sick child or something happened to him or her, this child was abandoned. You call it murder, but we called it survival. At the turn of the century there were no big families in any of our communities. Everybody had to live to survive. It was accepted then, but when the missionaries came, they brought different ideas. Even the trading system changed.

Today, there is a population explosion, which may have been happening all the time, but back then we just had the bare necessities. There were several places in the North that had an abundance of food. One place was called Kittigazuit at the mouth of the Mackenzie River. When non-Inuit people first came there, they counted as many as maybe four thousand Inuit living in one village. In the summer they got whales, fish and caribou and they stayed for the winter. Then they started the cycle all over again. That whole coastal area was abundant with whales, fish, caribou and seals. They were all travelling. They worked with their neighbors who were caribou hunters, who provided their clothes and then they would provide the seal.

Getting back to naming, it was a very valuable asset, because when you knew you had promised your son to someone, you hoped that he would grow up being very productive like you. The same was true for the girl. The idea grew that some day they both would be together. This started long ago to ensure survival. In some other places, because they were short of women or short of men, it was not uncommon to have rivalry among them. I heard that the Netsilik people, who were formally the last group to live under those rules, and the Thule Inuit about whom Peter Freuchen writes,[1] had their rivalries. Some had two wives and some had three, if they were good hunters. Some women had two husbands. It has been recorded. There are legends about that, too, but it depended how the agreement was made. It is called bigamy or polygamy these days, but we didn't have any evidence to say that it

was absolutely wrong. That was the culture. Put yourself into their situation. Some of them lived that way for a long time, so that the next generation could look after them in their old age. We read about that in Africa; a successful shepherd or cattle owner camps wherever his cattle roam and there's a wife to occupy him while he is in that area. This is very similar, fundamentally the same thing. It was the successful man who was upright among his people, who maintained this right.

On the other hand, if a man was not well, another hunter who was a good provider would take the sick man's wife in. You might call it a wife exchange, but that was also because the good provider needed more assistance, and the sick man was securing his survival from this powerful man. That was the way it used to work, but it doesn't work that way now. As I said before, the weakest got the jobs first in the settlements while the strongest were still out on the land. That's my estimation. The ones that hung around town got the leadership roles, and the ones who didn't were diminished. I'm not saying this maliciously. I know it happened that way.

In the fifties?

Well, before that, too.

As people were moving closer to the trading posts?

Yes. You could put it that way. The ones who couldn't go out on the land and didn't have the equipment were all hanging around town, perhaps waiting for a family member to come back from hospital. They were living on the fringe. Maybe they knew an Anglican minister or a Catholic priest, an RCMP officer, or a Hudson's Bay Company manager. They worked as cooks or local hunters. They lived around the perimeter of the trading post. People who were independent didn't come to town every week or every month. They may have come once every three months. When the government started providing housing,

the ones who were hanging around town were the first ones to get the better buildings, and the first ones to send their children to school. They were also the first ones to get electricity, the first ones to get water delivery, and so on. The ones who were out on the land were the last ones who were independent. When more new houses were built, those already housed moved to new homes, leaving the old houses to those who were at one time independent. This was changing Inuit values without anyone being conscious of what was happening. Life used to be organized our way, but now it was their way, producing a wave of limited leadership and strength. Inuit were imposed upon by administrators, by the RCMP or by the local traders because they had trading power. These are the kinds of things that happened, but nobody was really conscious of it. Once they had been to high school, all of a sudden they became leaders, which was not true. They had never lived a real Inuit life; Inuit values are found on the land.

So the man who had all the Inuit values, and brought his children into town last, was the last to get electricity and water delivery. He was the last person to get his road cleaned because he was living on the fringe of the new community.

When I travelled I saw this all the time. It was not done consciously; it happened without people being aware. The last ones to come into town in Igloolik or Coppermine or Cambridge Bay all had to live in a house to get their children into school. That's what brought about the change in the status of the powerful individual leader who later was not even an advisor, not even a counsellor. His traditional role was to secure a strong future for his grandchildren. Angulalik from the Cambridge Bay area was a powerful leader. Another one was Fred Carpenter from Sachs Harbour, and before their time there were also capable leaders.

Getting back to the namesake and marriage, it was still in use in my days, but when we started living in residential schools we forgot about it.

When you got the namesake of a grandfather or uncle, did you get his qualities, too? Do you have examples of this, Abe, from friends you knew?

If the person you were named after was very respected, even old, old people respected the name. They wanted you to be like that person. I was named after Auktalik who was my father's uncle, but when I was growing up they never used my name, they always said *akkaga*, which means my uncle. Everybody, even all the older people called me uncle. I never knew that till I got older. They told me that he was once a shaman, a healer. He gave up his rights to the spirit world. He didn't go against it; he just thought the missionaries had a better system, and let it be.

My uncles used to call me uncle, although in your relationships they were my uncles. They never called me nephew or Abraham. They called me *akkaga*, even though my uncles were old men. They had the kind of respect that lived from the beginning of time. Some people had a different kind of power, a kind of healing system. They communicated with the supernatural while playing the drum. People play the drum where I come from, and they still sing some of my uncle's songs. Although the people who were singing them didn't know it, the older people knew that Auktalik had left some traditional songs for the fourth or fifth generations after him. The drum dance is a very powerful medium for keeping the culture alive. It is a necessary part of social gatherings and for maintaining community.

Traditionally, would every kid have a protective spirit like a bear?

They used to. In my father's time they used an amulet, we call it an *aarnguaq*, which is your protector, your helper, and your guardian. My father had an uncle whose name was Ayaqi. At that time they were still living on the land, he and his cousin. They were around twelve years old. My father's uncle called the two of them and said, "Now,

I'm going to give you the power to help you in retrieving animals." He had five shells, I forget the name of them, 44-70 was one of the rifles at that time, and he gave my father one bullet. "This is yours," he said, "always have it with you when you travel. Never let it go when you walk, or when you sleep. Always have it, sewn into your belt or on one part of your body all the time!" And my father did that. The other four bullets he gave to his sons. One of them was called Avinngaqpak. He was given one of those bullets but he gave it to someone else; he had the power to pass it on. I never questioned my father about it, but one day he said that he always had it with him until he got married, until he started living with his wife. Once, when hunting caribou, he ran out of shells and he broke the taboo. He had only that one bullet left. "Well, I'd rather use it for the right purpose," he thought, and he fired it. But his other cousins kept theirs. They were perfect shots. They seldom missed, and if they did it would be unusual. They always had the best rifles, and perhaps that's the reason why they were given this gift. I saw amongst the Netsilik people someone who was given a rabbit foot so that he might be a fast runner. Another might be given part of a raven so that he would be cunning, or part of an *ukpik* so he would be curious, part of a peregrine falcon wing or something else. They all had supernatural power. If you were in despair, someone was going to come and help you. That's the way it was supposed to have been, but the religious used to tell us that it was all gibberish.

They had the book to prove to us that they had a better system. Therefore, we were taken from our supernatural world and changed to something else that was foreign to us. I don't know whether it was a misunderstanding, or they just didn't know how to go about living with others. I know some people who became parish ministers, not here, in other places, and who eventually left the ministry saying, "Well, this is a different world view!" The priesthood has changed, and they now understand that they

have tried to break the beliefs of others, their supernatural and spiritual gifts.

Up the Mackenzie Valley, too, people had their values and beliefs. It wasn't a game. It was a survival relationship between your creator and what was on the land for you. I think that a child, from the beginning, is a special gift to every one of us, whether we are in Alaska or Greenland or in other parts of the world. It was always a special gift to all of us that when people get older like me, the new generation will carry on our culture, language and values.

The people had adapted their lives to the North long before anyone else arrived. The Inuit and Inupiat from the Qaviaraq region, from Siberia to Alaska, Canada, Labrador, Baffin Island, and over to Greenland, have the same implement, the harpoon head. It was invented to retrieve seals, providing blubber for the lamp, for heating, for clothing and for food. It also provided skins to make *qajait* and *umiat* and harnesses and ropes. That one implement has a long history behind it. How it was invented is something that has always astounded me! I've seen them in Greenland. I've seen people go on the land and retrieve animals. They had machines, of course, but wherever you go, people always harpoon and hold mammals the same way. That invention has never failed. No engineer could explain how it was invented but it's still among us. The fishhook is another invention that ensured survival in the North. The *inuksuk* is unique to the North and the people really understood its use. Inuit used them as guidelines on the shore or by a lake. They put a marker on top of the highest little knoll or hill and one down next to the lake. If you put your hook in that lake, you got fish but you had to line up the two objects. The distance from the shore to the stone or the marker was the same distance you have to walk on the lake ice from the shore. Make a hole in the ice and there will be something there for you! I believe that sincerely, you know.

When you are on the land and you see an *inuksuk* with a hole, if you look through the hole you will see another one, and so on. There are places where you could get lost sometimes in the fog and the *inuksuk* would guide you in the right direction. It's as simple as that. But you have to understand its purpose, why it was put there. If the points are sideways, then there's another one in that area. The *inuksuk* is very functional. People don't use them anymore. They have skidoos now, but I don't think they even know what direction they are going sometimes! Ha, ha, ha!

Something that has always marveled me is how anyone in the Eastern Arctic survived. Where I come from there was a lot of wood, and I didn't have to worry about finding fuel every day to keep warm. But I wondered how the heck these people around here lived before the white man and the whalers came? I'm still trying to understand it. They tell me stories about the ancestral nomadic ways of moving and living on the land. They used dogs as a mean of transportation and also as a mean of retrieving seals.

The Netsilik people are good at that! I used to sit with some of them and they told me about it. Around February I have seen them coming home with forty seals in one trip, two nights out! They all go out with their dogteams, and they cover a large area on the sea ice. They block all the breathing holes, and make just a few openings. Some of the seals drown because they can't come up to breathe. They call that *mauliqput*. The seals can't come up so they gather at one place and the Inuit hook them. I've seen them get as many as forty seals in two nights in the middle of the winter. They use the dogs to cover all the existing holes, make a few in the center and then they just harpoon them.

That's one of the hunting methods they have known for years! There is also a place in that same area that I walked to, just on this side of the Boothia Peninsula. There are three lakes in between there and Spence Bay, what we call Taloyoak now. In August, after the young birds start

to fly, there used to be flocks of young eider ducks flying over the peninsula to get to the coast so they could move south.

The people there used to make a tie with caribou antlers and they waited in the dark and threw it up and hit the ducks. There were bones all over. They killed thousands of them in minutes. They just lay there and hit the ducks and knocked them down. They picked them up and put them in pouches. It was a gift they had!

When the Hudson's Bay Company came from Fort Ross, they asked where to put their building. An Inuk who was originally from Northern Quebec was helping them, and he put the building right on the bird route. That's why they call it Taloyoak. The people there still reject this, and they say the Hudson's Bay Company should have moved it somewhere else. But it was a nice harbour. They didn't understand that this was their main survival route at one time. It's a breeding place for the ducks, and Inuit used the down for bedding and so on. This was their natural habitat.

When you were in the Delta as a teenager was there a lot of exchange, of travelling between Inuit from one part of the Arctic to the other?

They had their own vessels and they would travel to Coppermine (now Kugluktuk), Victoria Island, Banks Island with just a few exceptions. George Washington Porter Jr. went to King William Island; that's what they call Gjoa Haven now. He was working with the Canalaska[2] Trading Company. He was from Alaska originally. They gave him goods to trade with. He was valuable because he was versatile. He spoke English well, wrote well and went to some school in Portland, Oregon. He married somebody locally from Gjoa Haven. He was not a provider but a supplier. They called him a middle man. He never went back. He died there. He has some descendants in Gjoa Haven because his wife was from around there. Some

years ago people from Perry River,[3] in the Coppermine area where there were trees, used to go to Chesterfield Inlet to trade. This was when there was no trading, before the early part of the century when trading was unknown in that area. Only now are we beginning to understand that.

So otherwise there would not be too many contacts between the west and the east?

Not too long ago they started communicating. Back in my father's time, maybe in the twenties, they started to communicate with people from Victoria Island. There were Mannaapinngarmiut and then in the late twenties they started travelling to Coppermine. That's when people started travelling, when the Hudson's Bay Company brought in equipment and brought people from some other parts to trap and so on.

NOTES

1. Peter Freuchen (1886-1957) accompanied Knud Rasmussen (1879-1933) in many arctic explorations between 1906 and 1924. In 1910, they established a trading post among the Polar Inuit of Thule in northwestern Greenland. Freuchen eventually became the governor of the colony of Thule (1913-1920). In 1926, a leg amputation, because of frost bite, terminated his life as an explorer. Freuchen then became a full time writer and film maker. He wrote many articles and books, such as *Eskimo* which was made into a film in 1933. The Polar Inuit call themselves Inughuit. For more on Peter Freuchen see: http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/peterfre.htm
2. This was Captain Pedersen's Canadian company doing business in Canadian waters. Pedersen used Fred Carpenter, who bought the schooner *North Star* from him, and George Washington Porter Jr. as traders to barter his merchandise east of Herschel Island.
3. The Perry River in Nunavut flows into the Queen Maud Gulf. 67°48'N 101°40'W.

Chapter 5

All Saints Residential School

My oldest sister went to residential school in Shingle Point. Before my time, the Anglican mission had built up a residential school with logs, wood and lumber; they also constructed a church there. I remember when we went whaling, before we left Aklavik, most of the schooner owners that were going down to Shingle Point would make arrangements with the Hudson's Bay Company at that time to fill their schooners with the supplies for the Anglican mission buildings and for the families and the school. They also took their own things including their dogs and everything; even their lumber. They took their grub and sailed to the Anglican depot.

They built it before I was born. But it was not that very old. My sister was one of their first students. My older brother, who was four years older than me, went there, too. The Anglican mission had been established in 1925 or '26.

My brother and my sister were there when we wintered in our cabin in Nunaluk, which is very close to Bagnell Beach, close to the border with Alaska. We went to Shingle Point for Christmas. That was the first time that I visited the school of my sister Esther and my brother Roger. He was four years younger than her. He went there for four years, too. When my brother left school in 1937, I was given the opportunity to go to school in agreement with my father and my mother. That is how I went!

Church of England mission hospital and residential school (All Saints) Aklavik1937.
Credit: National Archives of Canada. PA 101618.

Schooner getting ready to sail to whaling grounds. Aklavik.
Credit: Meikle/National Archives of Canada. PA 101770.

Prior to that we had tried to go to Banks Island to trap with one of my older brothers and his wife, my sister, and two other relatives, but we never made it to Banks Island. I was about seven years old. We wintered in a place called Booth Island. The ice in the Beaufort Sea between Banks Island and Victoria Island was all solid. The ice did not move that summer. It was a very poor trapping area but we had a lot of seafood.

When the weather started to warm up, my father, my mother and me trekked to the Delta, which must be a distance of five hundred miles. We had seven or nine dogs. It took us quite a long time to get there.

Booth Island is right close to Cape Parry, which became a DEW line site. We travelled south to Franklin Bay where we passed some camps and went right through to the Delta. It took us a long time, at least a month. When we got to the Delta, there were a lot of ptarmigan and the snow was going. That's where I saw my great grandfather's and my grandfather's graves. We came down a hill just north of where Inuvik is now. That is where my great grandfather and my grandfather are buried, both Christians, I suppose. They were buried on the land. That spring I was very sick and I went to the hospital in Aklavik. My brother left school. He was way older than me. He must have been twelve or thirteen. I would have been eight.

We got to the coast and met an old couple, Dennis Anuktuk, and his wife who were very close to us. He was a very successful supply man for other groups. They made an agreement with the minister and my father to take me to school that fall, when they went to Aklavik to get supplies. My father went trapping on another boat called the *Sea Otter*, which was fairly large. He went with a family called Pektoqan, Dave Pektoqan. They went trapping to Banks Island and that took them to Victoria Island, right about where Holman is now. There was a whole flock of them, including my brother and my sister.

So I had to go to school for the first time, in 1937-38. It was not that easy, my friend, because I was eight years old. I didn't know anything about yes and no. I didn't know the ABCs when I went to class for the first time, although my sister used to try to teach me to read a little Jack and Jill. I didn't know what language they were talking. There were not only Loucheux, who actually came off the land and were all subdued, but also children from Coppermine, Cambridge Bay and Spence Bay, who came in later.

Some of them had been to Shingle Point. They closed the Shingle Point School because for several summers there was a big northwest gale and it flooded all the houses. They were short of logs and provisions, and they had a very poor water supply. They had to go about a mile from the village to a little spring of water coming out of the hillside. They had to cut ice from a lake in wintertime, and with the growing population they didn't have enough wood sometimes. It was not easy. What they were trying to do was maintain their religious community. I only met the principal of the school, Mr. Shepherd and his wife. The others I never met because they had all left before. After, they moved to Aklavik, and they built the residential school there. They called it All Saints Residential School. They also built All Saints Hospital and All Saints Cathedral. But I didn't know that until later, of course.

They put us in a dormitory. One side of the building was the girl's side, and our side was the boy's side. It was convent-like. In residential school we were restricted to one eating place. We were never allowed to sit with the girls or even talk or whisper to them. That supervisor! We never played with the girls. They were on their side. We were on our side, and even in the classroom we weren't allowed to have contact. I found this out later, but it didn't take me long to learn. You couldn't do anything; you were restricted.

That was new for you?

Not only me. There were my cousins, my nephew, my other cousins and there were people from the Fort McPherson area and the Loucheux, whom we hadn't met before. We only saw them at a distance when we were kids, because we didn't know enough about the way they were. It was hard the first year because you had to learn all the rules. I remember when they gave me a pair of moccasins, rubber boots, socks and my number, which was thirty-five. During one of our workshops we had to sew our number on to all our socks and sweaters and paint it on our rubber boots.

The first year was really tough, but then you got to know a little bit about how it worked. Towards spring, school ended and we went out. It was difficult. I never saw my parents because they were trapping, and I had no relatives in town.

So you were there by yourself?

Well, I had cousins, too, but their parents didn't come to talk to us; we never had any visits. We did celebrate Christmas. The one restriction that I remember and I quickly learned was that we were not allowed to talk to the girls, nor even to look at them. Early in the morning before breakfast, we got dressed, washed our faces, prayed and went downstairs. We lined up before breakfast and sang some songs or whatever. We stood and said grace and then we sat down to eat. Breakfast was always a bowl of porridge and one and a half slices of molasses bread. They put molasses on it. There was no sugar in your porridge, just maybe a spoonful of milk or whatever it was. We had to survive, you know.

Every Sunday, they used to give us a small piece of cake and five candies, every Sunday! But if you were a bad boy they took the cake away, and if you were really bad they took the candies away, too. The second year was better because by then I had learned how to survive, and

I had to look after the other children who were younger than me. I became kind of a senior student. Third year was different. I wasn't a bully, but I made sure the other bullies didn't hurt anyone. I was kind of a protector and a challenger, together with my cousins and some Indians as well. We learned more tricks about how to get out of trouble than they ever did show us. There was always something going on.

The first year I went to grade one, and the second year I skipped grade two and went to grade three. Then in the third year I skipped grade four and grade five, and the last year I went to grade six. That was the highest grade at that time. I went to school with some people who were living in Fort McPherson. We were in kindergarten together. We didn't know the language, and a lady teacher used to make us exercise our mouths and our tongues. We did all this without saying a word for at least fifteen minutes. Ha, ha, ha! Then they taught us the ABCs. I remember the very first Christmas we had. They gave us these drawings of an angel to colour. Ha, ha, ha! I remember this one distinctly. It was my first angel. Because we were drawing an angel, we had crayons. I had never worked on an angel before! So I put red stockings on the angel and coloured the rest blue. When it was my turn to hang up my angel beside the others, they all started to giggle. They weren't even allowed to do that! Some of the girls got caught chewing gum, and the teachers put it on their noses, and they had to stand in front of us. Some of them got strapped. I got a few strappings on my ass, too. But when they saw the angel it looked funny. Who the hell knows what colours an angel uses? My angel had red socks. Ha, ha, ha! Whenever I saw some of my classmates they would always say that Abraham's angel had red socks. They tease me about it to this day!

Could you speak Inuktitut in school?

They tried to make us stop. The first two years were difficult. My cousins and I played together outside, and

we used our dialect. There was always somebody on the second floor monitoring us. If they heard us they would shout, “Don’t talk your language!” Some of us, because we refused to stop, got our mouths washed out with soap. It was a sin to speak your language, I guess. That was the rule. This happened not only to me, but to children in other schools in different parts of Canada as well. Indians tell the same story. They were trying to assimilate us as quickly as possible then. They wanted to forget about us, to make sure we were out of the way.

The second year I became a choirboy and a boy scout. I was with the Brownies, no not the Brownies, how do you call them? Cubs! In 1939, when the King came around, they gave us a little decoration commemorating the Boy Scouts of Canada. The King, George the Sixth, sent us a little medal.

We believed that Lord Baden Powell was the leader of the world in those days! Ha, ha, ha! Whenever I see an RCMP officer wearing those breeches, I find it very funny. When we went to Sunday school and choir, the scouts used to wear those kind of pants. They used to send us clothes from England then. They looked funny to us.

We always had Boy Scouts. I belonged to the wolf clan. Others were in the beaver clan. We used to have picnics. The third year was not bad because by then I knew how to get things, to get my own way and to break the rules. I was also given the privilege to do different kinds of work. For example, when the RCMP needed an interpreter, I used to go there, and they would give me something. In the spring, just after the ice went away, they used to haul wood from the riverbank. They had a scow and they brought a hundred and fifty cords of wood for the next winter. I was one among several pretty big boys about twelve or eleven years old who hauled in the wood. It was interesting. We got out of eating porridge and molasses, and they gave us cake and sandwiches. This was really necessary because we were working hard. They didn’t have a cook on board.

There were two men supervising, and we worked with them. The more they fed us, the faster we worked, more or less. We always had food on board, big baskets of it. When we got hungry, somebody made tea. We stayed out for eight hours a night, and it was really fun!

So when would you go back to your home?

Well, the first year I didn't see my parents, but after two summers I saw them. I did stay with a family that lived there, with old Dennis Anuktuk. I stayed with him the first summer, and then I went back to school. I stayed there the fourth winter. In the spring of 1941, my brother had started working. It was muskrat season, around Easter time, and my father came to the minister and said, "I need Abraham now, to try to teach him how to trap." So, he pulled me out of school. I could read the Bible, and I could read some words.

The war had started, and we used to get an odd report. There was a newscast every morning, and our teacher would tell us how the British were losing, and how France and Poland had been taken over. But then when the war broke out, I started going trapping with my father. We went to the post office, and he wanted to get a magazine for me. One of them was the *Star Weekly* and the other one was *Life* magazine. There were lots of pictures. The *Star Weekly* was a big magazine. It was heavy when you put it in a bag. I would always take it home, and my nephew, my cousins and I would read it. When it was getting dark they used to come to my place, and we would read all the stories. We couldn't read it all because we read slowly, but we read quite a bit. My father always wanted to know, during the war, who was winning and who wasn't. There were war pictures and pictures of Rommel, Montgomery and Churchill.

In Africa?

Yes. The North African campaign.

How can you remember all this?

I had to show my father who was who, Eisenhower and Stalin, because he was interested. In fact, some of his cousins from Alaska were in our forces with the Americans, and I saw their pictures in one issue of the *Star Weekly*. When the Japanese entered the war, the Americans recruited out of Point Barrow. He grew up with them and knew them.

I was always interested in the characters in the comics, Li'l Abner and Superman. The kids liked those! But my father always liked to say, "Let us know how the war is going!" We had no radio of course. I read one story of survival that happened in the Southern Pacific, during the Japanese campaign. Captain Eddy Rickenbacker and his B-52 bomber crew of eight, or maybe eleven, I forget which, got shot down. Three of them got onto a life raft, tied each other together and drifted for thirty-two days with very few rations.

And you still remember the name of the guy?

The one who was shot down was Eddy Rickenbacker, Captain Eddy Rickenbacker.

You remember so many details!

You know what? My teacher once told me, "Abe you have a photographic mind!"

It's incredible!

Ha, ha, ha!

Chapter 6

From All Saints Residential School to Trapping in the Delta

After spending two years at the Anglican mission, called All Saints Residential School, I became kind of a senior boy. I was about eleven or twelve, and they asked us in the spring to do some work as soon as the ice was gone. The mission had a boat called the *Sunrise* and it pushed a scow. We would go and haul wood for next winter's fuel.

Somebody would cut wood all winter, and we would haul it in the spring. In fact, there were two boats. The *Messenger* was also owned by the Anglicans, but it was hauling wood for the hospital and for the church. Our boat, the *Sunrise,* was hauling wood for the residential school. We brought in hundreds of cords of wood from a camp, maybe twenty miles away. It was an exciting time for me because you ate lots, you had lots of fresh air, and you travelled by boat. The scow was like a big long box, maybe thirty, forty, fifty feet long and we threw wood into it from the banks.

Other bigger kids would pile the wood in cords until we almost loaded it full, and then we would go back home. This went on for about a week. I enjoyed it because there I learned how to listen to someone and to do manual work with something heavy. Then towards the end of June, around the twentieth, the people from the Delta with schooners, Inuit and some Indians, would congregate in

Aklavik. Others came by boat and canoe to sell the furs they had caught in the spring, mostly muskrats. They also came to Aklavik to attend church and celebrate. We also had a Roman Catholic mission there.

Would you see your parents then?

Yes, my parents and many of my other relatives. They all had inboard motors, schooners they called them, and they brought their dogs with them. They would take us out of school around the twentieth, and we would go home for the summer. The Roman Catholics had a residential school and a hospital, and they were mostly dealing with their own people. Some of them were Indians from Arctic Red River and Fort Good Hope, and some were from the coast. Some of my relatives went there, but I never saw them because of the religious rules. We would see them at a distance, but we couldn't talk to them.

When I went back for the second time, there were children from Taloyoak, Coppermine and Cambridge Bay. Some of them had never been home for about eight or nine years! One of them is the Commissioner now, Helen Maksagak. She didn't go back some summers, she and her husband John. They were raised in the residential school, because there wasn't any coastal transportation for them. At both the Catholic and Anglican missions, some children never went back for the summer. Later on, some Anglican mission schools or residential supervisors asked if we could take a girl or a boy home down the coast. This wasn't often because most of them had finished school and had already found transportation by boat.

There was the Hudson's Bay Company ship called the *Niqiliq* and the RCMP schooner or ship called the *St. Roch*, and that's how they were transported. George Porter, who was a trader, used to transport some people from the central areas. He had an agreement with the mission. They would come by dogteam from Coppermine. They agreed that their son would go to school.

An example of this happened before my time. My father and his three sons were wintering around Pearce Point, more than half way between Tuktoyaktuk and Coppermine, in the mid-1920s. They were trapping white foxes. They met nomadic people from around Coppermine walking inland. My father saw them coming over the hill and they came to the camp. They didn't know who they were, but they knew they were Inuit. So they got talking together and the nomads stayed there for at least part of the winter. They had their own musk oxen, and a meat cache somewhere.

Then they had to go back, but they made an agreement to have their son taken to school. It wasn't only my father who did this. There was another fellow, Tommy Killinik, an elder who also had a schooner. The old man said, "I'll give you my son to take to school." This was a common Anglican practice. One of my brothers, Owen Tuesday, whom I mentioned before, brought the boy all the way to the mission in Aklavik. His name was David Kuliktana and he was about maybe eight or nine years old. "Take him to the minister in Aklavik and give him instruction to send him out to school," the old man said.

That was before they built an Anglican school in Shingle Point or in Aklavik, so he went to Hay River with a few others like him. There was Joe Milukshuk and I think his brother, Sillatgiaq. A family from Tuktoyaktuk went by steamboat to school in Hay River. Angus, Elijah and his brother Edward, they all went to the Anglican mission school in Hay River, which was the nearest one.

Are we talking around 1926?

Somewhere around there, yes. They went to school in Hay River, and they stayed there for five or six years. I had heard about David Kuliktana, and my sisters and brothers knew him, but I had never seen him before. When he first saw me he said, "Are you Owen's brother?" I said, "Yes." He gave me a cheque to give to Owen. I don't know how

much for. “Tell him that I can’t forget the time he took me to school,” he said. He was working for the government then. They had developed a friendship because he travelled with my brother all the way from Pearce Point to Aklavik. It’s a distance of about five hundred miles by dogteam.

My brother was a kind of supplier or mailman for the fur traders. The hunters put all their white foxes on his toboggan, and then he would pack them up and take them to the traders where he could get more supplies. That was the way they used to do it because there were no airplanes. He sold the furs for the other trappers.

Getting back to Aklavik; the Roman Catholics arrived there about the same time as the Anglicans. They built the Immaculate Conception Hospital. They also had a church and their own residential school. We used to go for walks, and we saw the kids over there. We never talked to them because there was always a nun around. We also had a supervisor who wouldn’t allow us to talk to them. That became very, very predictable, religious separation.

When my brother got married, he married a Roman Catholic, and the children went to the wedding. They were fighting their cousins. They said, “You know what? You are different, and I am different.” It built up a funny kind of animosity. I never paid much attention to it because when we were on the land we all lived together. We had no reason to find differences. But the children were saying, “When you pray you are all praying to someone who is hanging on a cross.” The priests had a big cross.

But my father never said anything about it. Missions were built around Paulatuk where my father and his father used to winter. There were other families, the Killinik’s and the Neigaqsak’s and the Smith’s and those characters that were trapping at that time. After I left school, we used to go out trapping muskrats for about a month, from our main camp. We would set up a tent somewhere, then come back to dry our furs for a trip to Aklavik. I remember distinctively one time we just got home and were getting ready

to work on muskrats when the dogs started to bark. There were two priests and they had come from Paulatuk. I never knew it at the time, but they were going to Aklavik to a retreat for the forty days before Easter. I don't know the significance in religious terms, but I guess it means forty days of no talking and so on. They came all the way from Paulatuk, and they both spoke Inuktitut very well. One was Father Franche, the other one was Father Delalande.[1]

I helped them to unhitch and feed the dogs. My mom sewed their *kamiit* if there were any holes, and my father sat with them and they talked. Our distant cousins, the Ruben family, lived around Paulatuk.They had to say their mass, and they set up their own things in a corner. They lit a match and my father just listened. They knew him well. He had friends like Billy Trasher who they talked about, and about news they hadn't heard for almost a year.

Were there Inuit or mostly Indians in the Catholic mission in Aklavik?

I went to school with a whole bunch of Loucheux boys. We called them the Loucheux Indian boys from around Fort McPherson and the Métis because they were all Anglicans.

From the coast, there were also Roman Catholics from Coppermine and Cambridge Bay. They kind of leapfrogged over each other saying, "This is our convert!" There were some from Fort Good Hope and Arctic Red River and also from Fort Norman. In Aklavik we had people from Fort Simpson who were Anglicans. They kind of mixed us all up in there, but it was a strange way. Now, when you see an Anglican and Roman priest sit together and talk, you get alarmed. I didn't think this was possible. That's not the way we were taught. But it was a situation that they had set up. The idea was to convert and conquer, no matter what else they were doing. Their purpose was to assimilate us into their schools, and then we might be forgotten some time later. Anyway, that was the way they did it.

One of my friends was from Gjoa Haven, George Porter, my cousin from my mother's side, and I never talked to him until we grew up because of that situation. When we were kids we used to play together, but when we went to the residential school we never saw each other.

He was Catholic and I was Anglican. I grew up with a whole bunch of kids, like Jack Goose, and it was as if they wandered off in one direction, and I wandered off in another. That's the way I explain it. We learned different ways, or they tried to teach us those. But when we are on the land we never think about this distinction. We all live together because when you catch a whale, everybody eats it. Those were the kinds of changes that they tried to bring to us; this started before my time.

When I left school, my father came back from the coast. That was the last time he would travel along the coast. He lived in the Delta until he died in 1948. Every spring, after I left school, we would go down the Yukon coast to prepare for the berries and to dry fish. We would go to the Delta to fish for the fall, and trap all winter. There were younger people who were still trapping into Banks Island, Holman and the Coppermine area because there was an abundance of birds in those days.

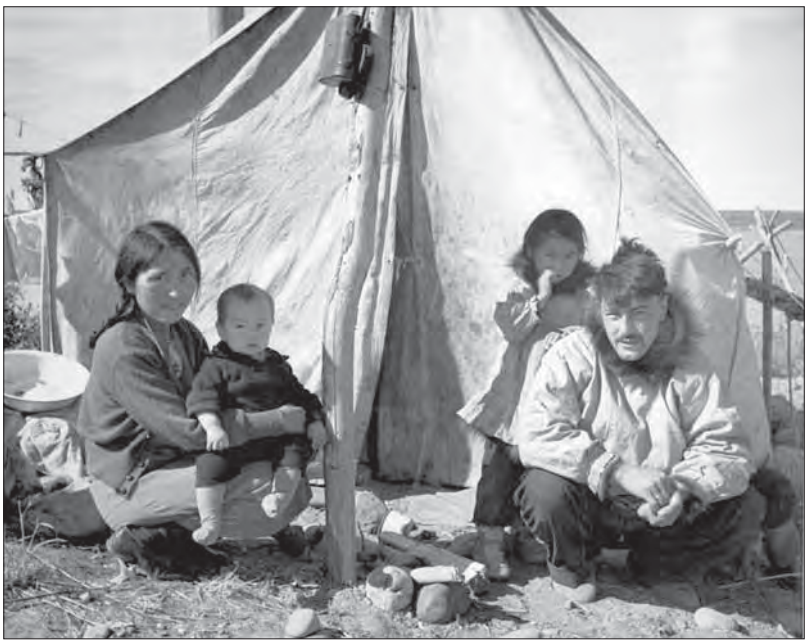
The animals have their own cycles. I was talking recently to an old-timer in Inuvik. He said there were a lot of rabbits, lynx, foxes, and lots of lemmings. They are all part of the same eco-system. They increase a lot in some years, and then the numbers go down.

So, it wasn't too hard, Abe, after three years of residential school to go back to camping and the dogteam?

It was not too difficult for us. I had only missed one summer when I didn't go back to my parents. When we came back in the fall we didn't see them till Christmas, Easter and June. That was the cycle that we were assigned to.

But it wasn't that difficult because I hadn't forgotten the language. One of the things that we had to learn was

Crowd on the bank at Aklavik to meet the first boat.
Credit: National Archives of Canada. PA 102235.



Alex Stefansson and wife Mabel Okpik (Allen) with daughter Sally and son Sandy, Mackenzie Delta, September 1939.
Credit: Finnie/NWT Archives. N-1979-063-0062.

how to use implements like the harpoon, the paddle and the rifle. At first, it was difficult, but later on, you could count on these for survival. You had to move around to survive, and I think that was one of the things that we learned how to do.

My father had an inboard motor in his boat and I used to be in charge of oiling all the moving parts when we travelled. Every half hour I had to look at the gauge and make sure that it had oil. It was not a very complicated operation, but it was my responsibility. I was only twelve or thirteen years old, but I had to follow his instructions. He told me, "Don't light matches in here!" and many other things. It was one of my general chores, and I liked it more or less. Somebody else did it before me. So now it was my turn, according to my age.

We had to raise dogs, and the first couple of years I didn't have any, so he gave me the old dogs. They raised their pups, and I managed for a couple of years. Later on I raised my own. It was part of learning how to go about things. We set traps and called down birds in the spring. We went looking for moulting birds like swans in the summer. You just picked them up because they couldn't fly. There was so much food and fish you could get with no real effort. But you had to learn all these things, like making nets.

If you didn't, you might be left behind. We learned how to follow the cycle of the seasons, and learned the times of the year when there were a lot of fish, whales, birds and eggs. We followed the cycle, which nature called us to do. We didn't try to break any laws nor make any big commotion. We wouldn't hunt a bowhead because we knew it was restricted.

I didn't know it was restricted until years and years later. I always thought that was just the way things were. We were told not to worry about the whalers coming and slaughtering whales in the Beaufort Sea. They left a lot of dead whales according to some. On one island, they

claimed there were about twenty dead whales and that was where two brothers made their money. Polar bears, white foxes and wolverines depended on the dead whales for food, and here was tons of it. They put their traps all around the island and the dead whales brought the foxes, lots of foxes!

So, those carcasses would stay there for many years?

Oh yes, yes. In fact, when I was working on the DEW line in 1955, there was a big esker near the shore, and we were hauling gravel from it with a loader. We were just gathering for the night shift when my companion said, "I can't get out." He was caught, and he couldn't move his vehicle. He was sitting on something. Finally, in the morning we got the cat going, and we hooked it and pulled it out. And there below was a dead whale.[2] The blubber was still intact. It had drifted ashore one time in some kind of a storm and the gravel and the sand just buried it right where it was. We didn't find out its age, but it had been there for some time.

Some whalers saved the blubber and the meat, but others just killed the whale and took the baleen. Or in a storm some whales were shot but never retrieved. They drifted ashore and they were all over the place. That's when the foxes, white foxes, started to build up the economy. Later on, from one group of trappers, the Hudson's Bay Company got thirty-six thousand white foxes. They were going for about forty dollars a piece at that time. The Bay bought them from the Inuit. They set them out with two or three hundred traps, and they wintered and came back with their loads. It happened not only here but also around Eskimo Point, now Arviat, in the Keewatin, Coral Harbour, Cape Dorset, Cambridge Bay and Kimmirut. Over there they migrated a lot, like the Coppermine inland people, the people from Cambridge Bay, and the coastal people from Herschel Island to Alaska. They all had two or three hundred leghold traps. Later on when they got

machines, they set more. It created a real economy. You had to have a boat and equipment and had to go places where you didn't see anybody. Some people went alone, just with their family, and trapped.

Did all this start in the twenties?

Well, before that, when the whaling commission stopped the whaling, around the turn of the century, Inuit didn't have too many leghold traps. They had their own native techniques for catching fur, but when they got the steel trap, that's when it really began. The more traps you got the more fur you got. That was the whole measure. The fox numbers fluctuated, as did the muskrat, in price and in population. If there were a lot of mice and rabbits and there were ptarmigan, then the martens would increase. Some of those martens were worth a lot of money, hundreds of dollars a marten! If you got a hundred of them in a year, that was a lot of money.

That's what I was going to say. Forty dollars a fox was a lot of money in those days! Some Inuit got rich?

Yes. Some of them really made a fortune. But the person making the money was the supplier selling it down south. Captain Pedersen was one of them.

Or the Hudson's Bay Company?

Yes. The Hudson's Bay Company. Ivory was priceless, too. We never had walrus in our area. We didn't know anything about ivory. Nobody was carving, only lazy men or old men carved. Now it's a big business. Everything has changed. Once you worked with your hands, but now it's the opposite; people stay at home and carve!

Even where I come from, they never accepted carving. "What are you making?" they would ask. Some people made carvings just so that they could show that they had better implements than others. That was about it, but nowadays the whole thing has changed. The stone became

an image and fur is secondary now. When seal prices went up, everybody went to the coast. If you got ten seals a day, they were worth perhaps three hundred dollars. That was a lot of money.

NOTES

1. Father Delalande wrote a book in 1957, *Sous le soleil de minuit*. Father Franche was later murdered in Aklavik.
2. Caterpillar, bulldozer.

Chapter 7

From the Trap Line to the Edmonton Hospitals

Abe, when you got back to your family, after school, were you the only person who knew how to read?

Well, my older sister and my brother Owen got married, so I was the only one at home who could read.[1] I would take up anything to read, especially the scriptures. My father found out that I was always looking at the labels of baking powder containers and on yeast cakes, directions and that sort of thing. One time he went to the post office and he subscribed to two different newspapers. One was the *Star Weekly,* and the other was *Life* magazine. That's the one he liked. We had them delivered, and I used to go to town to pick them up. Oh boy, what a treat it was! We had stacks of *Life* magazines. I wish I could have saved them.

This was during the forties. They had a lot of sports, and there was a science section. In 1943, I think it was, some scientist wrote that we would be going to the moon by 1978. I told my father about that. He also liked the pictures of the war, like from Pearl Harbour and of the war heroes, like Montgomery and Eisenhower.[2] I really liked the sports section. At that time Joe Louis was the heavyweight champion of the world. I thought he was the best of the whole bloody lot. There were pictures of the Roosevelt elections.

I didn't know anything about politics, but it was interesting to know what was happening. It was in the pictures, when you saw them. My father said, "How many people are in that crowd?" I said I didn't know, there could be millions of them. The pictures of Hitler looking at people marching in the city of Berlin astounded him. They were all carrying rifles. He said, "You mean they are all going to war. How can people live that way?"

So your father was very interested in what was going on in the world?

Yes. He didn't know how to read English, and once in a while my nephew Victor and I talked to him about what was happening in the world. We talked about how it was reported that Hitler was a really bad guy. We assumed he was bad and so we just told my father what it was all about. The Japanese were bad, too, because they used arms to get the world involved in war. We had no radio; so seeing a picture was psychologically impressive.

Abe, the Japanese came pretty close during the war. They invaded some Aleutian islands.

Yes. When I was in Alaska I heard about that, but I also saw it. They used to take a balloon and let it drift across to Canada so that hopefully it would hit a city.

With a bomb?

Yes. Well, that happened. Someone got killed in Saskatoon or somewhere in Saskatchewan. I also heard that they released poisoned bats and sent them to northern British Columbia. Balloons were found all over the coastal area. But the funniest part was that we knew a German soldier from the First World War, his name was Bruno Weideman. He had a family, and he was a trapper with his own trap line. He was married to a native woman. He had a sophisticated radio with short wave megacycles and code cycles and he could listen to Berlin. We had one later on,

Elijah Allen, the younger brother of Abe Okpik, in front of his house. Inuvik, July 2002.
Photo courtesy of Louis McComber.

Victor Allen, the cousin of Abe Okpik, who grew up with him in the Aklavik area. Inuvik, July 2002.
Photo courtesy of Louis McComber.

and you could listen to broadcasts from around the world. The RCMP confiscated all that from him, and he was not allowed to have a high-powered rifle, just something to kill small game, like ptarmigan.

But they let him go free?

They seized everything, and they told him what he had to do.

I don't know if you heard about an Oblate missionary who was German?

Yes. He was a pilot. Paul Schulte was his name.[3] He was not in our area. He used to disappear for days, and they figured he was communicating with some enemy. There were several submarines around this area at that time.

German submarines?

Yes. According to some people they were detected. They even had an automatic weather station set up on the Labrador coast, in the mountains.

The Germans?

Yes. It was on the radio not long ago. Anyway, those were the kinds of things we read about. It was complicated. We were so far away from it, but all over the continent they had to ration sugar and other things. We never had any of that in the North. Our supplies were bought from the Hudson's Bay through some other organization. We could have four or five hundred pounds of flour a year if we wanted it. Nothing was rationed, not even gas; perhaps because we had a refinery at Norman Wells at that time.

Was this curiosity for what was going on in Europe shared by other Inuit groups or only by your father?

There were some people from Alaska who were young when the First World War broke out. They never heard anything until mail started being delivered. This time there

were pictures and people talked about it. The old veterans from the First World War who were living in the North talked about it. They weren't exactly isolated, and they were interested in who was winning and who was losing. When we went to school, every morning they used to tell us how many bombs were dropped on London and how many planes were shot down. They gave us a short report. People got really involved in listening to the radio. In fact, my father and mother bought a radio, just for us to keep informed.

Our radio stations operated from Fairbanks, Alaska. They were called KFAR and CFRN, all Americanized. We used to listen to all their biblical broadcasts. There was a program called *Don McNeil and his Breakfast Club*. The *Bible Hour* was with Brother Fuller from Palm Beach on Sunday. We listened to all this! Then we would listen to *Inner Sanctum*, *The Shadow*, and *Superman*; it was all imaginary. We listened to hockey with Foster Hewitt, Canadian hockey, but we didn't really know what it was. "What are you listening to?" they said. We knew it was some kind of game, somebody skating around a rink, but it was very abstract to us. We listened to boxing every Friday, promoted by Gillette Blue Blade. I still remember Don Dunphy was a commentator and Bill Korum. In fact, the referees also spoke, and there was Mike Jacobs for the promoters. They were all on radio. The mystery programs really came alive when you listened carefully. What a scary thing to be in. It was psychologically powerful.

Especially when it was the only contact with the outside world.

You started wondering if it was really happening to you when you first started listening to foreign things. It still affects me. One time I was travelling with a friend in his new vehicle, a green Hornet, and somebody turned on the radio.[4] The music came on. I woke up and I thought I was back in the old days, but it was just the radio playing the Lone Ranger music! It was all coming back.

In those years were there any movies in Aklavik?

They came in about 1939, I think. The Roman Catholic priests had their own movies, such as Charlie Chaplin. Somebody had to wind the thing, as they had no electricity. Do you know what I mean? Ha, ha, ha! They needed a light behind the film. They had all these things, but the first talking movie was really exciting. The star was a quite popular guy, George Formby. He was a singer and he played the mandolin [ukulele]. There would be big crowds there. All the kids went to see the first movie in Aklavik, and that was it; then everyone started to go to the movies.

The other day Abe, you mentioned that in the residential school in Aklavik, there was a lot of disease?

There were people from different camps where they didn't have doctors. They brought them in anyway, and some of them died there. That's where we learned how to express feelings of sorrow and help each other in times of grief. I remember two brothers who died at Fort McPherson. They were Thompsons, John and Jamie Thompson, and they were very close to their people. I got involved with them. Some of their friends are still alive today, some I went to school with. They came from a small community. They died of tuberculosis. They were coastal Inuit. Some of my cousins died of tuberculosis later on. We didn't know what it was. We would be walking around and somebody started to spit blood, or if you were playing you got tired very easily. We didn't know what it was. Nobody detected it.

When I went to the hospital in 1945 I didn't know I had tuberculosis.[5] When they checked out my leg that was badly deformed by some swelling, they said there was tuberculosis in the bone. It happened when I was out hunting in the Yukon with my parents and my uncle and cousins. We got a lot of caribou and my cousin and I hauled the meat and cached it for the winter, so the wolves and

wolverines and bears wouldn't get it. We went out every morning, there was no snow at that time, with six dogs, and we loaded them up and brought meat back walking with the dogs.

In the Yukon?

Not far from Shingle Point, around where Herschel Island is. But one morning it snowed. It was in September, if I remember. We had toboggans, not *qamutiik*. My cousin had my uncle's dogs. He took off, and I took off after him. There were lots of what we call 'nigger heads',[6] pardon that expression, on the land. These are little grassy knolls. The toboggan started jumping over them and I slipped off the handle bars, and I got my leg caught in what we call the 'lazy back'.[7] I called and yelled for my cousin. That's what happened.

When my father was young, he used to hunt inland with his cousins out of Shingle Point. That is still in the Yukon. He went into the interior to get caribou hides so that they could have clothing for the winter because sometimes the caribou didn't show up along the coast. He made one trip with his cousin, his brother and another cousin, around 1914, when they were young. They went inland and another party, with my uncle and his friends were going in another direction but in the same area. One person went missing.

There were some white prospectors in that area at that time. I'm talking about 1913. They had horses, according to the information we had, and they came over from the Yukon.[8]

The Inuit didn't know what they were doing there. Somehow, the person who was with my uncle and his friend, his name was Elijah, disappeared. My uncle, my father's cousin, and my father walked inland to investigate. They thought they might find a body because there was a suspicion that he might have fallen. They never did find him, but they did find a prospector working, and they

looked at him through binoculars. They didn't know what he was doing. They didn't know what they were investigating because they weren't investigating; they were just hunters.

So my father went to this place, he and his cousin, in 1913. Carl Pedersen got a map from the United States and said that he wanted to go to that particular area to see the camp. In those days they liked to draw maps. Pedersen was a prospector and a trapper, not a leader but an instigator of things. He asked my father and my uncle, "Who once lived there?" He wanted to look around for this prospector's camp where they had horses. In fact, they had machines to work with, that they had transported from the Yukon over the mountains. They must have been marvelous men. We wintered there in 1942, I believe. But in the summer they walked inland just to survey the place with this prospector. There was my father, my uncle and one of my older brothers, who was young. They stayed about two weeks, and they came back and described where they had been. They couldn't find the exact spot because the rivers can change the landscape. They had been there in 1913.

They were looking for the old camp?

Yes, the old mining camp. When we went, we went in the fall. Carl Pedersen had his own cabin. He was going to go inland by dogteam in the fall, after the snow came in, so we went ahead hunting caribou. We met my father and my uncle with a bunch of caribou. My cousin and I were getting them all together, but then one morning it snowed. The dogs were excited because we had been working with them without snow. They were our fathers' dogs and they didn't listen to us, so we had to try to encourage them to work. They growled at us sometimes but it was natural, because we weren't their bosses. They hated to get up and pull, but that morning when the snow came, we were going to haul meat again. My cousin took off, and I followed with

my father's dogs. I was sitting and standing at the back, and I slipped. I got my right leg caught in the 'lazy back', which you have to tie to part of the toboggan. There was snow and 'nigger heads', lumps of snow and grass, and the toboggan slid and I ended up with a bad leg. It didn't hurt at that time. I got up and we carried on.

About a month later, in November, I started to feel something funny in my leg. I thought it was just some little thing. I went to see a doctor at Christmas, but it was not urgent by any means. He just said, "You'll be all right." But two years later I couldn't walk. I didn't know I had tuberculosis then, but about a year later I was all right. I wasn't exactly crippled. I could drive dogs and work and travel. I was with my father for just one winter. We went trapping together. I had four old dogs and I followed along behind him. I never looked him in the eyes, because I thought he was a solitary person. I was the eleventh child he had. When he told me what to do and taught me how to do it, I was always willing. My mother told me that if I was lazy then I would be hungry some day, and if I didn't do things well, I would have difficulty in the future. That was our rule. She told me that after I left school, I guess. I still believe that today.

If there were no caribou, we used to go to the reindeer station to get some. We would buy two carcasses, two full reindeer for fifty dollars. We always had cash, I don't know how! We hauled the meat back. That same year, a whole bunch of us from the Delta, from my area and further, went to Aklavik for the Christmas festivities. Just before Christmas the mail plane came in, and one of the clerks at the post office got sick all of a sudden. That's when we got what we called the bad flu. Everybody got it. They had really high temperatures and they were cold. They were not used to that, and they just walked around in and out of the cold. Thirty-five of us, children, men, old men and old women, including my grandmother and some of my cousins died. They were all maybe, twenty, twenty-five years old,

older than me. My immediate family didn't lose anyone, but about thirty-five people within three weeks were buried in Aklavik; they never went back to their camps.

This was in 1942, I think. They just got the common flu at the Christmas season, and they were buried there. Some older people didn't make it because they were already exhausted from life. They just died there. The two hospitals were all full and they had no penicillin in those days either, I think. So, thirty-five were buried, including a couple of my cousins and some other relatives from my mother's side.

Was Christmas time always a gathering time?

It was a time for festivities, dancing, going to church, mingling and visiting each other, and finding out how the trapping was, and so on. We all lived on the land, and about every three months we met our next-door neighbours. They might be our uncles and cousins, who lived about eight miles away, but we never saw them; they were busy trapping and working. Sometimes when it was nice and clear we could even hear the echo of them chopping wood!

Would people go there by dogteam?

Yes. They went there with their furs to sell them to the best buyer. Most of them would go to the Hudson's Bay Company, of course, but there were a few others, free traders and they played around too, so it was fun. But at that particular time there were no festivities. We were all broken, held down with this flu. Everyone was quarantined. We were lucky to have a couple of nurses. They were fine because they knew what to do, although they had the flu themselves. There were lucky people who never got it, so they looked after the unfortunate ones. The dogs still had to be fed. They fed them with help from the RCMP, so when we got better, we would be able to go back home. There were no airplanes. It was difficult, very difficult that particular year. I remember it was not really good!

I saw my first airplane when I was at the Anglican mission school. In fact, a three- motored machine landed there looking for some Russian pilots and some scientists who got lost in the north. The plane had a corrugated body, like tin. You could tell it was tin, not plywood. It was like a corrugated tin roof, bolted all over. What we saw was a flying boat. The first airplane I rode in was in 1945 when I was going south to Edmonton. It was a Norseman. We ended up in Norman Wells and we stayed several days, until later another plane came up from Edmonton.

Was this when the doctors found out that you had tuberculosis?

Yes. The Health Services didn't have any money, so my father paid for my fare to Edmonton and back, which at that time was five hundred and forty-eight dollars. That spring we did get a few muskrats, around two thousand five hundred. They were going for two dollars a piece, two dollars and fifty cents each. We weren't exactly without money, you know! I remember getting into Edmonton in July. It was very hot and my brother was with me, but he was on his own trip. He was successful in his trapping, too, so he and his friend went downtown.

An Indian agent came over and asked me for my treaty number, from which tribe I came from. I said, "I'm not an Indian! I'm an Eskimo!" I spoke in English. So he went away, and finally he sent two priests over from a place called the Misericordia Hospital. I didn't even know its location. It used to be in Edmonton. I ended up there. A couple of doctors attended me, and about a month later they operated on my knee. Then I ended up in Charles Camsell Hospital, because at that time they finally found out that the native people were undermined with tuberculosis all across Western Canada and even in the Eastern Arctic.

According to the history books, Lester B. Pearson was our delegate to the first United Nations Conference, and every country had to make a presentation. He accused

Abe Okpik (left) in Edmonton, probably at the Charles Camsell Hospital with an unidentified friend circa 1945.
Photo courtesy of Kathy Okpik.

Patients playing pool, probably at Charles Camsell Hospital circa 1945.
Photo courtesy of Kathy Okpik.

Russia of not looking after their northern people. They were not in good health at that time, and they were talking about camps where they used people as workers in Siberia. The Russians retaliated by saying that Canada didn't look after their native people and they were out in the wilderness. They began the health program that same year. There were seven hundred some odd of us, Blood Indians from reserves, Stonies, Assiniboines, Beavers, Chipewyans, Crees and Inuit. We were all in Charles Camsell. It was an old army hospital. When they had had the conflict with Japan, they had built hospitals, just in case there might be some wounded people coming in. One was called Deltrun College. It was an old Roman Catholic facility one time, and they extended the main brick building; they put dormitories in there. It was on 128th Street, and 111th Avenue, in Edmonton. I remember that address. The hockey player, what's his name, Randy Gregg, came from that area.

Tuberculosis was all over, in Coppermine and Cambridge Bay, everywhere. From, all down the Mackenzie, Indians like Dogribs and Chipewyans started coming in to the hospital. That's how I got to understand them. There were Blackfoot, Sarcee, Piegans, Brochet and Crees from Northern Saskatchewan. The place was just full! They had a staff of experts that all came from the war, x-ray technicians and surgeons. Some of the patients were cut right open and part of their ribs were collapsed together. I had pneumothorax in my lung and every week they put some air in it with water pressure. I could feel it for two days after. I spent three years there. When I came back everybody knew that I couldn't do what I was supposed to do, but I never accepted that and I just kept on going.

Were there many Inuit down there?

Oh yes. When I first went down, I was in the Misericordia Hospital for one year, and then somebody said, "You have to move over." That's when they recognized

that the government was responsible for the health of the aboriginals of Canada. I saw one or two Inuit families from the Inuvik area, and a lot of people from Coppermine, Cambridge Bay and Holman, all disabled or infected with tuberculosis. Some were from where I came from. There, they used to operate on some people, take part of the lungs out and collapse them. It was just shortly after the war, and they knew how to operate on those parts.

How long did you stay there?

I went to the Misericordia Hospital in July, around the 25th, and I came out exactly a year later. I went to Charles Camsell Hospital in 1946, and in August, 1948, I went home. I spent almost three years there, thirty-six months to be exact. On the way back, there was no social welfare, nobody to attend to things. I flew from Edmonton to Fort McMurray and stayed one night. I stayed two nights in Fort Smith, and then I landed in Norman Wells. I stayed a week, and finally I got home in the fall, in late August. There was snow on the ground already. My father had died in the meantime, and my mother was living with her daughter. I saw my three brothers when I got to Aklavik. They felt sorry for me. I was nineteen years old, and I hung around playing the guitar.

You learned to play guitar down there?

Yes. Somebody played the fiddle, and I used to play cords for him. There were no big acoustic type things in those days. We were lucky to hear the radio. Ha, ha, ha! After four years I came back, and I wandered back on the land. My father had left money. He had guns, shells, traps and dogs. I couldn't drive the dogs because they wouldn't listen to me. I had an old dog, one of the ones I had before I went to school and to the hospital. He remembered me. He listened to me, and from there I raised my own puppies, in 1949. I was able to drive a dogteam then on my own, and I lived off the land trapping muskrats. I was a little slow with

the dogteam and walking, but it didn't bother me, I got there anyway. I might not get there first, but I always got there, hunting caribou or whatever. I had my dogs to help me all the time. They were very honest, and I never whipped them. I talked to them. You have to be very patient with dogs.

I hit them once in a while, but I never beat them. Most people whip their dogs to make them listen. You have to pet them, and if they do little things you reward them. They get to like you, and they listen to you. But I couldn't drive my father's dogs because they didn't know me. I wasn't their master, so it was a little difficult. I worked a little bit here and there. I remember the first job I ever got was sand-papering a plywood wall. We had no machines. We had to do everything by hand.

In Aklavik?

Yes. I stayed for about a week, and then I had to go back on the land. I was always getting pneumothorax, and I had to go to town every three weeks to get air pumped into my side. I wasn't allowed to shoot with a high-powered rifle for about a year, but later on I got along pretty well. I could maneuver around and eventually, before 1955, I became one of the first native presidents of the Aklavik Trappers Association. We had to register our trap lines and trap only in our own area. But that didn't work because everybody cleaned out their own area, and there was nothing coming in. This was the only income we had. After five years they thought it was not working, and so they opened it up again. We trapped muskrat, mink and fox. The foxes weren't worth anything; only two dollars a pelt. They weren't worth very much.

The prices went right down when they brought out the artificial fur coats. They just went right out of fashion. It hurt our economy a lot. But we were still celebrating Christmas, the New Year and Easter when I got back. I managed to buy a scow with an inboard motor with my brother from an old Indian fellow by the name of Joe

Bernard. It was a good means of transportation. It had a stove in it, an engine, and a couple of boxes in which we could put all our things when we travelled around the coast.

You didn't have the schooner anymore?

My brother still had it, but it was old then.

What was the name of the schooner, Abe, do you remember?

Well my father had two schooners. One of them, the first one he had, was called the *Arctic Blue Nose*. It had an inboard motor with ten horsepower; a Frisco Standard engine. I don't know where they built it, San Francisco, I guess. They built huge cylinders in it. The other one was the *Anna Olga;* that's the one he used for freight. She had a twenty horsepower Atlas engine, which stood about that high. I never had a chance to run it. Somebody else ran it and took it around. I had the Frisco Standard. You had to prime it, turn it on the magnet, and crank it. It was funny, but when that was all you had, you had to do it right.

At that time they had what they called an Eskimo Loan Fund for small loans, three hundred dollars per person. Somebody had passed that in Council. For a year the economy was really weak. I heard that the foxes were coming back, and they were worth about twenty-two dollars at that time. If you could get ten foxes you had two hundred and twenty bucks. So I went to this old trader, who used to be a fox trapper himself, and asked him to outfit us for one year.

What do you mean, with traps?

We had equipment. We had a schooner and our own traps. We also had dogs, but we needed supplies, like coal. I went to a coal mine near where one of my relatives hunted, and I mined my own coal and put it in the boat. Wood cost nothing and we loaded about five tons, put on our flour, gas and dogs and went to Banks Island! On

September 9th, 1954, we landed in De Sallis Bay after travelling twenty-four hours in the water between two points of land. That's when I had the funny experience of living in an *iglu*. There was not too much wood around. The darkness was depressing, but you had to survive. Most people don't understand that once upon a time our ancestors, and even us in my time, had to struggle to keep body and soul together. Now people want everything. All I want when I get to retirement is a place in the sun. That's all! Ha, ha, ha!

NOTES

1. Abe suggests that his father could not read in English. In Nagy (Nagy, 1994: p. 39) Albert Oliver, Niksialuk, a resident of Aklavik born in 1920, tells us about the Allen family.

   > Those two, Allan (Ukpik) and his brother (Garrett Nutik) [...] They really know about books and reading. They were both good in making church for the people there. When they are getting ready to read in Inuit from the Bible they would study it and just go from there. The two brothers were very good in that reading and studying. They were smart in everything. [...] Even both Colin and Herbert Allen followed their dad's footsteps. They did service, too, before the ministers came.

2. All of a sudden, following the surprise Japanese attack in December, 1941, on the American Pacific fleet in Pearl Harbour, the United States massively joined the war. The North was shaken and transformed as it became the stage of important military strategies. In the West, the Americans wanted to reinforce Alaska, especially since the Aleutian Islands had been under Japanese attack. In order to link Alaska with the rest of the continent, they started building the Alaska Highway in 1941 and a pipeline, the Canol pipeline project, to supply a refinery in Whitehorse with crude oil from Norman Wells.

   In the East, the British government developed the North Atlantic Ferry route to fly newly built aircraft from California to England. These planes needed a few airfields on their way to Europe to refuel. This route also required weather information for the pilots. In 1941, the United States got permission from the Canadian government to build some weather stations in Fort Chimo [now Kuujjuaq], Frobisher Bay [now Iqaluit] and Padloping Island [close to Qikiqtarjuaq].

   As the demand for military aircraft increased, more functional installations had to be built. Again the Canadian government gave permission to the Americans to step into the Arctic and develop the "Crimson Air Staging Route". Important bases were developed at Churchill, Coral Harbour, Frobisher Bay [Iqaluit] and Fort Chimo [Kuujjuaq]. [Gagnon: 2002]

   The American military developed Frobisher Bay from scratch. There was no real community existing in the area besides being a known seasonal fishing spot for Inuit. Because of the presence of troops and workers, the living conditions of the Canadian Inuit became widely known through media reports in southern Canada, the United States and across the world. The American public was stunned by the absence of education, as eighty percent of Inuit children had no access to schools in 1940; the absence of health services, infectious diseases were decimating the population, and the overall inactivity of the Canadian government in the North. [Duffy: 1998]

The Canadian government eventually responded to criticism and started to examine how to provide health and education services to Inuit. By 1944 (Family Allowance Act) Inuit were recognized as Canadian citizens and were entitled to receive family allowances.

3. Paul Schulte was a German born Oblate missionary. As a pilot he flew the mission plane. During the war, the RCMP seized the barrels of fuel of the congregation's aircraft to prevent him from flying. Father Schulte published a book in 1940 about his Arctic ministry experience: *The Flying Priest over the Arctic.*
4. The Hornet was a small car first manufactured by Hudson Motor Company in 1951.
5. Until the end of World War II, the Canadian government was providing minimal health services in the north. In 1943, there were eleven hospitals in the Northwest Territories. Nine of those were operated by religious orders, and two by mining companies. Out of those eleven hospitals, only two were providing clinical care in the Eastern Arctic: St. Luke Anglican Hospital in Pangnirtung, and the Roman Catholic Mission in Chesterfield Inlet. While there were 213 hospital beds in the western NWT for approximately 8000 people, in the Eastern Arctic there were only 48 beds available serving a population of 3762 people. [Duffy:1998]

   The government problem of providing services in the Eastern Arctic was not an easy one. Maritime transportation was only possible a few months a year. There was no regular air transportation at the time. In 1946, the federal authorities opened two nursing stations, one in Lake Harbour (Kimmirut) and one in Cape Dorset (Kinngait) staffed with nurses to provide health services. Finally the Parliament decided to build a specifically designed vessel for the Eastern Arctic Patrol equipped with modern medical facilities: the *C.D.Howe.*

   From 1950 to 1968 the *C.D.Howe* stopped in all Eastern Arctic communities to perform government administrative tasks but especially health examinations. The boat was geared with a dispensary, operation room, beds, x-rays, and could bring back chronic cases to southern hospitals for treatment. Inuit who could not be treated locally were kept aboard, without permission to go back ashore to their family, in case they would not show up before departure. The story of Inuit who were taken down South for treatment is sadly remembered today in all Arctic communities.
6. Tundra hummocks. These hummocks are found almost everywhere in Arctic terrains, and are much more commons than pingos. In the High Arctic they are typically about the size of a human head; thus the Inuktitut *niaqukallaujait*, which means something that looks like a head.
7. The back part of a Mackenzie Delta type of toboggan.

8. As the action already takes place in the Yukon, Abe probably means the southern Yukon and most probably Dawson City, which had been an important prospecting centre during the gold rush of 1898.

Chapter 8

The DEW Line: 1954

Getting back to my story about how we wintered at Banks Island, we harboured around September 13th or 14th in Jesse Harbour. We pulled the boat out of the water. We caught some seals and then set traps all winter. It was getting darker every day because it was way up north, about the seventy-second parallel, according to the maps. It's the same latitude as Pond Inlet. If you look at the seventy-second parallel, Iqaluit is at the sixty-sixth. The daylight was receding, and we had to set traps as far as our dogs could go and as far as the daylight allowed us. When there was moonlight we used to extend our travel, and if it was a nice day, we fixed our traps. One day, I remember it clearly, I was fixing my traps, and I looked at my pocket-watch. It was twelve o'clock, midnight. I was fixing my traps by the light of the full moon as if it was a nice clear day! It was December 19th, and I saw my shadow from the moon while I was working on my traps. That was something I had never experienced before. It was one of those things that I remember clearly. You could see a long way, and it was so bright. It was nice to have the moon out.

When my brother-in-law got sick, I took some of his dogs, and I looked after his traps and mine for about one or two trips. He got better and he came with me around February when the daylight started to come back. It was on January 29th, if I remember right. It was nice and clear

right about noon, and you could see the little red spot of sun coming up. It had disappeared in November, and now every day the sun seemed to get higher and higher. The dogs travelled further and further, and pretty soon I could travel in the early part of March. When my brother-in-law and I camped, we used to follow a river so that we didn't get lost in the interior, and because foxes always have holes around a river. I found that out.

I was trapping all winter until April. At that time white foxes were going for twenty-two bucks a piece. There were four of us. There was my older brother, Owen Allan, my half-brother Isaac Simon, and my brother-in-law, Frank Cockney, and we had lots of foxes. According to our information, the trapping season stopped on March 31st, and we followed that date. So we took up our traps. There was an RCMP detachment in Sachs Harbour, and two policemen came by our camp, but they didn't say anything to us. We went to another community, and they were still trapping until April 15th. They had extended the trapping season, but we didn't know. We lost out on fifteen days when the foxes were really moving.

My brother-in-law and my sister were at Holman; so was one of my brothers. My other brother had a wife and family, and he didn't want to go. I had only four dogs, so I borrowed a couple from my older brother to keep them happy. They liked to go out. We took them to a different place. I had about two hundred foxes and some fuel oil I had left way up on the side of a bank for my next trip. Our camp was called Jesse Harbour; that was its name in English. We decided to go to Holman, which is on Victoria Island, for Easter. We left Jesse Harbour, which is on the northeast side of Banks Island but in the strait; Prince Albert Strait or whatever it is. We camped out on the ice. It was nice. We covered our *iglu* with a tarp and put snow blocks on top. We passed a camp where we were supposed to meet the others, but they were already gone. We saw their tracks.

The next morning we got up early. The days were long. I remember as the sun came back on January the 29th, the first glimmer of sunrise over the horizon. On the last day of March, that was two months after, there was daylight at midnight, and so we travelled all day long. We had made eight snow houses on the way to Jesse Harbour because, at that time, the light was receding, and we had to stop often. But in the spring you forgot about the darkness. You travelled further each day and the dogs knew where they were going. We passed three snow houses and picked one to rest in.

Here's something that I have never forgotten from that time. I never intended to do it, but I did. The next day we passed another camp. I had only a couple of nights of dog food with me, which could happen anytime to anybody. I looked in a pit where they had cached bearded seal meat. My brother-in-law said, "I know them very well. Take what you can for your dogs. They won't say that you stole it!"

So we camped again. The third morning we were out early. We started early because we wanted to get to the inlet area. We left the *iglu* and were going in one direction, following the tracks of those whose *iglu* we had used. Our dogs heard something, and they got a bit excited and went faster. Their dogs started to look back, and they, too, looked back. "There is somebody coming," they called. It was us. There were three dogteams, and that's when I met Roy Inuktalik's father. His name was Mallokak; he was from Berkeley Point. I also met Frank Kuptana and his family. He is still alive. He must be in his eighties now. They had a lot of foxes, too. That was their land. They knew that country well.

So, we had a cup of tea and lunched on some of their native food. I enjoyed it very much. It was a little different from the way we did it. We continued to travel, and all of a sudden we saw another dogteam coming from another camp. We could see them all over, one from one area and another from somewhere else. We congregated together

in a place called Mount Fair. We all had tents and some built *igluit*. Some were from Manitou Inlet and others from Waker Bay, which is a fairly big place. After we set up camp, we played poker and just visited and had tea. I said to that man, "I'm sorry. I took a piece of your seal meat for my dogs." "Don't worry about it; that's what it's there for," he said. I was happy he said that!

I had not seen anybody since November, except when somebody came from another camp to get a few supplies. They might have needed tobacco or sugar or something. It was November, no, October, November, December, January, February, March, April, seven months that I didn't see anything or anyone other than my brother-in-law, my sister and my dogs. It was a long time.

When you were travelling like this, you would build an iglu?

That's what we had to do at that time. There was not much material available. Now they have double-walled tents and primus stoves. We had a Swedish stove which was not a gas stove; it was a coal oil stove. It doesn't asphyxiate you like gas does. When you built an *iglu*, you made an opening before you closed it in, because you had to have air from outside. Sometimes you had to cook dog food. Some old trappers told me that if I built an *iglu* and had to work with a stove, I should just put a candle above my head and while working, to watch the candle. When it started to flicker and wasn't getting enough oxygen, I was to slowly push out the block and let the air in. It could be a very precarious thing, for if you fell asleep, you could asphyxiate yourself. We always had an opening in the top of the *iglu* and when we were going to sleep, we turned off the stove. We covered the opening or plugged it with a caribou skin or something like that. You got the temperature dropping close to minus forty, but as long as you had a good blanket of caribou skins, you got to sleep well.

When we finally pulled out our traps, I had broken the other boys' record on the last trip. I got sixty-eight foxes

and some of them got thirty or forty. I had to learn, you know! I got about one hundred and ninety foxes for the whole season. Some people got more than two hundred, and my brothers got over three hundred. I was handicapped, but I learned something. I learned to be alone.

I had a book on astronomy that one of the old traders there had given me. I used to read this, and one day when I was in Holman, the fall before, my sister said, "What are you reading about Abe?" I said, "Well, it's about galaxies and all the stars and the sun and everything moving at an estimated one thousand miles an hour." We were eating at the same time, and I added, "You know while we're sitting here we travel at about one thousand miles an hour over the galaxy." Finally my sister said, "Shut up, Abe!" I never talked about it anymore because I didn't want to disrupt their way of thinking. They believed in what they believed, and that was that! I was just trying to tell them the story.

I used to have a book about an Apache Indian. The book was called *Bronco Apache*. It's a true story, and I read it a couple of times. I told them the story, and one of my brothers couldn't fall asleep thinking about it. This Apache was an impossible guy. He had medicine power and he ran away from the reservation. He fought the Mexican army, all by himself, and the American army, too! I think his life story was part of a movie called *Apache*. Remember that? It was a western with cowboys and Indians. His name was Massaï. I used to have this book, but somebody borrowed it, and I never got it back. I looked for it in libraries, but it was not there either. The book described how the Apaches lived. I used to tell that story while we were out in the wilderness. My brother used to say, "Tell us the story about Apache, Bronco Apache, Massaï." Massaï was a loner. The book was interesting.

So we went to Holman. We used to play poker for foxes. We used ten matches for a chip. We put a fox on the table and played cards. I got a little bit lucky. I must

have won six foxes, but that to them was nothing. They had a lot of foxes!

I remember one particular guy whose name was Pat Qewaq. His real name was Asakpat. He was a good mingler. He could talk to anybody. He had an outboard motor, a five and a half horsepower Johnson, which he brought from Sachs Harbour to Holman. He made an agreement with someone to trade his Johnson for thirty-five foxes! Now at that time foxes were worth between twenty-four and twenty-six dollars each. He probably paid a hundred and fifty dollars for that motor in the Delta, and he sold it for three hundred percent more or whatever! He was the kind of guy who liked to make a deal.

We spent Easter there at Holman. There were lots of people from Prince Albert Sound and some other places. They all congregated at the Bay. There was an old Hudson's Bay Company post up there and a Roman Catholic mission and an Anglican church. We had our own laymen and we held a church service. After Easter we had a dance in the Hudson's Bay warehouse. We cleared all the things out. Somebody had a violin and a guitar, and my brother-in-law and I played and so did Jacob Nipalariuk. It looked like a big dance hall with everybody sitting around and people getting up to dance. It was fun!

The Hudson's Bay manager was called Morrison.

Holman is called Uluksaqtuuq now. I also saw an RCMP special constable there. The RCMP came from Coppermine, doing their patrol, and they said a plane was arriving. I went down to see the "G" Division superintendent. His name was Henry Larsen. He was the most famous man in the North at that time.

He crossed the Arctic on the St. Roch?

Yes. He crossed the Northwest Passage. I remember my father used to see him when he'd go to the ship. He came in a plane, a Norseman, together with Alex Stevenson who was the Arctic administrator.[1] He was

with the Hudson's Bay Company and had been to the war, and he came back to the Arctic. He spoke Inuktitut pretty well, both of them did. There was also a pilot and his mechanic. I looked, and the plane was empty. I said, "Gee! I'd better try to get out of here!" I talked to them, and I gave them a sad story. I said, "I had tough luck this winter and didn't get too many foxes. I'm handicapped, and I want to go back to the Delta." They were going to Aklavik. Henry said, "Come on!" I had half an hour, no, an hour to sell everything I had. I sold my four dogs, my toboggan, rifle and my muskrat parka. That's all I had anyway, and I took off!

I got about thirty foxes out of that deal, which was good. They had a lot of foxes anyway. They wanted to buy my toboggan and my rifle. I really missed my dogs, but I had to go! I just had my sleeping bag and my foxes with me. When we took off from Holman, it was foggy. When we got out there, the pilot saw three polar bears around a seal hole. He circled and got close enough to take a picture of it. I was looking out the window when all of a sudden we started circling around again. I heard something about some construction going on. I didn't know what it was! I looked down and there was Cape Parry! We landed on the sea ice. There was a long airstrip with cats going back and forth.[2] I saw three planes there on the ice. That same fall when I had passed there, there was nothing! So I asked, "What's going on? Is it an invasion or what? What is it all about?" I met one of my dear cousins working there, Edward Ruben, who lived in Paulatuk. They called it Pin One. That was the official designation.

We stayed there overnight, and the next day they asked me, "Do you want to go to Aklavik?" I also met my old school superintendent from the Anglican school. He had also been a wildlife officer, and he was now the liaison officer for the DEW line employees.[3] Mr. Boxer was his name, Albert Boxer. He right away asked me how the trapping was. I talked to my cousin Edward Ruben; he's

still alive, he must be in his eighties now, and he said that they were building this DEW line all across Alaska, Canada and Greenland. This just happened to be Pin One. The other sector was Bar sector, and there were planes coming in and going out all the time. People were busy with cats and trucks. The place was buzzing!

The next day we went to Lady Harbour. The Hudson's Bay Company manager and his wife were part Inuit; his name was Joe Milukshuk. He was also related to us, but I didn't know them that well. My sister grew up with him. The next day we went in to Paulatuk. They had the flu, and only the priest wasn't sick. Leonce De Hurtevend was his name. He spent fifty years there, and just recently he retired. I went down and saw the family. Just one boy was up; everybody was bed-ridden because they had the flu. So we took off from Paulatuk, and boy, was I happy to see the Delta and Aklavik!

I got off the RCMP plane in Aklavik toward evening. I got my little bag out, my sleeping bag, and my foxes. There was no vehicle to give me a ride, of course. We had a cabin across from Aklavik, and I walked in while they were eating supper. I just opened the door and threw down my stuff. I said, "Hello!" They said, "How did you get in?" I said, "Well, you came by plane, so I did, too!" But I never paid a cent! In fact it was a nice trip. So I got back to see my other brothers and relatives. I went to a dance, sold my foxes and enjoyed the week there.

My two brothers had chartered a plane, and they came back with their foxes, too. Fortunately, I didn't have to charter a plane, but they had money to pay for a charter, perhaps twelve hundred dollars or whatever it was, to charter it. My brother and his wife, and one child and my other brother brought all their stuff with them by plane, including the dogs.

That's when I started to learn about the existence of the DEW line. My brother-in-law had been to the Alaska

border to pick up the cat trains. He knew that coastline really well, and he was guiding the cat trains.

What was your brother-in-law's name?

Alex Stefansson was his name, and he knew that coastal area really well.[4] They had another machine, which I found out later was called the Monster. I forget how many thousands of barrels of fuel oil, forty-five gallon barrels, it could carry. They came from Fairbanks across the tundra with D-8s in front.[5] There were only two vehicles of that type, made in Texas somewhere. The wheels were about fourteen feet in diameter with electric motors in each wheel. It was like a train but it could maneuver around. I didn't see it travelling, but I went to see it when it was parked for the winter.

This train went all the way to Pearce Point and came back on the mainland in the Yukon. They travelled really fast, apparently faster than snow plows, which travel about twelve miles an hour. It was a very powerful machine. I never did find out what its real name was.

I went back home and there were lots of muskrats. I hunted muskrats that spring, and one of my brothers-in-law drowned in the meantime. I went back to Aklavik in July, and I talked to the liaison officer, Bert Boxer. He said, "They don't want any more men." I asked, "Why?" "Because people from other camps quit on the first payday!" he said. Of course the Inuit didn't know the work ethic. They liked to go home and spend the money and then come back!

"We should go to the camp and talk ourselves into some kind of work!" I said to my cousins Philip Belanik and Edward Lennie. So we went to the camp by canoe, and we talked to the superintendent. I think his name was Jack Wainwright. He phoned up on the Marconi radio and he said, "You've got to go to another camp." We had a canoe and gas, so we went over to what they called Bar 2. It was at the same place where we used to hunt whales that they were building this DEW line site.

So this was in the Delta?

This was in the western part of the Delta, along by Shingle Point, close to a place called Blow River. So we went over there, and we saw a man whose name was Roy Peace. He said, "You men wait here for three days. We'll send you to another site with a smaller camp!" They had oil and a diesel engine, but they dumped everything there, and they constructed the buildings in the summer.

So there I was with Edward and Philip. We waited for a couple of days until they finished setting up the camp, and then we flew to the site they called Bar B. There was a zero site, a small site, and then Bar A, Bar B, Bar C and so on, but the big ones were called Bar 1 and Bar 2. The smaller ones were letters, and the bigger ones were numbers. I didn't know why they were numbered that way, but I did find out that this was the Distant Early Warning System.

I went to work with them in a camp called Bar B. Its real name is Ikpiqiuk. When I was a small boy, I remembered my father called it Stokes Point. You could see Herschel Island from there, where there was an RCMP station.

We came there and worked through July, August, and September, and when they closed we went back to Aklavik. High sites were being closed because they still didn't have an airport. That's when we found the dead whale that was buried. We flattened out the esker when we were trying to build an airport.

When we got our first pay cheque, holy smoke! We worked for a dollar fifty-five an hour. Oh! What a wonder, lots of money! We worked for ten, twelve hours a day and finally got our pay about eight weeks later. What a big roll of money it was. Eight hundred dollars or more was a lot of money at that time. We could buy cigarettes, clothes, good jackets and boots from the commissary and it was all tax free. We had a radio operator from Marconi, an older

man, and a superintendent who was a Western Electric representative because they were sponsoring the DEW line. He made sure the money was spent in the right way. Little did I know that there was also a site at Cambridge Bay and way over here, and they had Fox 1, Fox 2, Cam 1, Cam 2, Pin 2 and Bar 2, all the way to Alaska. They all had different codes. I went back to Aklavik in the fall.

The Inuit workers at that time, even including myself and my friends, came from a nomadic life. When we were hungry we ate, and when we were sleepy we slept. We had no regulated mealtimes. We had coffee and bannock in the mornings, and during the day if somebody called us for a meal, we ate. We didn't have routines like the ones we were taught by the missionaries. When we lived on the land, we travelled whenever the weather was fine.

But when I went to work on the DEW line, not only me but many others, we had to have three full meals a day. So we had breakfast, coffee break, and lunch and coffee break and supper, and we would work after supper sometimes. Within three months you had the ability to work; you weren't lazy in the morning, you got up on time and you had your alarm clock. The other thing is that when you start having three square meals a day, it changes your whole eating system. You get hungry when you work harder.

We started rolling oil barrels from the beach to a better place because we had no equipment. They were just dumped there, and so we lined them up together. We jacked up buildings and put wedges under them. There was one carpenter and one mechanic in the camp, and we used to help the mechanic sometimes. Our superintendent was a cat operator to begin with. He was an old construction hand. He knew how to handle a cat. One day he said, "We'll go get some water." I was helping to get the pail, and I sat beside him as he was shifting gear. Finally, after about two or three trips he said, "Abe it's your turn to get water!" "What the hell am I supposed to do with this machine? This

is a big machine!" I thought. I had never touched a knob or anything, but there were instructions on how to work it. I read them carefully and they said, "Put it in gear." After that I put it in gear, backed it up a little bit, and then went forward. Soon I could turn it, and I took off!

We were getting water from a stream about a mile and a half from camp. We had to get it in buckets, put it in a tank, and bring it back. The machine I was driving was an International with a draw bar. You had two reverse gears, one low and one high, and six forward gears. Even with six gears, you were only going about nine miles an hour! I used to just splash around in the mud. I learned how to put it in slow gear, and then you could kill time before you went for lunch. Ha, ha, ha!

Then they put a blade on the cat, and the mechanic finally got a hoist-away. Before that we had to roll the barrels. When a ship came with some other material, we had to unload it by hand because we had no forklift. We had to unload it with a hoist-away and the D-8 with a blade. However, Inuit like Edward Lennie started to operate that pretty well, too.

We had a scraper digging up gravel and hauling it to make a path to set up a building. They had just brought in everything, so that in August we were unloading the barges. We had no oil tank, and they had to get steel workers to build one. So we worked around the site and there was a big wind, well, in that area they called it a big wind. The camp was in a low place, and everything flew away. We had no materials in the fall, so we had to close down. The plywood for the building was all 1/8" for the inside wall and 1/2" for the rest. We piled the plywood together and put tarps and rocks on it. But when this terrible wind came, it was so strong that it took everything away.The superintendent said, "Let's get out of the way!" So we had to walk away; we couldn't go into the camp.

Plywood was flying up in the air like a deck of cards! When it finally calmed down two days later, the water

came up, and some of our beams floated away. We couldn't hold on to anything. The D-8 was in the water, frozen. We didn't know what to do. But some older guy there, whose name was Allukajarjuk, said, "It's not going to last. The nice weather will come back." He knew the land, I guess! I never had that kind of experience before. All our wood, our insulation, and all our plywood and lumber just blew away. We had to close the camp, and we went to Aklavik. In the fall of 1955, I went to work in another camp called Pin Main with a whole bunch of people. We were shoveling gravel for building cement blocks for the airport.

I used to wear out a pair of gloves just about every day because you had to keep filling the bucket. You couldn't stop. The bucket was moving all the time. It was tough! I worked for three months, and finally I got sick just before Christmas. Right after Christmas I went to see a doctor, and he said I was all right, so I went back. I got a job with another crew that was in the Bar 2 sector. I went there in January, after working seven months from June to December, which was the contract we had. In the summer of 1956, I became a lead foreman for the night crew, which included my brothers and my nephews. We were moving things around. They had a make-shift garage, and we used to clean it and take the garbage out. Later on when the foreman, who was an old trader, decided to go back, I took over his job as foreman. I had thirty men under me, and I had to keep track of their hours of work and their overtime. There were two hundred men in the camp.

The DEW line was starting to have buildings then. The power plants on the DEW lines were housed in buildings, and everything was attached to the heating system. We had to carry ice from a lake to an ice chewing machine that filled up the water tank. There was always something to do. The water lake was not far from where they were building the airport. Most of the labourers were Inuit.

In 1957, our liaison officer, Bert Boxer, was given instructions by the federal government that some men

should go out and learn how to run equipment. We went to Leduc, Alberta. I called it L.A. It's only eighteen miles south of Edmonton. We used to go to Edmonton every weekend. It's an airport now, but then it was nothing, just a little town of about three thousand. We were training for three months on heavy equipment, driving trucks, and cat and grader operation. I got involved with grader operation for three months. If you ever go through Edmonton, you can see where that caterpillar flattened some kind of mountain. Another Inuk and I cleared that and made a path that is still there. It's one of the things that I learned how to do. So, I was an operator.

The last time I went back, in 1957, Northern Electric was taking over the camps for the finishing touches. Our superintendent on the Canadian side had called me back when I finished at Leduc.

Were there many Inuit there?

There were thirty of us when it first started, but later on they took another thirty from here, another thirty from there, until there were about two hundred trained men. There were only about eight D-8s in the North! We were all trained to be drivers, not administrators. But I went back and I became a strawboss in Pin Main.[6] I had my own jeep. I had twenty truck drivers and thirty men under me, and they had their own foreman. I made progress assisting the superintendent. He said, "We already are supporting you. Anything you see that's not right, come and tell us!" I never had a real problem, but I learned how to manipulate people. They just couldn't stand around and wait for work. I used to tell them, "You go over there and do something!"

Were you aware of the cold war at the time?

It was supposed to be a secret affair. We were not supposed to talk about it, but I got the idea that something was going on. We weren't there for fun. I used to talk to the Northern Electric or Western Electric personnel, and

we knew they were expecting something. We were putting up a dome like the ones they had here [in Iqaluit], like a golf ball. One time they asked me to come up, just to see what it looked like. They had a fluorescent bulb, and they told me to put it under the radar. That tickled it right away. I said, "How did that happen?" That thing was going around. "There's a radar set in there watching for some incoming objects," is what they told me.

I remember once I got a real surprise. In 1956 or '55, one of those, Roy Peace was camp boss in one of the Bar sector camps, Bar 6 maybe. He was promoted to second in command in charge of construction. He was a nice guy and we got to know him well because we were working under him. Once we were listening to the radio, and Moscow Molly was on the air. She came in loud and clear. She was congratulating Roy Peace for being promoted to assistant superintendent. This was from Moscow! They had spies in there already.

Moscow Molly was the name of the radio announcer. She spoke English very well, in a very American way. That's what they told us on the DEW line. It was propaganda, I guess.

You could receive this on short wave?

Yes. We could receive Greenland, too. So it was no secret. But we didn't know that there was a Mid-Canada line at that time. Some of those guys had built the Mid-Canada line, and then came up north to build the DEW line. The Mid-Canada line was south of the tree line, with spots here and there all across Canada.

The Russians knew exactly what was happening?

Oh definitely! They knew what the Canadians and the Americans were doing. The breakfast news that we heard showed that Moscow Molly really knew what was going on. She said, "Congratulations Roy Peace, you became

Summer camp in the Mackenzie Delta. From left to right: Frank Cockney, William McDonald and Abe Okpik standing on his cane.
Photo courtesy of Elijah Allen.

DEW (Distant Early Warning) line construction. View of Radar installations from a distance, Fox, Northwest Territories, Hall Lake area, 1956 – 1957.
Credit: Gavin White/National Archives of Canada. PA 146248.

assistant superintendent in the construction of the DEW line!"

There were tradesmen from Austria, Poland and Scotland, people who had trained with hand tools, not machine tools. They were good carpenters and really good electricians. There was a company from Montreal doing the construction. Rene and his brother, Bouvier or Bouchard. They used to do contracts for the big sectors. They had power, those people. Somebody must have known that there were spies there. You couldn't tell who they might have been.

I found out later, talking to some of the forces personnel that were inspecting it, that the technology we were installing was already obsolete! Even though we were finishing the job, it had done its turn, and it never became really operational. Now, they don't even man it. They use technology to operate it.

But the bosses didn't talk to us that way. They were spending billions just building their sites.

We were working on a gravel island about six miles out. For three months we hauled gravel from that island to where we used to have a whaling camp, just outside Shingle Point. Nobody knew what the hell was going on! There was no officer telling you, "You can't touch it because it's an important habitat!" Lots of birds used to nest there, and we used to go there for the eggs. We just bulldozed it in the winter time, got the gravel, put it in a truck and hauled it for the airport. The machines were going twenty-four hours a day to make a fairly long airstrip where a DC-3 could land.[7]

We had to unload planes coming in from the South, bringing oil from Norman Wells. They used to carry thirty-two forty-five gallon barrels in a C-46.[8] We would get up in the cold at night when the plane was coming in. We rolled the barrels down, put them in a truck, and dumped them somewhere. The next morning we rolled them up

to the camp. We had no fuel tanks in those days! All in barrels.

They were a real environmental hazard. There were no environmentalists to explain that it was wrong. But now they have every little detail under control. You have to report and measure what's going on. In those days, it was different.

There was plenty of employment then. Later, Northern Electric, whose head office was in New Jersey, took over. People from where I came from went all the way up to Cape Dyer from Aklavik. There were families discovering each other! My brother went to the Fox sector, and my cousins went to Hall Beach. There were people from Coral Harbour; Ben Ell was one of them. This was the first time they all got together! Broughton Island Inuit today ask me how one of them got married to one of my relatives.[9] That is when Broughton Island became a community, you know. As people were working in the high sector around there, they met others, and they got to know their dialects. We laughed about how the language of the sector was mixed up.

There were family-men who started working regularly, and they had to send their children to residential school in Inuvik, and later on here [Iqaluit]. So that was a big change. We had to live in isolation. They opened up a liquor outlet in each camp, which had its own bar. A beer cost fifty cents, but at the beginning my brothers and many other native people were not allowed to drink. Eventually, they got permission to drink six beer a night. They were told, "That's enough for you!" They listened to that, and there was no big problem. They taught the Inuit that too much consumption was evil!

When I was working on the DEW line we used to buy those Fleetwood radios and record players. You could play long playing records on them. When you fell asleep they would stop and jump, and another went on. They were automatic. We used to go to sleep with them on. We'd

listen to Hank Williams and when we woke up it would be Ernest Tupper or somebody else playing. Ha, ha, ha! It was a tradition that we all had record players!

You all had a room?

Yes. Before we put up the buildings, we had our own, not a house, but a frame tent, which was insulated; it had a tin roof. We had a space heater in the center, and that was it!

So this was the first time Inuit got in contact together?

All across the Arctic, yes, yes. We didn't know that there were other Inuit! I didn't even know there were people here on Baffin Island, not until later. I went to the hospital in 1957, and I went to Ottawa in '59. I never went back on the DEW line, other than on an official trip.

So you didn't suspect there were Inuit that far away?

We knew there were Inuit in Cambridge Bay and Coppermine, but not this far east. There were people working for Tower Construction which covered all the sectors. People went back and forth. There were Inuit from Baffin who went all the way to Alaska to work. They taught Inuit how to unload from the aircraft. They used the forklift to unload, and then load again, so they were specialists more or less.

The main depot was in Winnipeg for this sector; in the West it was in Edmonton, and then Yellowknife was for the whole Western Arctic.

They used small planes called Ansons that were ex-war bombers, old models made out of plywood. You could detach them and put them together.

They also had old freighters coming in, bombers from the war. One time in Pin Main we were all in the mess-hall eating, when we heard the siren. I said, "Come on! There's an emergency. The plane is crashing!" So we all rushed to

the site and we heard it approaching. It was coming in, all right, for an emergency landing! The brakes weren't working. They called the plane a York. It had four motors. It landed, but it didn't stop; it just kept going, going, going and slowly, slowly went over the runway, and ended up on the land. Nobody was hurt, and the plane just flopped. We opened all the freight; we had to pick it up from the ground. That's one of the things I really witnessed, not only me, but two RCMP officers and the whole camp. They didn't have any fire equipment, so they couldn't have done anything anyway. There were a few crashes!

Around here I think they flew most of their equipment in with a couple of big planes, what they called Globemasters. They were huge planes. They could carry two hundred heavily equipped soldiers and parachute them anywhere. They used them to bring in electronic equipment that you couldn't touch. It had to be on some kind of cushion, so that it didn't tilt over. We would take it out using a little forklift, and then put it on a kind of soft mattress. We drove very slowly and took it to the Western Electric warehouse, and set it down there. They worked on it themselves. I don't know whether it was explosive or not.

So afterwards, Abe, what happened? We're in 1957 and...

That's when I went to the hospital for eighteen months. When I was in Leduc, I went to see a doctor who reported that my urine test was positive for tuberculosis. So I went into a local hospital in Aklavik. I requested that I not go South. The old Anglican mission school was still there at that time. They were just starting building in Inuvik then.

So you stayed in the hospital for eighteen months?

I went there in July, and I came out in December '58. Then in '59 I went to Ottawa. There was still a risk, a suspicion, that my urine was positive, so they figured that I

must have tuberculosis again. They gave me streptomycin and other things. I didn't really feel it at all. They used to take a culture every time I went to see a doctor. That was what happened.

So you stayed in the hospital there?

In Aklavik. Then, when I came out, the doctors told me to recuperate. Then the administrator, Gene Rheaume, who became a Member of Parliament, got a letter about an Eskimo Affairs Committee meeting.[10] He asked me to come in, and he said, "Do you want to go Abe? They want somebody to talk to, and you more or less have a little experience here and there." So I went, and I was one of the first Inuit to go.

I was communicating with Bert Boxer, who had gone back to Yellowknife after everything was finished at the DEW line. That's when I came to know about people like Bent Sivertz, who was the Director of Northern Affairs. I wrote him a letter, two months before that, and asked, "What am I supposed to say, Bert?" He wrote me back a nice letter. I was always hesitant to be near the government, because I always thought in my mind they had the greatest authority, and we had no business there. You want to do something? Well, you clean their houses and so on! That was my attitude!

You mean your attitude as an Inuk was that government was something for qallunaat*?*

Yes. They had the big bucks. If you want to put it this way, they had to do everything. We only knew the land, and that was it. But some of them didn't look at it that way. They were all good men, too, you know.

In fact, I remember one government man named Lee Post who worked at the reindeer station. He was really good with dogs! I mean, exceptionally good. He used to have the best dogs. Of course, he was working for the government. He fed them well, trained them well, and he had lots of

time. He was the reindeer station superintendent. When he travelled, he travelled with dogs most of the time, and they kept pulling at the same speed. They never slowed down. They weren't all that big, but they were in good shape. I am sure he could have won a couple of marathons if he had still been alive and trained the dogs like he used to.

NOTES

1. A former Hudson's Bay clerk, Alex Stevenson became the administrator of the Arctic in 1960. http://pwnhc.learnnet.nt.ca/exhibits/CBCExhibit/stevenson.html
2. Caterpillar.
3. Distant Early Warning System.
4. Alex Stefansson was the biological son of the anthropologist Vilhjalmur Stefansson and Pannigabluk, a Coppermine Inuit who became the closest companion and informant of Stefansson.
5. Bulldozer.
6. A member of a group of workers who supervises the work of others in addition to doing his own job.
7. Aircraft built by the Douglas Aircraft Company after 1936.
8. A heavy twin-engine aircraft built by the Curtiss Wright Corporation after 1937.
9. Now named Qikiqtarjuaq.
10. Gene Rheaume was elected in the 1963 federal election as a Progressive Conservative Member of Parliament. He was defeated in the 1965 election by the Liberal Bud Orange.

Chapter 9

Working with the Federal Government

After I left the hospital, I was recuperating in Aklavik. I didn't go anywhere and around March there was a letter. There was a social worker who came to see me. I didn't know what a social worker was. He told me that they wanted somebody from Aklavik to attend this Eskimo Affairs Committee meeting in Ottawa. Someone in the office, who had known me before, mentioned that maybe I would be a good candidate to attend the meeting. So quietly I wrote back, and I said, "Okay, I'll go to the one meeting," and that they would have to give me instructions as to how and when it was going to happen. So they wrote back. The social worker was Gene Rheaume from Saskatchewan somewhere, and he gave me a letter for his friend Bobby Williamson, who was working in Ottawa at that time.[1] I didn't know who they were; they were just names to me. I did write to Bert Boxer whom I mentioned earlier. He became a wildlife officer in Yellowknife, and I used to communicate back and forth with him. I asked, "Who would attend? What would this conference be called?" He gave me a few details. The only government services person I knew when I was young was an administrator, a man named LACO Hunt[2] and he was from England. The other one was Lee Post. They administered the reindeer herd there. When they asked me to go to Ottawa, I said, "Okay, I'll go!" So, they got me to Inuvik

from Aklavik by plane, and they gave me expense money, about sixteen dollars and some cents per day, which I knew nothing about, of course.

What year was that?

Oh, in 1959, and this was in May.

Was this the Diefenbaker government?

Yes. They came to power in June '57. When I got to Edmonton I stayed overnight in a hotel, and the next day Lee Post came over and gave me my ticket for the train. This was the first time I was ever on a train, and it was a long ride to Ottawa. We started at eleven o'clock at night, if I remember rightly, maybe a little after eleven, from the Edmonton train station on a Sunday night. We stopped at about every little town all across the country. I woke up in Saskatoon after riding all night and saw the city just from the train. Then we went to Winnipeg, and I saw it in the evening. I'll tell you the truth, it was raining, with lakes all over the place, and the train was going through the water.

Well, I was travelling alone, but there were a lot of people on the train, too. I got to Ottawa about seven o'clock in the morning, and I got dressed and packed my suitcase. I didn't know Ottawa. I was standing among the crowd, and this fellow, who I never heard of before, never knew him, was walking back and forth, and finally he said "*Inuuvit*?" which means, "Are you Inuk?" I said, "Yes, I am an Eskimo!"

It was Alex Spalding, who was also working at that time for the government. He had learned how to speak Eastern Arctic dialects from Inukjuak and Repulse Bay. He knew the two dialects. I had difficulty understanding what he was saying, but I understood enough to answer. He said, "Are you Abraham Okpik? I have to take you to your hotel." I was just bewildered, but I went with him. He brought me to a place called the Bytown Inn. It had

a community shower, and a bathroom for each floor. It was an old-style hotel. I registered, and I was just checking what to have in the morning, when three[3] other Inuit came in. I looked at them, and they looked at me. I didn't know who they were, and they didn't know who I was. Finally, one of them said, "*Inuuvit*?" "Yes! *Inuuvunga*...I'm an Inuk!" I said. Then they started talking. I said, "I'm sorry I can't understand you because I speak a different dialect. I'm Inupiat," well Inuvialuit. I understood a little bit of the Qitirmiut dialect, too, because I spent three weeks in Holman one time when I was trapping in that area. We started trying to communicate. One was called George Koneak who at that time was from Fort Chimo. He's still my good friend. The other one, who was from Rankin Inlet was John Ayaruaq. He and his friend from Rankin Inlet had been asked to go to Ottawa to the same meeting as me. John was an older man, but right away when I looked at him I thought, "Gee! This man has a lot of experience!" He had a nice suit on and tie and shoes. He looked like some professional lawyer to me, even when he spoke! Finally, I got dressed up, too. I had my own clothes. I used to wear them when I was in Leduc.

We went to the meetings and I met Bobby Williamson, Mary Cousins, she was Mary Panigusiq at that time, and Elija Menirak who used to be with CBC. That's where I first met those few Inuit who were already living in Ottawa. I had come from the place farthest away. So the conference went on, and they talked about many things. The funniest part was they were all directors, or chiefs of some big Northern Affairs department. The Minister, Alvin Hamilton, was there, and later on we met Diefenbaker. We had our picture taken with them.

Alvin Hamilton was Northern Affairs Minister at that time. I met Gordon Robertson, who is still around. He was Governor-in-Council, or something like that. They named the school up here [Iqaluit] after him. He was a big scientific man, of course. He was a Deputy Minister

of Northern Affairs, Northern Affairs and National Resources was the full name, NANR. It was not Indian Affairs then. When we sat down and started the council, I recognized Henry Larsen. He was the one I had met in Holman when he flew me to Aklavik on one of his planes. He was the head of the RCMP's "G" Division. I also met Bishop Marsh, who I had known before. Bishop Marsh was originally from England, but he served in Eskimo Point. Eventually he came to Aklavik and became a bishop, and then he moved to Ottawa. I got to know him a long time ago when I was young. He lived around Aklavik for years. He used to drive by our place with a dogteam. We used to talk to him, and the Anglican minister who was a Loucheux; his name was Jim Sittichinli. I met Bent Sivertz, the Director of Northern Affairs, and I also met old Alex Stevenson who I travelled with from Holman to Aklavik. At that time he was the administrator of the Arctic.[4] Alex Spalding was there. He was one of the translators. Bobby Williamson was an anthropologist who studied the North. I had met him years ago, in 1952, I think it was. When the riverboat came down, he was the person on the barge loading freight. He was counting off the numbers, checking I guess. I remember working with him. I was on the other side unloading. You know, a dollar an hour was big money in those days. For three days, we got thirty bucks. Thirty bucks was thirty bucks, you know.

This was on the 25th of May, 1959, and I was ready to go back by train because I wanted to go back hunting muskrat at that time. Bobby Williamson and Walter Rudnicki and Cliff Thomson were all social workers, I realized. Gene Rheaume wrote them a letter about me. When I was living in Aklavik, he gave me a letter for Bobby Williamson. He said, "When you see him give him this." I gave it to him and he said, "Next week you'll go to my cottage out in the Gatineau Mountains, at a place called Meech Lake." We had to row across the lake to get to the cottage he rented. There was no way to get there,

except across the lake. The road went towards the Prime Minister's home north of Gatineau. We left the car there, and rowed across the lake for about half a mile, I guess. He had a little rowboat. I stayed there for a few days, and finally he said, "Abe, why don't you work for us? We have decided that maybe you should work for us." I asked, "What am I going to do? I know nothing about government structures. I have never been in government, and never really heard about government workers other than people who came to visit."

Eventually, I said, "I'll try. I'll go for two months and see how it works!" It was hot and I had to wear a necktie, a jacket, pressed pants, and polished oxford shoes every day. I learned how to do that.

Was this first meeting just for a weekend?

No. No. It lasted a week, and our meetings went something like this. They had an agenda asking questions like, "Do the Inuit want to be as they are? Do they want jobs? Do they want schools?" John Ayaruaq who was from the central Arctic in the Keewatin, said many things about that. "We need better schools," he said. I supported all of that because I wanted better schools, too, and better services so people could work with the government. Ayaruaq had known the people from the missionary times, to the time he started working. This was the first time I had heard of the Rankin Nickel Mine,[5] and the first time I met people from there. I didn't know there were Inuit in that area!

One of the real problems that time concerned alcohol. Before I left Aklavik, I went to Tuktoyaktuk, just to see friends. A couple of old timers said, "Listen Abe, you know, we are under different government services." I asked what they meant. "When an Indian is drinking even home-brew, or is caught bottling on the reservation, they charge him a five or ten dollar fine, the first time. But if an Inuk gets

The Prime Minister meets Inuit attending the Eskimo Affairs Committee in Ottawa, 1959 (Left to right): George Koneak, Singiituq, John Diefenbaker, John Ayaruaq and Abraham Okpik.
Credit: National Archives of Canada.

caught drinking, even if there is no reservation, they charge him a fifty dollar fine right there!"

All Inuit in Canada were listed under an alcohol interdiction. I later found out that if you had a real problem with drinking alcohol, you were put on the interdiction list. We were interdicted right from when we were born. We never did have a choice. I said, "The real problem we have is that Inuvik is growing." I spoke about it at a meeting in Aklavik. When they first opened a liquor store in Aklavik, there's a story about that, they called a public meeting. The liquor store was opened without asking the Inuit or the Indians if they needed it. It was just for the transients, white people who were coming in, so they could drink. We had a public meeting around Christmas because public drinking was getting so bad. The whole town was there, missionaries, priests, Anglican ministers. They wanted to know if they could leave the liquor store wide open from ten in the morning to ten at night. Finally, I got up and said, "I don't think this meeting is for us! We are Inuit. We are not even entitled to have a drink. The Indians right there are not entitled to drink, either. Why were we invited to this meeting?" That hit the mark you know, with the people, too. There was a lot of bootlegging around. When I got to Ottawa, I said, "Listen. The real problem we have is this. If I go to work and make money, then I can enfranchise myself and get a permit for liquor, but if I'm not working, I can't. I'll be charged and placed on the interdiction list!"

A reporter and lawyer got hold of that, and in July at a Territorial Council meeting in Rankin Inlet, they opened up liquor for all Inuit in the Northwest Territories. This was just shortly after I had made my statement. Of course, Inuit didn't know about liquor. They didn't know why the white man was allowed to drink alcohol. The Inuit got special permits, and they started ordering. The Indians had been left out, and so at the next Territorial Council meeting they got their permit to drink, too! In November

I started scratching my head. What were we doing? We could not teach them how to make their own spirits, and we couldn't charge them for doing it. They thought they would learn how to do it, and they just assumed that it was going to work right. Right there and then, that was the way they wrote it down.

That was one of the big points. The newspapers and reporters got hold of it. I have a copy of some of the statements we made. George Koneak and the others all wanted better living conditions and better work places, not too far away from our families. I was sick for a long time, but the people I worked with on the DEW line had to send their families a cheque every month. They at least knew that their families were all right, and if something happened, they had the option to go home.

We spent a whole day on that, and in the evening they had a big reception with all the big dignitaries. The Hudson's Bay Company Governor was there, Alvin Hamilton of Northern Affairs, and so on.

Do you remember the name of the Hudson's Bay Company Governor?

His name was Simpson, I think. There was also a fellow I met, Doctor Weber, who was the head of the National Health and Welfare Department. There were many government departments represented at that time. Bud Orange was also there, and I worked with him later on. There were also some very interesting people at the meeting. I met Farley Mowat shortly before, and Doug Wilkinson who had written a book I had read before.[6]

Was Farley Mowat participating?

Well, he was just listening to what was happening. He was interested because his book called *People of the Deer*, or *The Desperate People* had just come out. He was criticizing the work of the government departments. Elija Menirak

was there, and I went to his home for supper with Farley Mowat. He ordered Chinese food, which you can imagine I had never tasted before. Wow! Good Lord! What!

Good?

Oh! Yes! Wonton soup was the best soup I ever tasted! Ha, ha, ha! But anyway, I got that opportunity, and I said, "Okay, I'll try it for two months!" I later met Diefenbaker, and another time we went to the home of the Governor General, Vincent Massey. I went to work, and it was hot! I said, "I'll try to work in the lake!" Every night I went home, it was hot! I bought a swimsuit, put it on, and swam until it got dark. I cooled off a bit!

Sometimes they had to send us home because we could not stand the heat. There was no ventilation in the Ken Albert Building at that time. It was the tallest building in Ottawa, other than the Parliament Buildings. It had eleven stories, if I remember. We worked on the eighth floor. We took the elevator up and down. About three weeks later I wrote a note, a little note, which I put in my pocket in an envelope. I wanted to go home! I wanted to quit the next Friday. I made a note that I had to dig around, as to what to do.

I knew nothing about syllabics, the writing system used in the East. I had to learn that as I went along, because it was part of my job as a translator. The government had little Inuktitut books I had to translate. I wrote in a phonetic Roman orthography, the way we write today. I sent copies to some of the old folk in the Western Arctic. The old timers were happy that at least they had something telling them what was going on. These were some of the first publications in Inuktitut. It was Mary Cousins' idea, I think; somebody from that office. She was the editor or something. I translated my part from English to Inupiaq and sent it out. I got a letter from a former Anglican deacon, just before he died. It was a long handwritten letter in Inuvialuktun, telling about the history

of the whalers. There must have been ten, twelve pages. I translated them, trying to be as precise as I could. I gave it to one of the editors, and someone wrote it in Inuktitut syllabics. His name was Thomas Umauq. I decided to stay another month, and pretty soon I was spending Christmas there. I came up here the same fall, in October, to Iqaluit. It was my first trip up north.

I didn't know there were Inuit here, but this was the largest town of Inuit in the whole of the Northwest Territories, and it still is. I came here for three weeks with Alvin Hamilton and George Hees. George Hees was the minister in charge of DOT, the Department of Transport. Alvin Hamilton was the Commissioner at that time. They were all ex-army fellows. Allan Dulles was head of the CIA, the Central Intelligence Agency in the United States. When we got off the plane I noticed two Inuit sitting there. I didn't know much about their dialect, just a few words. Someone asked, "*Kinauvit*? What's your name?" I answered, "Abe Okpik." The press was there, and they said, "There must be a reason for all these dignitaries." There were some tall policemen there, too. That's when I met Brian Pearson. He was working in the Rehabilitation Centre in Apex. There were buses between Apex and Iqaluit. I came back to Ottawa and wrote a report about what I had observed. After about six months working with the syllabic writing system, they also got interested in writing in Roman orthography. I worked with Elijah Erkloo, who came to Ottawa that same fall, or some time after. He became another part of our work force. They hired a linguist named Raymond Gagné. He had a very good ear for standardizing the Roman orthography and the syllabarium. We used the one dialect, like Greenland does. I worked with him for six months.

He used to consult with Father Schneider or somebody who also was a linguist at Laval University.[7] Raymond Gagné sacrificed a lot of his time just to get the orthography right. He was very positive about his work. He did a lot

Abe Okpik in conversation with Brian Pearson in Frobisher Bay (Iqaluit), 1964.
Photo Charles Gimpel. Courtesy of Martha Ningeok.

of linguistic work in different places, and I got to know some of the people from the House of Commons who were trained as translators by him. He used to gather people together and talk in different languages. That's when I found out that English and French were not the only languages, beside my own language and other aboriginal languages.

There was a translator from Austria. He spoke German, French and English. He knew many languages fluently, and he translated for visitors to the House of Commons. There was another fellow who had never been in Inuit land but he studied the Inuit language and he could converse. Imagine that! There was another fellow who worked there. I think it was Bud Neville. He was a social worker. I got to know him very well. He, too, had never lived with Inuit, but he learned syllabics and he spoke Inuktitut, just from learning the written version and from listening. He learned Reverend Peck's first syllabic orthography.

I got to know those people when I worked in Ottawa in 1959. When I was in Iqaluit for three weeks, I met Lionel Jones at that time.

So you went back to work in Ottawa?

I went back and did my report, and then around March they called me and said, "Abe we want you to go to work with the Rehabilitation Centre in Apex." So I got a job as director of the Rehabilitation Centre. There was a coffee shop and a laundry. I was in charge of all this. I had to make sure that they got their supplies properly, wheelchairs and whatever. They closed it down five years later. It was for people who were disabled from long-time hospitalization. They found out when they came here that it was difficult to get back home. I was a victim myself when I came back. I didn't know where to go, but I had to live with what I had!

Some people, while in Hamilton or Quebec City, had been operated on for tuberculosis. After three or four years,

when they came back, they went back on the land, and they died. They had no place to go to recuperate.[8] So that's why we had the Rehabilitation Centre in Apex, for people who had had long hospitalizations. Henry Evaloarjuk from Pond Inlet with his family, was one of them. Some people from Northern Quebec were there. There were people from Coral Harbour and from Igloolik. We also ran a transient centre for people returning from, and going to the hospital. We also had accommodation for Northern Affairs and National Resources workers who were going to build schools in different communities. They stopped and ate at our kitchen, and we charged them, I don't know how much. It was a fairly busy place because there was no hotel here. There was one small one belonging to an aviation company; East Coast Carriers had the first one.

You left your hometown, you left the Delta to go to Ottawa. You didn't feel like going back to your place?

Oh! That story! Well, anyway. I worked a lot of overtime that winter, and I accumulated maybe forty days of leave. I had two weeks off, and I took the overtime without money and went back to the Delta for the first time. I must have shot about nine hundred muskrats. They were going for a dollar something a piece. I had enough money, so I paid my way. It was only a hundred and ninety dollars from Ottawa to Edmonton, and another hundred and ten to Inuvik. I hunted muskrats in the spring. Then I came back through Edmonton to Ottawa to my apartment. I had just one bus ticket left when I went back to work. The money was not all that great, but I enjoyed the work and I travelled a lot!

By the way, before I get too far, I'll tell you a little story. When I was living in downtown Ottawa, I used to think about some of those things that I always wanted to know. There was a fortuneteller, downtown in the market, so I paid her seven dollars to read my fortune, to tell my future. I never forgot one thing she told me. She

said. “You are going to be travelling in many areas of this land!” I didn’t believe her at that time, but sure enough, some thirty years afterwards I found out that she was right! Ha, ha, ha!

I went back to Aklavik for the second time in ‘62 for the spring hunt. I probably shot about one thousand muskrats, and at a dollar and a half each, that was something. I enjoyed a little holiday in Edmonton. The third or fourth spring, I quit going back. It was lonesome for me when spring started. May came around and I said, “What am I doing here?” There are geese flying in my land, canoes out on the lakes, people paddling around or calling muskrats. I used to miss that a lot because I really loved that part of the year. Swans were flying over, geese and all kinds of birds, and there was always something to see.

In a city you got into the boredom of getting onto the bus, and nobody talking to you. The people were all reading that financial section of the local newspaper, buying stock. I guess that’s what they were doing! I never did get to know anybody on the bus, even though I was on it for six months. In the morning and in the evening when I went back, they never said anything, although I knew them by face, you know. I never spoke to anybody. We had an apartment, my friend and I. He was working for MOT, the Ministry of Transport, and his name was David King. I used to call him King David!

There were about eight other apartments in the same building, right in Ottawa. It was funny. You never talked to anybody. You never said anything. Your mailbox was there, and that was it!

You were living a different life.

Oh, yes. You have to do it sometimes! Sometimes. I started living in an apartment with Jacob Partridge from Fort Chimo. He’d been sick most of his life, and he was handicapped also. I worked with him.

When I moved to Apex, I learned a bit about everything. I got to build the community hall there. I used to do a lot of confidential reports interviewing older people. They are still in the archives. I think they put them away.

Did you have to learn Inuktitut here?

Yes. I had to learn the syllabics. I got involved with the language commission for a while, later on. I still have a few difficulties talking, because sometimes I get my dialects mixed up. The reason I tried hard to understand other dialects was because of something that happened when I went back home one time. I tried very hard not to mix dialects one with the other. I was talking to them about my life, one time when we were eating. The kids left the door open, and I said, "*Matuguk.*" My sister-in-law was there, and she got up and put a lid on the pot that was on the stove. I said, "Why did you put the lid on the pot?" She said, "You said *matuguk*. You asked me to put the lid on the pot." But I had said, "Close the door!" That's the dialect here. It's the same idea, but it has a different meaning. That struck me, so I really, really tried hard not to mix my dialect up with theirs when I was at home. There's always something different to learn.

What were your feelings about the community here? How were you accepted?

I spent three weeks here, before I came to work, and I got to know some people working in the garage; truck drivers and water truck drivers. Charlie Sariaktuq was a bus driver and I started getting the drift of the dialect. It was a really busy town! One other thing I found out was that Northern Affairs and National Resources had a carpenter foreman here who was training Inuit carpenters. There were also good heating men from Europe training Inuit. They had different skills and they had patience with the people.

Can you describe the town at that time?

Well in this area right here [around the Nunavut Research Institute] in 1961-62 there was a big building, and a big SAC base up there. There were American military planes landing here and filling up. It was during the cold war at the time.

What does SAC mean?

It stands for the American Strategic Air Command. U.S.

Was the old college part of that?

Yes. That whole sleeve out there was full of planes landing night and day. They had about five hundred men here all the time, perhaps seven hundred. They were mostly Americans. The Royal Canadian navy was here, right where these buildings are now.

You mean the RCMP staff houses?

I think East Coast Carriers had a hotel right here [Nunavut Research Institute]. Across the way, off the airport here, was the Department of Transport [DOT]. There were signs all over restricting access to Inuit, except those who were working there.

The area was restricted to Inuit?

Yes, that's what it said. They had signs over here. Apex was a restricted area. You could go to Apex if you were an employee, but you couldn't just go over there.

So Apex was like the settlement?

Yes. Over there they had 15x12s. There are two of them still around. The town was kind of in a half moon circle with all the houses along one end.

What's a 15x12?

It's a wooden building! It had just two bedrooms, a stove and a space heater.

Is this what they called a matchbox?

It was bigger than a matchbox. Later on they brought in matchboxes. They were no good. Anyway, housing was lousy here in Iqaluit.

There were no people living in Iqaluit?

There were people living in *qammait* down the bay, where they are building the dock. They were right along the shore. They were all in *qammait*. I think there were one or two people who had built their own homes with wood from the garbage dump. One of them was a carver, Harry Kilabuk. He had a fairly nice house, compared to others. Individuals had homes that they built themselves. But the ones in Apex were built before my time. Bobby Williamson, who I got to know later, had built a house there, too, in 1955.

At that time, in 1962 , would a lot of people come to town from outpost camps?

There were a few outpost camps but not like in other communities. I found out that at Igloolik, all the people were on the land. Arctic Bay had no settlement, no schools and no buildings. The Inuit only came to trade. We had people coming back from Hamilton in October, and they only got back home in April. We chartered lots of flights, but there were no regular services. There was a direct flight from here to Resolute Bay. There were no services to other communities. There were the DEW line sites, too, but it was difficult at that time. People got stuck at the Rehabilitation Centre for six months at a time. People came here for treatment, and couldn't get back! There were no services.

Was there still a lot of tuberculosis at that time?

At that time, yes. I worked with handicapped people, too. We had a common room in Apex. We built that IODE hall, [The Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire.]

There were Simonie Michael, and Joe Tikivik, and some people who are gone of course, like Jimmy Onalik. I remember at night we would go there and put pieces together. Simonie was like a foreman. We did put it up before Christmas, and we had a big celebration on New Year's Day. It was a nice dance hall, and there were a bunch of people! We had movies every Sunday night for those who had bought a membership. We had a band there, and we ran Bingo for almost two years, every Thursday. When a conference had no place to meet, they set up there. It was always busy.

Was the Hudson's Bay store there?

Right down below, yes! Bill Mackenzie's house used to be the staff house. We used to call them the Bay boys.

Here in Iqaluit there were a lot of people, too. There were those five hundred Americans, and Upper Base was operating.

We were restricted from that area, unless by invitation.

Did Canadians operate Upper Base?

I think it was the Canadian Air Force, or the DEW line.

Were there a lot of people up there?

Yes. There were about fifty or sixty people, I guess.

There is a book called *Eskimo Townsmen* written by John Honigmann.[9] I know his name really well. Our pictures are in that book from when we operated the community hall in Apex. One Christmas, I remember, we got all the people who were rehabilitating and their children together. I was the president of the community hall in Apex and we had some money, five thousand dollars. We decided to give a Christmas gift to all the children, including the MOT [Ministry of Transport] children, *qallunaat* children and Inuit children. We counted the children from age one to twelve. It took us about a month and a half to get all this information. Then we sent the money to a company down

south, and Nordair[10] flew the stuff in. We wrapped the gifts and put them in plastic bags. Some people had eight or nine children. The Northern Affairs bus driver, Sariaktuq, was dressed like a Santa Claus. We announced that Santa was coming and everybody came to their doors; the kids ran out and picked up their Christmas toys. This was Christmas Eve. We must have spent at least five thousand dollars, but that was nothing compared to how happy all the children were. We gave them presents appropriate to their age group. A six-year-old girl needed a new doll; boys needed little toys, cars and all that stuff. We had a whole bus load and we gave it to kids!

The white people had never been to Apex, and then they all came and paid their membership. That's when we started to work on Toonik Tyme also. We used to use one of the SAC base buildings that the United States armed forces left. We didn't have control of the building, MOT had. We used it for the First of July to raise money for a community hall. We used to have a Carnival Day, and everything was sponsored by Apex money. We bought roulette, dice and balls. There were activities all the time. We would say, "Pay for your soft drinks and all." Now, when Apex people moved from there to Iqaluit all this ended. We got the high school, but we didn't see real community work any more.

So how many people were living here? How many inhabitants were there in Iqaluit?

There were about eleven hundred Inuit in total from here, and nine hundred from Apex. There were on average around two thousand people at that time. It was a big booming town with a lot of attractions. People moved here when the territorial government decided to build new schools in every community.

There were jobs? Inuit worked for the military?

Yes. They had a lot of work. Nordair used to hire a whole bunch of Inuit for freight handling. MOT had its

own cleaning people and garage men. National Resources had garage men, trained mechanics and trained furnace people. It was pretty well organized, because they had to work with people who had never been to school. But they were good with their hands, and they listened to the foreman. In fact, there were two or three carpenters from Lake Harbour. The Hudson's Bay Company had a building program in Lake Harbour. A skilled boat builder from down south had trained five or six people to build Peterhead boats and sell them to the communities. There were some of them around here. I have seen several of them.

Were Inuit still hunting at the time?

Oh, yes. They were hunting by dogteam. When I first came, I went out hunting with somebody to the *sarvaq* on a dogteam twice. My cousin and I walked most of the time for the exercise. But then the first automobile came, not really an automobile, a track machine. I brought in an auto-toboggan from Winnipeg by air. It cost me seven hundred dollars to land it here. It was an old cold engine. About three months later, the first Bombardier nine horsepower skidoo came. That's when they started losing the dogs. I know some Inuit who went out before Christmas, and they came back about a week later with caribou. They went way up the Sylvia Grinnell River, about fifty miles from here. In the winter you can't get close to the caribou herd, because the caribou hear the dogs. You have to sneak up to them most of the time. Now, they just bypass the skidoos.

What do you mean, they started losing their dogs?

They started buying machines.

So, even if Inuit were living here, they never gave up hunting?

Never! See the guy sitting here right now! That's all I did on the land. I always marvelled how they survived in this land without any wood, before the white man came. But they survived and they had implements that you and I

would never even think of. They were very, very intelligent to be able to make their tools and *qajait* and harpoon heads. They had to be, without wood. If I had no services, I wouldn't be here! Inuit learned to survive all the way from Siberia, Alaska, Canada, Labrador to Greenland; just through utilizing the sea, the small fish and the birds.

Traditionally, as there was no wood here, life was tougher than in the Delta.

They were good hunters and they got a lot of seal oil and community fish. The fur traders changed the place, too, when the Hudson's Bay Company came trading.

NOTES

1. Abe knew Bobby Williamson. See page 160.
2. LACO Hunt was the Northwest Territories Assistant Commissioner in Aklavik. Born in England, he arrived in Canada in 1928 at the age of nineteen to work for the Hudson's Bay Company. See: http://www.nwtandy.rcsigs.ca/down_north8.htm
   Also: Hunt, LACO, 1983, *Rebels, Rascals and Royalty, The Colourful North of LACO Hunt*, Yellowknife: Outcrop.
3. This third Inuk mentioned by Abe was probably Singiituq or Shinurtuk as spelled by Valerie Alia.
4. At that time, Alex Stevenson was probably still the assistant to the superintendent of the Eastern Arctic. He became the administrator of the Arctic in 1960.
5. In 1953, the Rankin Inlet Nickel Mine opened. Inuit from all over the Keewatin region moved closer to the mine to work for the company. The Rankin Inlet mine operated until 1962. After 1962, some miners were transported to Yellowknife to work in the mines there. Some others went to work down South.
6. Wilkinson, Doug, 1956, *Land of the Long Day*, New York: Holt.
7. Father Lucien Schneider was an Oblate missionary in Kuujjuaq [Fort Chimo].
8. At one time, Inuit patients were placed in twenty-four various institutions. Many were isolated in towns and hospitals where nobody understood their language. No information was sent back to their families about their situation. Many of them never returned. Those who were successfully treated came back, but were weakened by disease, operations, inactivity, and southern food. Many young children had forgotten their language.
9. Honigmann, John and Irma Honigmann, 1965, *Eskimo Townsmen*, Ottawa: Canadian Research Centre for Anthropology, University of Ottawa Press.
10. Nordair was the main air service for the Arctic in those days. After a difficult strike in 1982, the company merged with Canadian Western Pacific, which later became Canadian Airlines.

Chapter 10

The Emergence of an Aboriginal Political Leadership

When I lived in Iqaluit, I ran the community hall with a bunch of other guys like Simonie Michael and Joe Tikivik. We also worked on the idea of having Toonik Tyme for the whole town. It began in May, around the first week in May, 1965. It was the biggest single event where we invited everybody. There were different groups here, like the navy, the Legion, FARA[1] and the RCMP and we got them all together. We started around December having meetings to get organized. That's how Toonik Tyme became what it is now. We were also looking for a name at the time, and somebody said, "What about Toonik Tyme?" So that's the name we chose, and it became an annual festivity here.

The *tuniit* were an ancient pre-historic people before the Thule culture arrived. This was called the Dorset culture. I talked to an anthropologist and an archaeologist who told me that they were here before the present Inuit. There are still markings in some places. I've seen some old houses that the people around here know. I didn't see them in the West but they can be seen from the Central Arctic to here. They were here before us. Someone said, "You see huge boulders around the houses. How did they manage to build them?" I never knew; maybe they had some kind of power.

One of the things that Inuit always said, not only around here but everywhere, was that they knew the *tuniit*

were there, but that they never found their bones, not one skull. Someone said, "Maybe they buried their dead in the sea." Maybe they did, but we don't know about that. Some said scavengers like foxes and wolves and the birds took the bones and put them somewhere else, but that's just speculation. They were here quite a while before we were!

Around February, 1965, I had a letter from the regional director at the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources asking if I would like to move to Yellowknife. I had married in 1962, and I talked to Rose. I said, "Do you want to go to Yellowknife? Let's go anyway. Maybe there's a better system over there!"

They really didn't explain to me what the job was, but they said they needed a liaison officer to work with hard-rock Inuit miners from Rankin Inlet. I only knew maybe a few people from that area, John Ayaruaq and Donat Anawak, and Singiituq. I accepted the challenge, and I regretted it when I left here. At that time the Inuit had set up a little company. It was called Inuk Limited, and I was one of the founders. But because I was working with the federal government, I didn't want to leave my job for a small business like that.

I accepted the job and didn't worry too much about anything else. I had to go to Montreal and then to Edmonton. That was the first time I flew in a DC-8, or whatever you call it. It was interesting. It was midnight, and we were flying from Winnipeg to Edmonton. We were flying so high that if you looked north, you could see the glimmer of lights from the north, and yet we were way down south!

We stopped in Edmonton. By then, they had moved the airport to a place called Nisku. At that time it was just little; there were maybe a hundred people in the town between Leduc and Edmonton. That's where they built the airport they now have. In fact, they have a big airport hotel right there. It was just farmland when I was there in 1957. And so we went to Yellowknife. I got to know the

nine or ten Inuit families there. One wanted to go home, so they sent him home.

There were no airline connections straight across. If you were going to Rankin from here, you had to go to Edmonton, Winnipeg and Churchill and so forth. You could go to Resolute Bay if you got lucky. It was mostly charters. The main lines were from Montreal to Iqaluit, and then to Fox Main; it is Hall Beach now, and Resolute Bay. Then for the central Keewatin area they flew from Winnipeg to Churchill, to Coral Harbour and up to Hall Beach. In the Central Arctic, they flew from Yellowknife to Cambridge Bay and on to Resolute. There were no scheduled airlines. You just had to wait for the right time.

In Yellowknife I had to work with social development, so I started working under the direction of social programs. There were only a few people working there, and I got to know them. Some children from my homeland were going to school at Sir John Franklin, but I didn't know them, except for their names. I used to visit them. A couple of them were my nephews. There were a whole bunch of them. The residence, Akaitcho Hall, is closed now. In 1965, they had a big government-run school, but they also had a public school. The population of Yellowknife at that time was only about thirty-six hundred. Then it became the town of Yellowknife, and the mayor was John Parker,[2] who later became Commissioner.

You knew everybody within a few months, if you got to know people at work. Peter Baker[3] was a Territorial Council member there, another one was Merv Hardie.[4] I got to know a few of the townspeople. There was Johnny Rocher and some Métis who lived there.

In October, I bought a car. I used to go out on the weekends with some fellows by boat. We boated around lakes like Prosperous Lake. Towards Fort Providence and Fort Rae we used to hunt ptarmigans and ducks. We shot one black bear; we never did get a moose or a caribou. We

29th Council Session in February 1965. The Commissioner and Council. Back row, from left to right: Council clerk; Commissioner Stuart M. Hodgson (1967-1979).

Middle row, from left to right: RCMP constable; Lyle Trimble, MLA Mackenzie Delta; Abraham Okpik, appointed member; Peter Baker, MLA Mackenzie North; Robert Porritt, MLA Mackenzie South; Robert N. Harvey, appointed member; unidentified; Air Marshall Hugh Campbell, appointed member; Legal adviser to the Council.

Front row, form left to right: Simonie Michael, MLA Eastern Arctic; Duncan Pryde, MLA Central Arctic; Commissioner Bent G. Sivertz (1963-67); Robert Williamson, MLA Keewatin; John Goodall, MLA Mackenzie River.

Not present or not identified on the photo: Deputy Commissioner Wilfred G. Brown (1957-65); Deputy Commissioner John H. Parker (1967-79); Dr. Frank Vallee, appointed member.

Photo credit: NWT Legislative Assembly/NWT Archives

would see a lot of tracks, but we missed them. The highway was so noisy, that they didn't come around at that time. I used to drive to Fort Providence for the weekend and hunt partridges and fish a little here and there. Every weekend you went somewhere. You could camp or go by boat around the bay. They had nice summers. You could go swimming when you wanted to. It was just a little town.

They had the Territorial Council meetings right in Yellowknife in the Elks Hall. I used to go and sit and listen. I knew Stuart Hodgson and John Parker, who was appointed to travel with the Carrothers' Commission. These were the people who were looking at the possibility of setting up a new structure of government in the Northwest Territories.

The Carrothers' Commission[5] was set up in 1965. In 1966 they released their report. When the commission retired in December 1966, John Parker was appointed to the Territorial Council. That's when he became Deputy Commissioner.

I had to travel once with the whole Carrothers' Commission. There was Dean A.W.R. Carrothers, and Jean Beetz; both must have been judges. Walter Kupsch was the secretary. John Parker was there. I moved to Yellowknife in the spring. There was a Territorial Council meeting in June, and I had been out driving around. When I came home, there was Stu Hodgson and Frank Vallee, both appointed members, visiting us. I said, "Gentlemen, what can I do for you?" They said, "Abe, we want you to be appointed as a territorial councillor." "What the hell can I do?" I said. "I'm not the type of guy who can decide on certain things!" But they said, "You have to try sometime!"

So, I got my appointment shortly after. In October, I was asked to go to Ottawa in my capacity as a territorial councillor because Wilf G. Brown was not well and had retired. The Commissioner was Gordon Robertson. The Council was operating from Ottawa, but they had no members from the Eastern Arctic. They had a member from

Aklavik called Frank Carmichael and also Knut Lang[6] and Lyle Trimble. South of there, was Bobby Porritt. Before that, there was Paul Kaeser[7] from Fort Simpson. They were elected members for the West.

I was the first native appointed.[8] They had members for Hay River and Yellowknife, such as Peter Baker who was an old trader. He was known as the Arab of the Arctic. There were no members in the East whatsoever. There was nobody from the Central Arctic, nobody from the Keewatin, nobody from this island. We had the first session shortly after my appointment, in November, 1966, and there were some pretty critical issues.

I was in Ottawa for six weeks as an appointed member. There was Robert Harvey, Hugh Campbell, Frank Vallee, Stu Hodgson and Bent Sivertz who became Commissioner of the Northwest Territories, and the elected members from the West. There was Bobby Porritt from the South and Peter Baker from Yellowknife North, all around the Rae area. There were about five councillors. I'm just trying to count them now, Lyle Trimble, Bobby Porritt, Peter Baker, one from Fort Simpson, and that was about it. There were about seven appointees, I think. Yes. There were twelve or eleven in the whole council, five elected and seven appointed. Something like that.

When I made my presentation at the first meeting in November or October, I said, "This is Canada, but how come the East doesn't have a member on this council? There must be a reason. Is it that colonial rule is not over yet?" I put it into words, and somebody might have picked it up. They were working on it for quite a while.

Bob Harvey was a consultant from Edmonton. He was really something else. Hugh Campbell was an ex-Marshall in the Canadian air force. They were informed, these people, and you couldn't trick them to do anything without proper discussion. That was the way they were. John Parker and the rest all graduated from university. What's his name? Frank Vallee was a Professor of Anthropology

at McMaster University. Can you imagine sitting with him? He knew more about you than you did yourself! Ha, ha, ha! He had written a couple of books about Eskimos at that time. Stu Hodgson was an ex-union man from the British Columbia Woodworkers Union, and he knew his business.

I got caught in the corner, but I had to make a presentation. I said, "We have the Eastern Arctic area with no members, while we have some from the Mackenzie District." There were three districts at that time. The Mackenzie District was down the Mackenzie River, the Keewatin District was Rankin and north, and this area, Baffin, was the Franklin District. That's the way they described this country at one time. There was no Baffin Island or anything like that. So I made my presentation, and I continued, "Well, if we can't have any new elected members, maybe we should go back and ask colonial England to look after us like they did in the olden days. Maybe we should get our services from over there!"

Somebody got a hold of this idea, and in February when I went to Ottawa again, they said, "We are going to have an election and we have to pass a bill!" They opened election hearings in July, 1966, at the same time as the Carrothers' Commission made their report on the need to change the structure of government.

Then they sent electoral boundary officers north. They made three divisions: all of Baffin right up to the High Arctic would have one member in the territorial government, the second one would be the Keewatin, and the third one would be Central. When it passed the third reading and became law, I phoned my friend Simonie Michael. I said, "Simonie, we are going to have an elected representative now; why don't you run?" I suppose I influenced him. When we were in Frobisher Bay the year before with the territorial government, I asked the older people to go and listen to what it was all about, because this was part of their government.

We didn't have too much money to play around with at that February session. I think we must have passed maybe twenty million dollars worth of territorial government payments. Most of it was federal then, and we just took a little bit at a time. When we broke up I went back north, and I spent the spring there. I was not getting any honorarium. I was just getting my expenses paid, not like the appointees, because I was a public servant.

In July, Simonie Michael was elected for Baffin, Bobby Williamson for the Keewatin and Duncan Pryde[9] for the Central Arctic. I think Duncan got in by acclamation, because he had no opposition. He was a Hudson's Bay man from Perry River, and he spoke Inuktitut fluently. He's back in England now, of course. In the next session, after the members were elected, I was in Yellowknife, and I was helping a group of Inuit who had come from Rankin Inlet. One night, they had been put on a plane and taken to Yellowknife. I had never heard of them until I got there.

They had communication problems, payment problems, and rental problems. They had been in Yellowknife for almost a year when I got there. There was no liaison person around to communicate with the workmen. One perhaps spoke English, but the others didn't. I got them together and we talked and I found better accommodation for the larger families. Some of them had nine children, and other ones had five, and so on. They weren't actually on welfare. They were hard workers, and they made good money, but they just didn't know how to work within the system.

The Rankin mine closed in '62. The women were completely isolated from other non-Inuit women, because they couldn't communicate. I went to see one family and I asked, "How come your children are home and not going to school?" The mother said, "I am scared to send them out. There are Indians out there." I said, "Why?" "Indians are bad people," she said, "They are all around here. Every time we see a movie, the Indians are always the bad people. I don't want my children to go out with them."

That's all they knew, from what they had seen in movies in Rankin Inlet. That made a big impression on them. "If that's the way they live, boy! I sure don't want to be among them!" was what they thought. So I talked to them, and I brought the children to school. We also talked to the priest, and they started going to school regularly. Some of them are doing well today, the ones that are alive, anyway.

The territorial government was then being run by the federal government and was using the appointed members and a few elected members from the Mackenzie District. But then the Carrothers' Commission did their research. They went to every community. They had to fly using a Canso.[10] Bobby Williamson was among them, explaining what government was about. We went to Pangnirtung and Pond Inlet, the High Arctic, Rankin Inlet, and so forth. They asked, "What are we going to do with these people? Are they going to have elected councillors or what?" Remember? That was the report they made.

One of the things I already told you about goes way back to when they first set up the United Nations after World War II. Lester B. Pearson was appointed to the founding group, and in one of his speeches he criticized Russia for not looking after its northern regions better. But Russia retaliated and said, "Canada should look after their native people better!" We certainly needed better health care. Just about every family, both Indian and Inuit, living in isolation, at one time had been touched with tuberculosis or institutional life. That was why they said, "You better clean up your own backyard before you start criticizing us!" The first Public Health Minister for native people was Paul Martin. Not the Minister of Finance now [1996], but his father. I met him in the hospital when I was there. After that, they had to start looking after the North. There were three hospitals in the North. One was in Aklavik at the Roman Catholic mission, there was a small one in Chesterfield Inlet, and one in Pangnirtung for the

Abe and Rose Okpik's wedding in Pangnirtung, 1962 with an unidentified couple.
Photo courtesy of Kathy Okpik.

Abe Okpik (left) on one of his numerous plane trips with an unidentified individual
Photo courtesy of Kathy Okpik.

whole area. Like nowadays, we have one general hospital here, for the whole area, but with technology.

Then came the teachers. In this area they used the Ontario curriculum, in the Keewatin they used the Manitoba curriculum, and in Northern Quebec they used the Quebec curriculum. The West had the Alberta curriculum. They were trying to get organized. In Ontario they took grade thirteen, so we then adopted the school curriculum from Alberta; it's still used here today. We kind of pushed it. I don't know what happened in Northern Quebec. That's how it started. All of a sudden the government wanted to get some people to perform their duties as elected people. In July, 1966, Simonie Michael became the first elected aboriginal Canadian ever, and his constituency stretched from Iqaluit right up to the North Pole!

Bobby Williamson was well known in the Rankin Inlet district, so he got elected. He studied people, too. He was an anthropologist. Now he is a Doctor of something in Saskatoon. Duncan Pryde was a Hudson's Bay Company manager. He got in by acclamation. Nobody knew what was really going on!

But before that, I travelled with the Carrothers' Commission. I went to Coppermine, Holman and Sachs Harbour in the Western Arctic because I understood the dialect. Bobby, who was the translator, would say, "I cannot understand, Abe. Take over." That's also how I got appointed, because I was given information about what was going on.

An appointed member's job wasn't easy. Sometimes you wanted to say something but it was difficult. I used to tell Simonie, "You say this. Maybe you are going to have more impact." He had a lot to say. At that time there were no interpreters, and oh, it was tiring. The next council meeting we decided to have in a special place in the North. So we went to Resolute Bay in November.

It was dark and stormy! We spent twenty-one days in Resolute Bay. We couldn't see daylight, and we had

to use flashlights most of the time. I knew how to live in the darkness, but the others didn't. That's when Simonie made his presentation. Bobby Williamson and Duncan Pryde joined the elected crowd. There was Bobby Porritt, Peter Baker, Lyle Trimble and an older guy from Fort Simpson. He used to plant potatoes for the mission school I went to. There were six or seven elected out of ten, and they had a little more power. At that time Bent Sivertz retired as Commissioner and went south, and the new Commissioner was Stu Hodgson. John Parker became Deputy Commissioner. They had a whole administration crew from Ottawa. Clare Bolger, was the Director of Northern Affairs and National Resources, and Arthur Laing was the Minister. So we had three weeks of sessions with no place to go. We spent most of the time right in one building. We had lots to eat. We couldn't communicate with the outside that well, except through the DEW line services.

The next session was in Ottawa, in 1967, and then my time was up, so they appointed somebody else in my place. In 1967, they moved the government to Yellowknife. I went to Spence Bay after, as the federal administrator. My immediate community was Cambridge, but I was mostly working with Pelly Bay and Gjoa Haven. My job was to make sure that everything was not going in all directions. It was a small responsibility, but it was a job, and I held it for six years.

In those years in 1965, '66 and '67, were there any Inuit organizations?

No, no, no. It was small. In Apex, we had a community club, but we invited everyone. When I was on the Territorial Council in 1965, there was a group of people travelling around. I think they were from Frontier College in Toronto, and they got a few of us together. "We'd like to start an Indian and Eskimo Association,"[11] they said. Later on I was appointed to go to a meeting in Toronto.

There was George Koneak, whom I knew, Annie Palluk, Elija Menirak, who was with CBC, Minnie Freeman, and myself.

Minnie Aodla, now Freeman, wrote a book called *Life Amongst the Qallunaat*.[12] There were some Indian people, Russell Moses from the Six Nations Reserve,[13] Rufus Goodstriker, a Blood Indian from Alberta, and George Manuel from British Columbia.[14] From Northern Ontario, there was an Anglican minister, Reverend Adam Cuthand,[15] Doctor Ahab Spence[16] and Omer Peters.[17] At the meeting we got numerous messages about what the Toronto meeting was all about. These were big businessmen from Toronto, the chief of whom was Mrs. C.E. Clark.[18] She was an influential one. There we started an organization, and we got a fellow by the name of Ernie McEwan[19] who was an expert on organization working with us. George Koneak and I were elected to the Board of Directors. We spent three days discussing what was going to happen. The direction we gave Ernie was, "Lobby the government for some money so that we could at least start talking for ourselves." So he worked on that. I was in Spence Bay by then.

I got a request by wire to go to Australia. I asked my boss about it. "Don't go," was his answer. So I wrote back, "Tell somebody from the West to go!" They picked someone and he went to Australia. It was my nephew. He was not influential, but he was a very good communicator.

When I came back to Yellowknife, in 1969, I got a telegram to start this new group called the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada. They came up with the idea that the Indian and Eskimo Association needed separate funding. They gave money to the Inuit, and money to the Indians. That was when the Indian Brotherhood and the Inuit Tapirisat became two groups.

So this was in 1969, the same year as Jean Chrétien's White Paper?

Yes.

From what you remember, were these linked together? The White Paper initiated opening a land claim office and then giving money for aboriginal people to get organized?

The Indian Brotherhood appointed Harold Cardinal to lead the First Nation of Indians and Crees of Northern Alberta.[20] Tagak Curley became the first president of the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada. He said he was the founder. They asked me to go, but I was busy, doing that Project Surname. I'll tell you about that later, but it was great organizing this out of the blue. We worked on it from the inside with other influential bureaucrats. Those high level government officials could talk. There was a whole bunch of businessmen, and some of them were very, very influential in politics, and very powerful. The Indian and Eskimo Association had an office in Yellowknife. We got our first money from some kind of foundation, from an anthropologist called Wenner-Gren. They gave us an airplane to use and our own pilot. In '67 or '68, Harry Leishman was our worker. Wally Firth,[21] who became a Member of Parliament, worked for us as a pilot for a while, when we first started the Indian and Eskimo Association. But when they gave the money out, they said, "Here's your money, and here's your money!" That's when the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada became what it is. George Erasmus started the Brotherhood of First Nations.

The first president of the Indian Brotherhood in the Northwest Territories was James Wah-Shee, who became a territorial councillor. They were very, very good on many things. They worked hard to get what they wanted. We started the movement ourselves, and after I resigned, I went to the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada meetings just to listen and say a few words.

When the 1969 White Paper came out, many government bureaucrats in our department and in the Northwest Territories government wanted to accept it, but the Indian Brotherhood would not. A lot of them, right from

the Commissioner down, would have forced it down our throats! But native people didn't accept it. They appointed Harold Cardinal as a chief, and he was right against it. He was from Northern Alberta, an old mission school product. Some of the mission school graduates didn't want this new thing to happen to them, so we opposed it, anyway. But they would dictate to us, and they wrote letters back and forth. Some of them were confidential. I saw some of them, but you know I am not a gossiper. Some of them were ugly, very ugly.

Was the reaction not to get organized with the Indians, to be separate, coming from the Inuit or the government?

Tagak Curley was hanging around with Ernie McEwan. Ernie said, "Here's your money. You go and organize your people!" Tagak said he was the founder, but he was not the founder. We were the people in there lobbying at that time. There was Omer Peters who is gone now, too. They were influential, educated teachers from Manitoba.

Afterwards Inuit and Indian politics really split apart.

Yes, now they are. Even right in my hometown, they are all divided. They have their own tribal council now. They said the tribal council would work, but nobody gave them any money to work with, and the treaty has been lost for a hundred years. In the first written treaty it says, "This is your tribe. You're the chief!" The chief and the vice-chief used to get a medal and twenty-five dollars a year and a uniform from the Queen, I suppose, from the treaty.

In the treaty they were allowed horses, cattle, nets and plows. There was one group, I think it was the Blood Indians[22] or the Brocket[23] band in northern Manitoba, who didn't know how to plow, or ride horses. They were not cowboys. They gave them enough money, but they put them all together. They had no training to plow. Maybe they made a few gardens.

So in the North it was the same. We couldn't take the horses! But Indians got fish nets and shells at cost from the Hudson's Bay Company. We Inuit didn't know, even when we were trapping, that every time we shot a muskrat, five cents was due to the government, and fifty cents for every fox. It's in the Hudson's Bay Company books! They took our taxes and brought them through their offices to the Crown.

Before we finish this session, Abe, can you tell us about the start of co-operatives? How did they start?

When I first joined the government there was talk about co-operatives.[24] Elija Menirak was working with a fellow by the name of Don Snowden from Newfoundland. He knew about co-ops and he wanted to start one somewhere. They went to George River [Kangiqsualujjuaq] on the east side of Ungava Bay, and they built a little log cabin. Then somebody else started one in Puvirnituq[25] and there was a priest[26] in Igloolik that started one in around the same time. They started working, and now they are all over the place.

When I first went to Yellowknife, they had a credit union, which was part of a co-op. I belonged to it for a while, but a lot of people used to go to Saskatoon. They had big co-ops there, and they would buy their stuff there.

George River had no real store. Resolute Bay had no store, but they started their own co-op through the same system, a loan from the Eskimo Loan Fund. At that time the loan was only five thousand dollars, but in those days five thousand dollars was a few dollars, too, eh!

It took a while for the co-ops to catch on, but now they are being utilized very much. And you know, it's for a good purpose. Billy Lyall, who I've known for a long time, is a director. People have started to understand what co-operatives are. Father Goussaert started the one in Pelly Bay when I lived in Spence Bay. Well I call him Father Goussaert, but he's not a priest anymore. He's

André Goussaert, the head of supply for the North out of Winnipeg.[27] He was an Oblate at one time.

Did the Oblate missionaries really support those co-ops?

Oh! Yes, yes, yes. They did, because they knew they were going to work. In Cambridge Bay, they have a big co-op store and hotel. Coppermine, Pelly Bay, Pond Inlet and Cape Dorset; they were all in a wild market, those co-ops. They did the same all over the Territories, too, and they did well. The Hudson's Bay Company was like a mountain one time. They used to tell us, you can't beat the Hudson's Bay Company. They simmered right down, too. Times have changed. The co-ops are doing very well. In Northern Quebec every community has a co-op of its own. There are also small businesses all around there, too, doing well. Although I know one place it didn't work well was Paulatuk, because the people were selling their furs to another trader from out of town.

Talking about co-ops, Cape Dorset is interesting as a production co-op for carving and prints.

They started about the same time as the others and called it the West Baffin Eskimo Co-op. You had no place else to go but to the Hudson's Bay Company, but now you can go somewhere else. That's the whole idea of it. But you have to support it. People in Pond Inlet are giving notice. They bought a hotel[28] right here [Iqaluit], which is a co-op and there are other services in it.

So after serving on the Territorial Council, you went back to Yellowknife?

I went back, and I was the administrator for the communities of Spence Bay, Pelly Bay and Taloyoak. When I left there for holidays, Stu Hodgson told me in Edmonton, "I have a job for you." I didn't know what the hell it was all about! So when I came back from holidays, I got a new job; it was Project Surname.

So it started in '69?

Yes. This was the centennial year for the Northwest Territories. We had the Confederation Centennial year in 1967, and I went to Ottawa to be introduced to Her Majesty the Queen at the Governor General's residence.

Can you tell us how this thing came up?

When I was staying here, in a roll call in a classroom I heard Jonah Kelly answer E-7 something. When I went to another class I heard E-7, E-5; the students always answered with their number. Jonah was one of them, and he just said, "How come I have a number and Jim McGrath has no number? Why is that? Doug McNeil has no number and I have a number." He was curious, but they didn't really listen. Some administrator who was in Pangnirtung was trying to change things and get rid of the numbers.

When I did my survey, the number was used for administrative purposes, to record births. People weren't living in one place; they were moving all over. When they first introduced the family allowances after the war, they introduced the disc numbers. But I read about it a bit before. Stanley Knowles,[29] he's still around I think, was involved with this. He was one of the founders of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation [CCF]. He must be in his nineties. Tommy Douglas introduced a bill for the Family Allowance. I never got mine, but you got yours, I'm sure! Ha, ha, ha!

NOTES

1. FARA is the abbreviation for *Frobisher Bay Airport Recreation Association*. It was a private club located at the four corners, where the Telesat Building now stands, providing a bar service for its members.
2. John H. Parker was a member of the Carrothers' Commission. He replaced Stuart Hodgson as the Commissioner of the Northwest Territories. By this time the Territorial Assembly was composed of twenty-two elected members, fourteen of whom were aboriginal (Dene, Métis and Inuit) (Parker, 1996: p.70-71).
3. Peter Baker, known in the Canadian North as the Arctic Arab, was born in 1887 in the Middle East, in what is today Lebanon. His real name was Bedouin Ferran. He became an elected member of the Northwest Territories Council from 1964 to 1967. He worked as a trapper and trader and eventually opened a store in Fort Rae. He was also known as "Banana Pete". He spoke Slavey and Dogrib (Hunt, 1983: p. 47). Peter Baker wrote an autobiography: *Memoirs of an Arctic Arab, The Story of a Free-Trader in Northern Canada, 1907-1927*. 1976. Yellowknife, Yellowknife Publishing Company.
4. Merv Hardie was a Yellowknife town councillor. Representing Yellowknife, he was amongst the first elected members of the Territorial Council in 1951. The newly appointed and elected council met for the first time in Yellowknife. It was the first time since 1905, when the elected Territorial Assembly had its capital in Regina (Qu'Appelle, Saskatchewan), that the council met in the Northwest Territories (Parker 1996: p. 31).
5. In 1965, at the request of the Northwest Territories Council, the Government of Canada established a commission to study and make recommendations on the future political development of the Northwest Territories. It produced its report in 1966. For more information, see: http://www.duncanmp.com/publication/whither_9.html or Parker, 1996: 41-61.
6. Knut Lang was a trapper and a trader from Aklavik. He became an elected member of the Territorial Council in 1958-1959.
7. Paul Kaeser was a successful businessman in Fort Smith. Arriving in Canada as a German immigrant, he first worked as a cook on the sternwheeler *Northland Echo* in the 1930s. He was elected mayor of Fort Smith and president of the Liberal Party of the Northwest Territories. (Hunt 1983: P. 20, 145-146)
8. Abraham Okpik was appointed to the Council of the Northwest Territories by Prime Minister Lester Pearson on October 18, 1965. Abe was thirty-six years old.
9. Duncan Pryde died in November, 1997, at the age of sixty. Fluent as an Inuktitut speaker, he worked for many years on a dictionary that he never had time to complete.

10. The Canso was an amphibian aircraft used mostly during World War II as a submarine bomber. Many Canso aircraft were later used in the Canadian North until 1990. More on the Canso: http://www.aviation.technomuses.ca/collections/artifacts/aircraft/ConsolidatedCansoA.shtml
11. The Indian Eskimo Association had its origins in the Canadian Association for Adult Education (CAAE) when the CAAE appointed a committee to study the problems of off-reserve natives. This committee became known as the National Commission on the Indian Canadian and it functioned as a standing committee of the CAAE. In 1960 the commission withdrew from the CAAE and was incorporated as the Indian Eskimo Association. Its services, at this time, were expanded to include all people of native origin, both on and off reserves, and the natives of the north who were known as Eskimos. Its first president was Clare Evelyn Clark.

    From: http://www.trentu.ca/library/archives/95-006.htm
12. Freeman, Aodla Minnie, 1978, *Life Amongst the Qallunaat*, Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers.
13. Russell Moses was a journalist in training for a publication called *Indian News*. He had been hired by the Department of Indian Affairs. That is what brought him to attend the Indian-Eskimo Association meetings. He came from the Six Nations Reserve in Brantford, Ontario, but he was a Delaware or Lenni-Lenape. He enjoyed spending some time with Abe Okpik sharing their respective sense of humour. They called themselves "Moses and Abraham!" Russell Moses presently lives in Ottawa.
14. Grand Chief George Manuel was destined to greatness. He began his life on February 21, 1921 in Shuswap, at a time when the Canadian government had made it a crime for native people to practise their ancient religion, the customs of the Potlatch. By the time George was six years old, the Canadian government had also made it a crime for native people to organize and raise funds for political action to support aboriginal rights. Like so many Shuswap boys before him, George Manuel was sent by the government to a residential school to "become a white man." In his childhood, George contracted tuberculosis which forced him to live in a sanatorium. The attempts to distort his spirit and his body were always a source of shame, and so he never volunteered to talk about these things. He preferred to remember the desperate poverty his people were forced to endure because of Canadian government and British Columbian government policies toward the Indian.

    Instead of bowing to his own personal tragedies and to the demeaning privation Indians suffered, Chief Manuel turned his

mind, his spirit and his withered body to changing the social, economic and political conditions that brought Indian people to such humiliation. As a young man, he began to raise a family… In the 1950s, when the Canadian government began to repeal its laws denying religious and political freedom to Indians, Chief Manuel became more public about his political organizing in Shuswap communities and in neighboring nations. He put his energies to organizing political field workers and he focused on community development. George began to understand through these activities that organizing Indian people at the community level was essential if they were to regain economic and political power – to eliminate poverty and to rebuild cultural strength.

For George Manuel in the late 1950s, the increasingly popular ideal of self-determination would not simply be an idea, it would become a force for Indian communities to decide for themselves how they would live. In 1959, he broadened his experience and honed his knowledge and his leadership when he became the President of the North American Indian Brotherhood of British Columbia. For seven years as Chief of the Shuswap Indian Reserve and President of the Brotherhood, George worked to promote community development on reserves throughout the province of British Columbia and to press for reforms in Canadian federal and provincial government policies toward Indians. To achieve reforms in the government he later took a position in the Department of Indian Affairs. But George became impatient with reforms when in 1969 Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau issued the White Paper, a government policy document which announced Canada's intention to dissolve Indian nations and promote the "assimilation of Indian people into Canadian society."

Trudeau's White Paper was the last straw for Chief Manuel. His years spent trying to reform Canadian government policies had failed. "Canada was dead set on wiping out Indians once and for all," George recalled later. Collecting what he called the "best and the brightest Indian people I could find," George Manuel sought and won the Presidency of the National Indian Brotherhood in 1970. With the added power and resources of a country-wide organization and his "best and brightest," he set his mind and the minds of Indians across Canada to develop a strategy to defeat "Trudeau's White Paper." In countless speeches, meetings, interviews and strategy sessions, he beat the drum of resistance to Canada's assimilation policy. He urged the mightiest to turn the policy around and he pushed for more community political organization on the reserves. Grand Chief George Manuel died in 1989.

See: http://www.cwis.org/manuel.html

15. First President of the Manitoba Métis Association. See: http://www.mmf.mb.ca/cgi-bin/news.pl?action=600&id=100
16. Dr. Ahab Spence, a Tataskweyak Cree, became the president of the Manitoba Indian Brotherhood. He graduated in theology and became Archdeacon in the diocese of Saskatoon. Dr. Spence died in 2001. Ernest Benedict recalls that Abe Okpik had no problem discussing in Cree with Cree leaders. He probably became fluent in Cree during his stay at the Charles Camsell Hospital in Edmonton.
17. Omer Peters was an important native leader who greatly contributed to the organization of the Union of Ontario Indians and later to the National Indian Brotherhood. He was a Delaware or Lenni-Lenape and grew up in Moraviantown, Ontario. See: http://collections.ic.gc.ca/Indian/a78sep06.htm
18. For more information on the Indian Eskimo Association: http://www.trentu.ca/library/archives/75-015.htm
19. The organizer of the Indian Eskimo Association was an Air Force retired officer, Ernie McEwan, who had developed the air forces' 10BX plan for physical fitness. See: http://www.othermetis.net/WAM/WAMch4.html
20. Harold Cardinal wrote a book in response to Jean Chrétien's famous 1969 White Paper called *The Unjust Society*. This first book was followed by a second one, *The Red Paper*. "Cardinal studied law at prestigious universities like Harvard, was President of the Indian Association of Alberta, Chief of the Sucker Creek Band, Vice-Chief of the Assembly of First Nations and a Treaty 8 negotiator." See: http://www.firstnationsdrum.com/Sum2001/NAAA-Cardinal.htm
21. Wally Firth was the pilot of the airplane, a Cessna C-180. He was elected in 1972 and in 1974 as a member of Parliament for the New Democratic Party to represent the Northwest Territories.
22. The Blood Indians formed the Blackfoot Confederacy with the north Blackfoot, the south Blackfoot and the Piegans.
23. Lac Brochet is now a small Cree community of seven hundred north of Thompson, Manitoba.
24. As a remedy for the deteriorating economic conditions of Inuit in the fifties, the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources (Ottawa) offered financial support for Inuit economic development, private or co-operative; the Eskimo Loan Fund. [Mitchell:1996]
    The first co-operative experience in the Arctic was launched in George River, now Kangiqsualujjuaq in Nunavik, in 1959. There was no settlement at the time, but people were living in camps around the mouth of the George River.
    The purpose of the co-operative was not so much to provide consumer goods to the local population, as the Hudson's Bay Company trading

posts were already doing, but to find some economic alternatives to the unstable and collapsing fur market.

In the winter of 1959, logs were cut to build the first co-op building, which was erected the next summer. The co-op first organized commercial fisheries. Inuit were paid $0.15 a pound for their fish. Arts and crafts were also encouraged, including sewing and the very first experiences in soapstone carving. The co-op also bought blackberries and eider ducks.

In western Nunavut, there was no Hudson's Bay post in Pelly Bay [Kugaaruk]. The Roman Catholic mission maintained a stock of useful goods for the community. This small business operation probably motivated the Oblates to further push the small business venture. Father André Goussaert o.m.i. experimented in Gjoa Haven with a co-operative as early as 1957 [Personal communication]. The first officially incorporated co-ops in the Northwest Territories were opened in the early sixties in Cambridge Bay and Igloolik. By 1963, there were sixteen co-ops in operation including some Dene co-ops in the Mackenzie Valley.

Besides organizing the economic life of the communities, the co-op movement provided training and education for its staff and administrators, including basic accounting, management, merchandising, coordination of public meetings, etc. It created opportunities for debates about what was rapidly happening socially and the impacts on Inuit communities. Many important political Inuit leaders, such as Jack Anawak, emerged from the co-operative movement. Co-ops were the first "Inuit based" northern organizations and they prepared the ground for developing the first Inuit political organizations.

La Fédération des Co-opératives du Nouveau-Québec (FCNQ) was founded in 1967 with six co-op members, generating a total of approximately half a million dollars in sales. Twenty years later there were eleven co-op members selling over six million dollars a year.

A similar organization was founded in the Northwest Territories in 1972, including the Dene co-ops of the Mackenzie Valley: the Canadian Arctic Co-operative Federation Limited (CACFL).

The co-ops rapidly diversified their operations as more and more government money was spent in northern communities. From carvings and handicraft brokers they stepped into the retail business selling food, hardware, snowmobiles, oil, gasoline, etc., and they operated hotels, restaurants, taxis and so on.

The Federation, renamed Arctic Co-operatives Limited, had independently, some gross revenues of ninety-two million dollars in 2004.

25. Father André Steinmann, an Oblate missionary.
26. Father Louis Fournier, an Oblate missionary.
27. André Goussaert is now retired.

28. In 1996, the Toonoonik Co-op from Pond Inlet was still operating the Toonoonik Hotel in Iqaluit.
29. Stanley Knowles was the vice-president of the Co-operative Commonweath Federation party from 1954 to 1961. The CCF was transformed into the New Democratic Party in 1961. He represented Winnipeg North Centre in the House of Commons from 1942 to 1984.

Chapter 11

Project Surname

When we had the council meeting in Ottawa in 1967, it was the centennial year, and everybody was getting ready for the big event, and the opening of the Montreal Exposition. Air Marshall Hugh Campbell made a motion that we should inaugurate a medal for every man who had served the people well. Later on they made a motion, and that's when the Order of Canada became an honorable medal, which I have received.

The government introduced it early in 1967, and it has become pretty common now. Our centennial program started in the summer, and Rose and I were invited to have dinner with the Queen on July 5th in the Governor General's Residence, Rideau Hall. We had a couple of days off work.

After that we went back to Spence Bay, and I got to meet the people there. They had a different dialect, but it was very close to my Inupiaq dialect. I had no problem understanding them, and they also understood me when I used my dialect. Somehow, in that whole process of language spread among the Inuit, it seemed as if one group had leapfrogged another group. The Kuuvagmiut have a similar dialect to Inuit from Northern Quebec. The Inupiat have a similar dialect to the Netsilik and further south, right on the border of Manitoba, the Paallirmiut have a dialect similar to the Inupiat. The Tuktoyaktuk dialect is

well spread among the Kittigarmiut. Siglitun is pretty well understood all over, even in Greenland. This language is very fine. I think there is a common understanding.

Inupiat and all the North Slope people speak the same dialect. When I moved to Spence Bay, there were some people from Cape Dorset who had been there for years, Ernie Lyall and his family.[1] The Netsilingmiut were permanently there. I had no problems when I heard them talking, and I was able to communicate almost right away. One of the things that I found out, and I have said it before, was that I didn't know who lived in the East. But I got to know! I did quite a bit of travelling and hunting with them. The Netsilik people around Pelly Bay had their own system of hunting seals. I guess that's why they were given the name Netsilingmiut.

There's a place called Itsuaqtuq. It means you look down. I was really surprised at the techniques they used for hunting seals years ago, at certain times of the year. After the harp seals have pups, they migrate back and forth. Just outside of Ikpikkat, Thom Bay, right at the point, is the place they call Itsuaqtuq. It's in Committee Bay. When the daylight came back, they built a double layer *iglu*. They then made a hole in the ice, and they looked through it into the sea. It was a small hole, but so bright from the sun that you could see a long way down into the ocean. Every time a seal looked up, he would find this place, and thinking it was an *aglu*, it came up to breathe. They came up and the Inuit harpooned them. Some people explained to me that they got as many as twenty-four to thirty seals from one hole!

I learned something about their technology, which I never would have known had I not lived there and talked with them. There is an area where they used to hunt eider ducks in the Boothia Peninsula, right where it narrows, where Spence Bay is now. You can still see the ducks in the summer. They come right over on the other side, into Committee Bay. The Inuit had caribou antlers tied up,

and they lay down and waited. The eider ducks fly really low at night over the land when they migrate. There were bones and antlers[2] all over the place where they used to catch them. They got hundreds and hundreds of them, I guess.

So you had the chance to go to Pelly Bay in those years?

Oh yes. I have been there many times. I was there when they were building the airport, and I went down to the graveyard. I walked up to the little, what do you call it in your language, weir? The stone church was there. Father Henry was gone,[3] but Father Vandevelde was there.[4] You know these people were stone masons. They built that church with stones.

I met Asen Balikci coming back from the first trip after making the *The Netsilik Series*.[5] I saw those movies. Some of the Inuit are gone now, but I knew them well. There was Bernard Iquugaqtuq and Zacharie Itimangnaq and Sigguk. They are all gone now, but those films are a true representation of how we lived at one time. With simple hunting implements it is amazing how they used to survive! They had no whales as we had. In that area there is always ice, and in Committee Bay there are a lot of seals, and caribou on the land.

Father Goussaert was there at that time, and Father Vandevelde who I met in Hall Beach. Father Joseph Laberge was in Spence Bay. I met Father Rousselière in Pond Inlet later on.[6] They called him Ataata Mari. These people were all professional graduates from the old countries. They knew their literature very well!

Were you curious whether the people from Pelly Bay remembered Knud Rasmussen?

Oh yes, they told me that. In fact there are a few people that are still around who remember him. Yes, they said Knud stayed there. They couldn't say Knud, I guess, so they called him Kunuk. He spent quite some time

around there, according to the history that I read when I was in Greenland some years later. He wrote parts of the five volumes in what is called *The Fifth Thule Expedition*. I'm always, not angry, but disappointed, that most high schools in the Northwest Territories in Inuit country don't have copies. Here at the library they should have them, no matter how much they cost, because this is our culture. It is people's ancestors that they are talking about. Simon Awa's and Ben Ell's[7] grandfather is one of the ones mentioned in the book! This was the way they lived at that time! You don't see those books in any places in the libraries at all!

Did you hear any stories about the Franklin expedition[8] in this area?

Yes, there were a couple of them who had stories. Jose's grandmother was a little girl, and one time they were trekking out of Ikpikkat, Thom Bay. They were hunting around there. John Ross[9] had wintered right in Katsiaq Harbour; they called it that. He went in, got stuck and couldn't get out because of the ice. They were starving, and they spent a few years there. Avutiguk said one time they were travelling, and they saw this mast sticking out of the ocean. The ship had sunk and the mast was sticking up, and you know what they did? They knew it was good wood, but they had no saw, nothing to cut it with.

Was it John Ross's vessel?

Yes. *Victory* was the name of the ship.

It sank there?

It sank in Committee Bay somewhere. When there was no ice you could see the bones of it. Franklin was on the other side. He was in that area where Gjoa Haven is. The elders talked about when they found some bones. People were put in this boat, and they were starved to

death. That's on the mainland. The Inuit said that they had different shoes.

There were a couple of people hunting just outside King William Island, now called Uqsuqtuuq. They were eating raw seal meat. The Inuit saw people walking, pulling a boat. "Come and eat," they called. But they wouldn't come! They were very strict, and in fact the Inuit found out that they were carrying their silverware and stuff like that on their backs. That's the last thing I would take with me if I were lost on the land. They were packing the silverware, which was meaningless to Inuit. All that Inuit need is one knife.

So you heard some stories that the Netsilik met the rest of Franklin's expedition?

Some of them, yes. In fact they found a ship later. The story goes that there wasn't any light inside the ship. They knew there was something in the ship, so they found some implements, and thinking that they were above sea level, they made a hole, trying to make sure of what they were going to see! The hole they had made was at water level, and the ship started sinking, so they left! It's still out there somewhere. That's the story I heard.

Sir John Ross was very close to finding Franklin's people, but he was on the wrong side of Boothia Peninsula. That's about as much I know. But the Inuit talked about how they had seen these strange people, and there are a lot of stories about this. White men added to it, too. There was a last search by Patty Gibson, who was with the Hudson's Bay Company at that time. He found bones. That's about all I know. I have read a bit about the Franklin expedition.

I spent two years in Spence Bay. In 1969, the Territorial Council was having their meeting and Simonie Michael was there. They were having a meeting in Yellowknife, but he didn't say anything. It was private. He had planned to say, "My name is Simonie Michael. Why did you give me a number?" But that was just between him and I.

Well, the next time he was in a council meeting in Yellowknife, which the government had moved to the Elks Hall, he wanted to know why, when he was a territorial councillor, he was getting his mail from the government under the number Simonie E7-551. That's when I got involved. The Edmonton Journal reported that, "a councillor has asked to have a review about his number." I guess Stu Hodgson was a little upset when it went in the press. The press took it, and they blew it up and Duncan Pryde and Bobby Williamson who were also territorial councillors talked back and forth.

When I had my first holidays from Spence Bay, I spent about a month in Edmonton. My wife Rose and I used to go down to the industrial airport, not far from where we were staying, to see who was coming in and out. One time there was Stu Hodgson and his wife Pearl, who I knew very well. They came off the plane, and I was sitting in a corner talking to somebody. Stu Hodgson said, "Come here Abe!" and I went to him. He said, "Abe, I want you to go back, right now if you can. You've got to do this now. Tomorrow morning you report to your office in Fort Smith. I got a job for you to do!" So I asked, "What is it? Tell me!" He replied, "Well Abe, you have to get rid of the disc numbers...they've got to go!" You know he was very embarrassed about how it came out in the press.

So the next morning I phoned up a representative of the Northwest Territories government, Lee Post, in our office in Edmonton and asked him to get my plane tickets ready, and I went to Fort Smith. My regular director was Ewan Cotterill,[10] and he already knew about the project. The message was, "Get this thing going!" So I left my family and went to Fort Smith. When I got there June Carter said, "Abe, you better do this!" But I had to pick up my stuff in Spence Bay, so I went there and packed up. This took a week. In the meantime my mother had died, and I went to her funeral, and then went back to Fort Smith. Ewan said, "You go to Yellowknife and get a hold

of the secretary!" His name was Harold Cross, a very intelligent man. He was the head of all the centennial projects that they had for 1970 commemorating one hundred years of Northwest Territories history.

Harold said, "You have to go to each community to interview people." I had to draw up a pamphlet and send it to every community, through the RCMP, explaining "my little project." I sent it to all the communities in both Inuktitut and English. I had to inform the people to let them know why I was coming there. This was the summer of 1969, and that's when I got involved with Project Surname.

The first trip I made was to Holman. I knew the people from before, when I had trapped there. Some of them had married since 1955, and this was '69 now, fourteen or fifteen years later. I stayed there a whole week trying to get people to understand. I used to go to the church, which they used as a meeting place, and talk to them there. I went back to Yellowknife and reported that the people took the surname pretty well, because they wanted to have a second name. They were already using their own second names. But then in the East it was different. They had to use their disc numbers for pay cheques, school attendance and for mail. They still used their numbers a lot. They were still strongly attached to the numbers.

In the West, in places like Coppermine, and even in our area, people had their own second names. They were not registered the way they are now, but everybody used them. Because I'm an Allen, they called me Abe Allen. My father's name was Allen, and all my brothers' names were Allen. They still use some of that over there. They never used the numbers, but in the East, they used them; even when I was administrator. This is E-5 and W-1 is the area around Spence Bay and Pelly Bay. I had to use the numbers for referencing the people I was talking about, writing a memorandum and so on.

The second trip I made was to Resolute Bay, and then to Pond Inlet to do some research on what the people thought about it. I reported back after being away two weeks. There were no regular airlines in those days. The first time I went was in the fall, and I spent a week there. I got to know the people. I knew some from before when they were passing through Iqaluit. I worked with Eli Panipakoocho, a retired special constable's son, and with Benjamin Arreak, Annie Palluk's brother. We worked for two weeks, and then I went back to report what the people thought.

Some of the things they asked about, older people that is, were, "Would it be all right with the minister? Would it be all right with the RCMP? Would it be all right with our pension?" I had to explain these things to them. "You know it's up to you," I would say. In the meantime, I had five girls in the office working on statistics, just taking the numbers, making a file on each community, and comparing these with RCMP reports. The police had a disc number list in their files that they updated every year when someone was born or was deceased. Each area had a sub-division, E-7, E-1, E-2, E-3 in which they recorded everything for years.

I got involved with that, and I got a copy of all the statistics that were recorded in the disc lists. I took the disc number and a blank form and asked people, "Do you want to change your name or do you want to keep this one here?" That's how it started. I never said that I gave them names! That's a wrong impression. I was only asking if they wanted to use the name they had, or change it to their ancestors' name. And they did, most of them did.

When I first started, it was difficult because I didn't know the Keewatin people. I had never been in that area. I knew the West a bit, and I had been to Pangnirtung and Cape Dorset only once. I knew the people here from affiliation with that Apex community association. People used

to come there and talk. But when I went to the Keewatin area, I was really baffled!

I only knew one person [in Rankin Inlet] who used to work with us. He became a businessman. His name was Chessley Russell.[11] He was an ex-Hudson's Bay Company manager from Baffin Island. He had been at Cape Dorset at one time. He'd been there five years without leaving. He spoke Inuktitut fluently, and I stayed with him in a hotel. In October I went to Churchill, and I waited nine days to go to Eskimo Point (Arviat). They have a different dialect and different ways, and I didn't know anybody. I heard a few people mention that I had a different dialect. I knew a few people at Coral Harbour; they were all Ben Ell's relatives, the guy who lived here in Iqaluit. They worked on the Dew line, and they knew my brothers. I didn't know the people of the Keewatin at all, except the ones that had worked in the mine in Yellowknife.

Eskimo Point must have been very small at the time?

Yes. It was not too big! They had a school. I had to stay in the administrator's house. He had a, what do you call it, a suspended basement?[12] I stayed with him for, oh, it must have been nine or ten days. I always appreciated people like Mark Kalluak, who's a well noted person, as he was willing to help me. There was also Father Ducharme, and the Anglican minister who was just starting to work in Arviat, Jimmy Muckpah, from Pond Inlet. I got along pretty well in that area.

Then I went to Baker Lake. Oh!!! Those Baker Lake people were like people from here. You know, there are people here from Port Harrison, people from Pond Inlet and from all different settlements. This is a kind of a melting pot, but in Baker Lake they had Qairnirmiut, Paallirmiut, Sanningajuurmiut, and Savvaqturmiut, all not together yet. They had their own traditional ways of doing things, like the Indians, you know, the Cree and the Blackfoot. They were a bit like that. I had an interpreter,

and once they started talking, I had to really listen to what they were saying, because they had such a different dialect. They said, "*imaa.*" I said, what's that mean? "Yes," they said. They also said *matnaluaq* which means, thank you very much! That's the kind of thing I went through, and it took me two years. I started in August, 1969, and I completed Project Surname in September, 1971. It took me twenty-four months to finish the last report.

So you had to go to all the communities?

Yes, all the communities! Iqaluit was not bad because I knew the people, and all I did was to put a bunch of files on the table and wait at the Hudson's Bay store over at Apex. When the Inuit came to the store in the morning, we would call them over. I had a good assistant, Moe Kilabuk, who's in school now, I think.

In Igloolik, it was nice, too, because I worked with a man there by the name of Caleb Apak. Now this was strange. His father was an Anglican missionary, a minister. His name was Noah Nasuk. He had three sons, one was Mark Evaloarjuk who had been a territorial member of the Legislative Assembly. He had been adopted, but he was the real son of Nasuk. Caleb was his oldest son, and the younger was Josiah Kadlutsiak.

We all got together and Nasuk said, "What are we going to do? Will you be called Nasuk?" They disagreed on that. "No. I'm going to be Evaloarjuk because of my namesake from my ancestors," one said. Caleb Apak said, "I will keep my grandmother's name." Josiah Kadlusiak said, "I have my grandfather's mother's name and I'll keep that." I said, "It's up to you, to the family!" They also said, "We'll keep the family informed. They know that we are all related and very close." This was very important to them.

That's when we tried the [standardized] spelling. Remember I said I was in Ottawa working with Raymond Gagné, the linguist, and he was trying to set up a writing system that everybody could read. We eliminated some

letters. We were using only fifteen letters; no Os, no Es, no Ds, no Bs or things like that. We were using that orthography. I worked with Caleb Apak who was very influential. He was well-read in the Bible and in some other areas.

We worked together for fifteen days, and we asked people what name they wanted. Some of their children were in Churchill, Manitoba, and I interviewed them and told them, "You have to spell your name right!" Caleb was well aware of this writing system, so we started using Q instead of K. For example, there was one person named Kiamarkjuak, spelled K-i-a-m-a-r-k, you know, j-u-a-k. There was Father Thibert's dictionary. I don't know if you know Father Thibert's Inuktitut dictionary? The spelling was all distorted, because he didn't know the new orthography. We looked at it, and we started changing the spellings of names.

Quassa is spelled Q-u-a-s-s-a. We talked to his father. Paul was in school in Churchill. I got a nasty letter when I came back to my office. It said, "Who asked you to change my name?" He wanted to be called Koassa. But I wrote him back, and I said, "It is not spelled with a K it's a Q!" Q, you know, like in *qimmiq* but they write *kimmik* in Igloolik! So we talked about it. It was interesting.

I didn't get too many negative reactions over the names, but some of them were a bit much. I made my first trip to Holman in 1955. This couple I knew got married when they were young. They had seven children, I believe. His name was Roy Inuktalik, and I had a list of his family members. They had six or seven children, and each one had a different spelling for Inuktalik. It was simple I-n-u-k-t-a-l-i-k; that's the way to spell it. Some of them had E-e-n-o-o-t-a-l-i-k or something. There were seven different spellings! I said, "Which one are you going to take?" Roy said, "I'll take the shortest one!"

Father Lapointe first wrote Inuktalik the way he heard it, I guess. If you got somebody with a Ukrainian background or an RCMP officer or a Hudson's Bay manager, or

a clerk from Scotland, or an Anglican minister from England, or the nurse who was also probably English, they just wrote the name the way they thought it should be written when the children were born. There were seven different spellings of the one name! Inuktalik is a common name, you know, and an ancient name, but that's how I found out that everything was distorted in some places. When I was in Baker Lake, I saw this one name. I had a registered copy of the disc numbers and the names with me all the time, and when I was in Baker Lake I saw this fellow named Qaumajuk, you know, Q-a-u-m-a-j-u-k. But his name was written C-o-w-m-a-y-o-k-e, like Cow ma yoke. That's the way he wrote it! I should have kept a copy of that.

The other name I remember was from the time when I was in Pangnirtung. There were a lot of Kilabuks there; it's a common name, very, very common. But when the RCMP officer years ago registered a Kilabuk he wrote K-i-l-l-a-b-u-c-k, in large letters. Kill a buck. Ha! ha! ha! So very close, but it always struck me as funny! People didn't really understand. They were just doing their best! They thought they were doing a good job!

I was getting frustrated, too! I didn't go to Repulse Bay or Whale Cove because of poor weather conditions. No airplane! I waited fifteen days in Igloolik during the fall, and then in the spring, in May, I waited ten days in Broughton Island. There was fog at the bottom of the bay, and the plane couldn't land. It was not a pleasant time to travel, with no regular airlines. The only ticket I had was with Nordair to Resolute Bay and Hall Beach, and in the West with Pacific Western Airlines to Cambridge Bay.

I got to know more pilots, and I got many free rides. My budget was about thirty nine thousand dollars, and I did the whole thing for only nineteen thousand dollars. I bummed a ride with my briefcase! When there was construction, I went to the community and stayed there until the next supplies came in. Then I jumped on the plane

and got out! It was fun, but you never knew when you were going to leave! We had no means of communication! The only places where I could make contact with the outside were at Cambridge Bay and Broughton Island, because the Dew line was still there. I could phone from the Dew line at Pelly Bay to reach government services.

I had all this information. I went to each community and had a meeting with public health, the Roman Catholic priest and the RCMP privately. They had seen my pamphlets, so they knew what was happening. They were very helpful. But it was really a headache in the end, especially when you got stuck in a place like Baker Lake where the wind was blowing from the same direction every day! I would think, "What's going on here?" I was trying to get home for Christmas in Fort Smith! I was away for three months in that area. Igloolik was not bad, neither was Coral Harbour. I had to start around ten o'clock in the morning after the kids were gone to school. I would go to everybody's home and talk to everyone individually.

Some people were very co-operative, but some said, "Why are you taking the number away? It worked for us all this time!" I was happy to meet the first Inuk. That was what I always called him. His name was Jimmy Gibbons. He was a special constable in Eskimo Point, but he was originally from around Chesterfield Inlet. His name was Uvinik in Inuktitut and his number was E1-1, so I called him the first Eskimo. Ha, ha, ha! He's dead now of course, but that's the type of thing I came across. Even Ernie Lyall, who was a white man, had a number because he married an Inuk woman from Kinngait.

So I spent thirteen months away from home out of the twenty-four months I was working on the project. Thirteen months away from home; it seemed a long time. Sometimes I would not get back for two months. I didn't know whether my family was okay. In fact, Kevin was a

little boy at that time, and when I came back home, he didn't know who I was. He spent quite a bit of time in the hospital himself. He was born with a bum ankle.

There were no airlines flying across from Iqaluit, to Rankin Inlet, to Yellowknife. This was in 1969-'70. If I wanted to go to Iqaluit or Resolute Bay from Yellowknife, I had to go to Edmonton, Montreal, Kuujjuaq, Iqaluit, at that time Frobisher Bay, and then on to Resolute Bay. There were no scheduled flights. You had to make your own schedule!

When I went to the Keewatin, I had to go to Edmonton, to Winnipeg and then north to Churchill. It wasn't so much the travelling, but the idea of trying to get there. I only chartered to one place. From Iqaluit I went to Hall Beach and Igloolik, and I had to come back to Iqaluit in order to get to Pelly Bay, because the airline did not go there. I phoned my secretary and said, "I don't want to go all the way back. It's only twelve hundred dollars to charter." They came and picked me up and I went from Hall Beach to Pelly Bay, which was called Arviligjuaq at that time. It was less than an hour's flight, so that saved me a lot of time.

But in the summer of 1970, I had to go south to Montreal, from Yellowknife, and then to Great Whale River,[13] Poste de la Baleine [Kuujjuaraapik], and Sanikiluaq, in the southern part of the Northwest Territories. Port Burwell still had people living there then, but I only found about three childbirths registered with the Northwest Territories; most were registered with Quebec or Ontario.[14] They were all registered in different districts and recorded with Quebec birth certificates. I couldn't do anything about that. The Inuit were all strung out on Great Whale River. I guess that's where the subdivision was, and when the RCMP used to do their patrol, that was beyond their jurisdiction; that was Quebec stuff. I enjoyed the trip though. I spent one week in Sanikiluaq and three days in Port Burwell, and then I came over here to Iqaluit.

I didn't go to Repulse Bay or Whale Cove because of the weather. As there were no airlines going there, I wasn't going to wait around until after Christmas. That was kind of a long trip, you know. You had to go all the way around. After all that travelling, when I got back after three months, I had to do a report on my expenses and my tickets.

One time, when I was in Igloolik, I spent fifteen days trying to get out of there in October. Sometimes there was stormy weather! There, I also saw a migration of lemmings! I mean, I'm talking about for the first time in my life. I had heard about it and I read about it; a migration of lemmings! There were hundreds of them going towards the ocean! In the morning I woke up. It was dark when I got there. I saw nine snowy owls sitting on top of those poles. The lemmings were out moving. You know, they were all over the place. They had come in, just shortly after freeze-up, from the mainland. Hundreds, no word of a lie; I never saw anything like it before. I have seen migrations in places, but nothing like that. I saw some of their survival instincts at work. I read about these migrations in Norway, or somewhere in parts of Alaska, in the *Readers Digest*.

But anyway, I did my expenses. For the time I was in Igloolik, instead of saying, "Weather was bad," I just wrote A.O.G. and I put in the amount of money.

What is an A.O.G.?

I'll tell you later. It was way after Christmas and I was getting ready to leave for my last trip when my secretary said, "Abe, Mr. Cross wants to see you." He worked above me upstairs. "What the hell did I do? Is something wrong?" I said to myself. He called me into his office and closed the door and said, "Sit down!" I thought he was going to discipline me for something that I might have missed. "Tell me Abe, what is this A.O.G. about?" I said, "Sir, when I first joined the government I read the regulations I had to follow. When I was travelling from Winnipeg to

Ottawa one time, we got stuck because of the weather. I said, "That was an Act of God!" He just looked at me. I said, "Well it is in your regulations."

In the old days, if you stopped in one place, say Saskatchewan, because the weather was bad you stayed there. Wherever your airplane landed, you stayed. It was stated in the regulations that it was only by an Act of God that you could claim these things. So that's how it came about. Ha, ha, ha! I told that story one time in Yellowknife at the Caribou Carnival to the public. They thought that was funny. Act of God! Ha, ha, ha! So he accepted that, and I was happy! He just didn't understand what A.O.G. meant. It was in the statutes of the civil service regulations.

In the same family, Abe, people would pick different names?

Yes. There was for instance, Elisapee Davidee, who's well known here. The daughters called themselves Davidee but the old man said his name was Ulluakallak, Davidee Ulluakallak. That was his Inuktitut name you know.

I have a brother whose name is Elijah Allen, because he took Allen as his surname. But my name is Abraham Okpik. The year I was born, my birth was recorded by Corporal Fielding, I think his name was. I am the only one in the family registered as Okpik. Another brother of mine was registered as Kisoun. Even though people were brothers and sisters, they would decide on their own name. I didn't give people a name. I just spelled the name for them if they couldn't.

My name is not Okpik; my name is Auktalik, which is the name of my namesake, my father's uncle. I am very proud of that. I also have two other names given to me by others. Every Inuk in our culture had more that two names to identify a close relationship that took place before. The word *auktalik* means the one who has a mole. One of my godmothers, the one that helped my mother when I was born, gave me her mother's name, just to remember her. Then some old guy lost a daughter and he called me Sila. The name Sila

is pretty well known all across the Arctic. And then I have Okpik,[15] which means a willow, not Ukpik. But when I came to live around here, every body said Ukpik, which means a snowy owl, and I accepted it because there is not much willow around here to compare to it. Ha, ha, ha! Tulugaq is another of my names. This name is used around here too; it means raven. There is also Avinngaq which means a lemming, and Kanajuq, which means a sculpin, and Natsiapik, which means a cute seal, used all across the country. But some of the names are old, like Kuutu.

Are there Inuit names that you find all across the country?

Yes. Yes. Onalik, which means the one with a harpoon, is one of them. Inuit still have their ancient names. When you say Kuutu, it's so ancient we don't know what it really means anymore, but it is a name. Maybe when they first developed the namesake…

Do you find the name Kuutu in the West?

Oh yes. In Alaska we had Iqaluk, which means a fish, and all over there is Naujaq, which means a seagull. They named them by who they were. So that was the way this worked!

So to introduce a surname was something very different, a different practice from tradition?

Yes. In the old days everybody knew everybody, and they didn't need to call them this and that. It's only on official letterhead, or when you're working in an office, or when you go to school that you need to be identified by your surname!

For government purposes...

Yes; and also to distribute Family Allowances. Each district had a number like E-1, E-2, or E-3. Here it was E-7. It was a big district out of Lake Harbour. E-5 was up in Pond Inlet; E-6 was Pangnirtung, Clyde River and

Broughton; E-4 was around Spence Bay; E-3 was Rankin; E-2 was Padlei and E-1 was Eskimo Point. In the West, W starts right from the borderline of Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Anybody east of there had an E number and anybody west of there had a W number.

I happened to be in the last part of the W-3 district, and when I came back from the hospital my mother gave me my number. I said, "What's that?" "That's your identification number," she said. It was W3-441 or 445, I forget which! I still have it at home! I never really used it until I got it from my mother. At that time when they had Family Allowances, it was very useful, and for going to court was another one. They still could use that number if they wanted to. I used to file stacks of them. I'd go to the Supreme Court in the Northwest Territories on special days, Thursday mornings I guess, and swear that I endorsed the names and stamped the document.

When did they stop giving new numbers?

In 1971 was the last one I think, because Operation Surname was completed as a Northwest Territories centennial project. I forget, the number was maybe 3000 something, E-7 3000. Dennis, who was adopted in 1962, has the number E-7 from 1969. He wasn't born that year but that was his number. It would have gone on longer and longer, I guess, but people wrote about it and objected. Some of the kids were happy to have their name written finally. People like Jonah Kelly who was in school at that time, and Moses Kelly who joined the armed forces later.

The communities were very supportive of what you were doing?

Oh yes! Both missions, Anglicans and Roman Catholics were supportive. They had a lot of influence on people. I had a few difficulties with Father Vandevelde. He said that these people should never have had their names changed. I said, "What are you talking about, Father?"

He said, "Well, some of them have very good names. I said, "You mean, you are telling me about naming! What are you calling them? You baptize a child by the name of Dolorosa, or Geneveva, or Angelico. These are not common Inuit names." He was from Belgium and he brought all the names of his relatives, I suppose. Ha, ha, ha! He couldn't answer that. He gave me a map with all the names of places outside of Pelly Bay in Inuktitut, every lake and river. I saw it in the museum in Yellowknife, I think, one time. They were debating whether they should adapt the names of the regional places, and I think that's where it started. This guy worked all his life with Inuit!

He is still alive!

Oh yes, I guess so, living in Belgium. He was an interesting person, you know. He was a hard core type too, powerful when he was young. The priests I met were all very, very good, such as Father Choque and Father Goussaert. They all understood very well.

They were mostly Europeans.

Yes. But they were all very learned people. Put it this way, I am an Anglican, but I just assume if you converse with a Roman Catholic priest and with an Anglican from England, they have different views. Ha, ha, ha! The odd bottle of wine doesn't hurt anybody! I guess that's what they meant!

Our tape is finished! I didn't see the light flashing. I was listening to you.

In other words you were enthralled! That's what they told me one time. I kept listeners on their toes listening.

You met people like Jose in Pelly Bay? What's his other name?

Angutingnungniq! He was a big strong-looking man, and he played the drum, too. He and his cousin showed me how. I played only once in Ottawa, about three years

ago. They had Korea Day, and they invited me to make an appearance, and I sat around. Serapio Ittusardjuat and his wife were there singing and drum dancing. I had to get up and do my thing. They thought I was one of them. To understand it though, you have to listen. When Angutingnungniq drum dances, I think he goes into some kind of a trance; you could see it in his eyes!

I saw that in Pelly Bay. I was so surprised because elders would gather together. I was teaching there for the College and I walked into the town hall. The elders were playing drums, and the old ladies were singing at the back. I never saw anything like that elsewhere.

You know why? These people here think that it is the Devil's work! That's what I said, you know.

Whalers brought their own chaplains here, telling Inuit that drum dancing was evil. Even in Alaska, when I go there, I dance my style and I get really, very happy. Just like the Indians, they sing their songs. It's the same idea.

NOTES

1. Ernie Lyall wrote his autobiography, "Because I was fed up with all the baloney in so many books written about the North." (Lyall 1979: back cover) See: Lyall, Ernie, 1979, *An Arctic Man*, Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers.
2. When telling this story, Abe made the motion of throwing the caribou antlers or bones up in the air which would bring the ducks down.
3. First Oblate missionary to live among the Netsilingmiut of Pelly Bay. See; Choque, Charles, 1985, *Kajualuk, Pierre Henry, o.m.i., Apostle of the Inuit*, Montréal: Médiaspaul.
4. Frans Vandevelde, born in Belgium in 1909, arrived in Repulse Bay as an Oblate missionary in 1937. Father Vandevelde worked mostly in Kugaaruk, but also in Hall Beach and Igloolik. He retired to Belgium in 1986 having spent fifty years amongst the Inuit. He wrote many articles about Inuit culture and language and facilitated the production of the *Netsilik Series*. He died in February, 2002.
5. Asen Balikci was a professor of anthropology at the Université de Montréal until 1994. He did extensive field work with the Netsilik in Pelly Bay from 1957 to 1965. He was the consultant anthropologist for the National Film Board of Canada in the production of the *Netsilik Series*. He is presently living in Sofia, Bulgaria. For a short biography of Asen Balikci, see: http://www.iwf.de/va-origins/biograph/bal_2.htm Also, about the Netsilik and the Netsilik Series project, see: http://www.aboutnetsilik.com/history.htm#balikci
   Balikci , Asen, 1970, *The Netsilik Eskimo*, New-York: The Natural History Press.
6. Guy Mary-Rousselière [1913-1994] was the editor of *Eskimo* magazine for many years. He accidentally died in Pond Inlet when his trailer burned down. See; Choque, Charles, 1998, *Guy Mary-Rousselière 1913-1994*, Montréal: Médiaspaul.
7. Ben Ell passed away in Iqaluit in April, 2001. He was 67.
8. Sir John Franklin was the most famous explorer in the British Admiralty. His first two land expeditions in 1819 and 1826 to the Canadian Arctic made him a hero in Great Britain as well as in the international scientific community. He became even more famous after his third expedition of 1845 with the two prestigious ships the *Erebus* and the *Terror*. The fate of the Franklin expedition is an unsolved mystery to this day.

   > On May 19, 1845, Franklin left the Thames River with two ships, the Erebus and the Terror, and 134 men. He left well equipped for this new expedition: food for three years, including a large quantity of canned food, as well as ships heated using a pipe system and with propellers powered by a steam engine. Each ship was fitted with a dining room arrayed with porcelain, crystal and

silverware as well as a large library. The ships headed, as planned, towards Lancaster Sound. Europeans saw them for the last time in Baffin Bay on June 26.

From 1847 to 1859, of the some 30 major expeditions to find Franklin, only four found signs of his last expedition. In 1850, Horatio T. Austin and William Penny learned from the Inuit that Franklin spent the winter of 1845-1846 on Beechey Island in Barrow Strait. In 1854, John Rae of the Hudson's Bay Company was informed that the expedition was in difficulty in the area around King William Island and found traces that confirmed this fact. In 1859, Francis L. McClintock found other traces and human remains on the same island as well as two brief notes.

From: http://www.collectionscanada.ca/explorers/h24-1830-e.htm

9. John Ross' expedition was trapped in the ice from 1829 to 1833. This was the first time that a British expedition wintered for so long in the Arctic. The vessel, that had to be abandoned, was called the *Victory*, and Ross and his crew would sail back to England on the *Arctic*. When Ross heard of the fate of the Franklin's expedition, at the age of seventy two, he decided to lead an expedition sponsored by the Hudson's Bay Company to find Franklin. See: http://www.collectionscanada.ca/2/24/h24-1810-e.html
10. Ewan Cotterill eventually became Deputy Commissioner of the Northwest Territories.
11. His Inuktitut name was Aupaqtuq.
12. A suspended basement is a two story house that has the living room and bedrooms on the second floor and the furnace, storage and utility rooms on the first floor. One enters the house from the basement first floor and uses stairs to get to the living space on the second floor. These houses were built across the Arctic during the 1960s.
13. The Inuit community of Great Whale River on the eastern coast of Hudson's Bay in Nunavik is now known as Kuujjuaraapik. The French name was Poste de la Baleine. Whapmagoostui is the name of the small Cree community neighbouring Kuujjuaraapik.
14. Port Burwell was located on Killiniq Island (Lat 60 25'N Long. 64 50'W) off the northern tip of Labrador. The Hudson's Bay Company opened up a trading post there in 1916. The RCMP opened up a station in 1920 and from the 1960s the Northwest Territories government provided some services to the few families living on the island. In 1978, the GNWT closed down the community. See: http://www.pinetreeline.org/other/other8/other8ba.html
15. In standard orthography the word for willow is written Uqpik. The standard orthography for a snowy owl is Ukpik.

Chapter 12

You call it Supernatural, for Us It is Survival!

Remember, I talked to you about names among the Inuit known across North America; some of them are so ancient.

When I was doing Project Surname I realized that some of the Inuit names were made-up names that most other people, especially the Europeans or those who were teaching, were hesitant to use because some of them referred to body parts! There is for instance Itinnuaq, which means "the little rectum." I mean, I'm just translating this! Igjujuak means "the big testicles" and Igjuki means "a person with small testicles," or balls, I guess. Then there are names referring to the vagina such as, Utsutuurniut, which means "a tool to play with a big vagina," and Utsullukkut, which means "a misshapen vagina" and names like Qabluquttaarjuk, which means "someone's own little eyebrow." All these names had something to do with body parts!

I talked to people as they were deciding on a name. "Why use that name?" I asked. They didn't know why! I went in depth into the whole naming thing, because I wanted to make sure that it wasn't put there as a joke or as an intimidation. So I talked to a couple of elders, Johnny Ayaruaq was one of them. He grew up in the Keewatin. I went to Rankin Inlet and I talked to him quite a bit. I

got to know him well. I asked him, "Why do people call themselves such names?" It wasn't only him I talked to, I also found out information from Maktar who was his cousin. Then there were Pelly Bay and Taloyoak. I recorded some of the names.

People all agreed. In the old, old days there was no doctor, of course. There was a shaman, maybe. Some women would have a hard time delivering a child perhaps because she broke a taboo, or a family member broke a taboo. For example, there were certain foods pregnant women couldn't eat. Well, once she started labour, the child had to be born. So some people got together, relatives, and they sat around chanting a name. They sang out Nuvujaq, cloud; Tulugaq, raven; or Nanuq, polar bear or other names. Somehow they used what you call in your language the power of words, or the power of suggestion to find the right name and allow the child to be born.

When they said something, it became what was said. This happens in different cultures. They explained that they started chanting while the women were in labour, and they would say anything just to help. Then when the right name was mentioned, the child came out. Someone named after that word would have a lot of power.

I'll explain that. I was talking with Simon Awa's grandfather, Uyarak. When he was still a young man, he met Knud Rassmusen and he travelled with him. He was Simon Awa's grandfather, Johanasi Uyarak. He's an old guy now, but he told me that they also used the power of suggestion when they were hunting, they kind of chanted. He said that he had seen people who, when a walrus was not drifting close to their camp, and they wanted to retrieve it, would get some old guy to hum, or sing, or go into a trance, so the walrus would come close. In the Inupiaq language we call that *atulluk*. Those people said that they could call the animal closer to their premises. That's the same power of suggestion in the speech, or the supernatural.

It happened in other situations, too. For example, if you saw a lone raven and you were hunting near it, my uncles and my in-laws used to do this. In fact, my uncle used to say, "*Tulugaq*! *Tulugaq*! *Tuktuturaluqiq! Nunannut!*" which means, "Raven! Raven! Take me to where there are nice caribou! Take me to their land!" The raven would flap its wings just like it heard you, and you could hear the sound of its wings going, whoosh, whoosh, whoosh as it just fluttered over. My brother in-law strongly believed in that. He would turn his dogteam in that direction, and then he finally would find a caribou. It's an indicator of some sort.

Now I'm not just saying this because I have seen it once. I know about it; it's used all across the Inuit world. I was talking to somebody about polar bear hunting in Clyde River and that's far from my area. We were just sitting around talking and he said, "You know those ravens are very intelligent creatures for this country." He said, "I went polar bear hunting with a dogteam and I saw a raven and I asked it to go towards a polar bear. Sure enough, if you turn your dogs around, there's a polar bear right there for you." This is true. This happened not once, but several times.

I mean this is not just a made-up story. It's something that has always been used. I also talked to Johanasi Uyarak about it. It is a form of *qilaniq,* which means that you are not guessing which one is which. It's like when they look for a water-well. They use a branch and if it bends, and they can't hold it, it's there that they drill! It's the same thing on the land. Uyarak told me a story about it, and I also heard it in the West. My brother-in-law tried it. Although that was taboo to them then, he tried it and he said it worked.

In the Pelly Bay area, the Netsilik people had a different system, but similar. In the West, in my grandfather's time and even in my father's time, they called it *qilajuq.* You know, when they would go out hunting,

they would tie up their dogs. They had a wooden staff, a *tasaupiaq*, like a helper. They put their mitts on it, and put it across their legs, and they would ask something. Sometimes it would move, but when it held, that's where the animal was!

I spent fifteen days in Igloolik when Johanasi Uyarak was already an old man then. He said one time, as a young man, he and another guy were out polar bear hunting beyond Fury and Hecla Straits, in the Committee Bay area. There are a lot of polar bears around there in the springtime. After they camped, they saw some polar bears, and that same morning they followed the two polar bears' tracks. Johanasi said he was just travelling with the other hunters.

One of the hunters said to another, "Take off your parka." The man took his parka off, and he put it on the ground and lay on it. The first man tied his whip around the other man's head and said, "Face toward the polar bear tracks that are going that way." So the hunter started chanting and tried to lift the man's head. The head moved off the caribou parka, so he took the parka and put it on the other tracks. He put the man's head back down and started chanting again. This time, the first hunter couldn't lift his friend's head! "Now," he said, "We're going to catch a polar bear." In a short while, they saw a polar bear that had just caught a seal. It was full and was sleeping when they came to it, and they got it. This is not a mystery. This is true. How would you say? It is true communication with the wilderness or with whatever.

Was this the same Awa that Rasmussen was talking about in his book?

Yes, yes, the same. Johanasi Uyarak was his son.

Oh, his son.

Ah, well, his old father was a medicine man, the same Awa, yes. He knew Knud Rasmussen when he was a young man.

People followed a different system then. Now they think it is taboo. But they had some instinct, which is nothing bad! There was no way you could change that, because that was how they survived. There were always some people who would have strange dreams. They would say, "We're going to get something!" Some people would say, "I have a strange hunch, or a strange feeling." Sure enough, there are things that people know about, but they will never tell you about how they know. It's their own personal feeling. That's part of their tradition. A person could give it to someone, if they were trusting.

I have a nephew, still alive today, who uses the same thing with a sinew or a thread. He said that when he wants to go trapping somewhere, he asks this thread, and it shows him where to go trapping for foxes. That's his style. He does things his own way!

I used to see my grandmother use a dry caribou sinew. You know the flat one? She would tell us, "The weather's going to change soon!" You could see the sinew was very soft and damp. When it dried up, we would get dry weather. They knew that. It was like a barometer.

It worked for them. These are the kinds of things that most people don't believe. The English people whom you try to tell such things to usually say, "That's gibberish. That's nonsense!" But they never really try to understand the methods that we used.

I do know that the Netsilik and the people from Spence Bay, and Gjoa Haven, and Cambridge Bay, Coppermine and Holman knew about that. I don't know about my area, but some people in Alaska and out in the islands used some of that same traditional communication.

I've seen it, too. They close their eyes and they think, and they kind of visualize something. You know, you call it extrasensory perception or something. They used that! Maybe not often, but some people had a gift for that. That was how they survived, more or less, using these things.

Talking about naming people; I have a grandson named Umigiluk, but his real English name is Lionel. I try to treat him as he treated me. You know, I try to make him like Umigiluk, my uncle, who is long since dead. He's the one who taught me how to do certain things in life when I was growing up. He cared a lot for me.

When we name a child, the namesake lives on. The soul dies and the body is gone, but you have the name, and you have to raise the child as the person you knew. That's how most of us were raised in our time, people of my age. They gave us something that we could use.

There is a drum dancing song in the West that, before my namesake Auktalik died, he taught my father and three brothers to sing. They still use that. It's a kind of a chant, to make people happy. We call that *atuvalluk.* It means, leaving a song of love or whatever it is. They still use it when they are drum dancing. People claim it is theirs, but it's not theirs. It belongs to our family. They used to sing songs about happy times.

The one thing I do know, and I travelled quite a bit talking to the elders, is that they never, never talk about the sorrowful times. They always talk about the good times, good things they have seen. Later on, some legends came out with some sorrowful meanings.

How come some individuals end up with two or three names, with more than one name?

Oh. That. I have three names. My main name is Auktalik, which means a mole. I have two other names. There were two women who died about the same time. One of them was the mother of the one that brought me into this world; she helped my mother. Her mother had died so she said, "I'll give him her name, too." The other woman who died was called Sila, which is a name from Alaska used all across the North. This old man and his wife had a daughter who died quite a while back. I never met her, but she died about the same time. They loved her

so much, and they just called me Sila. It was my name. Even when I was growing up, the elders used to say to me, "How's my *aapuq*, spouse doing?" That's the name they used. We say *aippaq* over here. All this is going away, but we still hang on to it in some way. It's a very strong tie with the people.

So, at your birth you had three names?

Yes, well shortly after. As soon as they found out I was born, as Auktalik was the shaman at that time, they figured that maybe they should give me another name.

Now, some of the people explained that you could give a name to a person who was sick; you could change their name, and give them a new name. That works too. I haven't experienced that, but I do know that I heard about it.

As a cure?

Yes, spiritually, or whatever. That was a very traditional way of naming. When I was doing that Project Surname, I saw Markoosie, Pauloosie, Davidee, Joanasie, and I knew right away they were Anglicans. Then, when I went on the other side, I heard Peter, Lucille, and Lucien, and I knew they were Roman Catholics! It's no word of a lie. This is distinct in itself. You could tell right away, who was there first and baptized people. Felix! You know, you could tell right away what church he belonged to! These groups were two very strong opponents, and they leapfrogged each other in the Northwest Territories and also in Indian country.

Even if they were baptized, would Inuit have traditional Inuit names, too?

Oh yes! They had their Inuit names. For example, in Igloolik, what's his name, Joe Morgan. He and I were working together on Project Surname and were joking together. He worked on the DEW line, and I said, "What do you want to call yourself, Joe?" He said, "Joe Morgan."

I asked him, “Are you sure?” “Yes. I’ll take Joe Morgan,” he said. I often ask him now, “Is this Joe Morgan?” His real name is Niaquttiaq. Later on, he would say to me, “I want to change my name!” I would answer, “You have to pay a twenty-dollar fine!”

Raymond Ningeocheak, told me this recently. When he was young back then he wanted to spell his name the way he wanted it. While I was doing Project Surname in Coral Harbour, he was away somewhere. I just assumed that it would be spelled Ningeosiak. There was another Ningeosiak in Cape Dorset, and I assumed it was the same name, so I spelled it the same way but he told me just lately, at a conference we went to, “It cost me four hundred dollars to change the spelling of my name.” That was his decision. I didn’t spell it that way, but that’s what he decided. Spelling is very important to them now, too, you know.

Like I said earlier, I also did a little bit of phonetic writing, while I was in some places. They accepted that. A few people wanted to change the spelling of their names. I wrote a letter to each administrator, through the justice department, saying if you wanted to change your name or give yourself another name, you had to be nineteen years old, go to the local Justice of the Peace and apply through them. It could be anybody.

The old way of naming still went on?

Now, in the West, if it was an old man, people would call him, their *ataatatsiaqqunaq*. Everybody wants me to be their *akkak*, uncle, because of the old ways, even people not related to me call me Uncle Abe now. But you know, I think the tradition has kind of broken down.

There were three persons named the same name after my uncle died. His name was Auktalik. One was in Sachs Harbour and the other one was in the Mackenzie Delta. We were all about the same age when this old guy drifted on. We were from different groups, I mean, we had different relatives.

Have you heard any stories, Abe, of a baby or a young child having a similar character to his namesake?

In fact, when they were on the DEW line, one of my aunties had a niece, and they named her after an old lady. She even put the *amauti* on and danced like this old lady without knowing who she was. It was a strange thing.

Now, one thing I read about, but I heard about it also when I was in Greenland, was from the Knud Rasmussen expedition. In Rasmussen's College there are volumes of that *Fifth Thule Expedition*. But I also heard this from the other side, from Alaska. Rasmussen himself wrote how he heard that story from the Inuit around Diomede Island in Alaska, close to the Bering Strait. Now this is not just a story. I heard it from my father's side, my grandmother's side, and people who knew those involved.

There was a fellow whose name was Iyaquk who knew when he was going to be born. He said that there were five people who were given the gift of spirit travel from a polar bear family. There were four males and one female. My father was young at that time when this man from Diomede Island came over with the whalers. His name was Iyaquk. He said, "I'm looking for my brother. Before I was born, I knew I had three brothers and one sister somewhere travelling along the coast. The only time we could enter into a womb was if we saw a clean, bright light inside. Then we could go in there. We stayed in the womb until we could get out." The story goes that if you put an eagle or a sheep mat under the mother for the baby, it would go well. But if you put a polar bear mat under, they dropped right there, and then they lost their memory. Do you follow me?

I knew the other old man. The one I'm talking about died in 1928, from the flu, just before I was born. But my father told me that he was there when this man met his brother from his past life!

His name was William Maniloaluk. When they saw each other for the first time, he said, "How's my brother

doing?" Iyaquk replied, "I landed here." Maniloaluk said, "I landed somewhere in Siberia." Iyaquk just said, "My mother is from Diomede Island."

Maniloaluk was from around Kittigazuit. When they met, they knew each other. They said, "We have two brothers and one sister somewhere."

A grandmother I heard about on my travels was the female. She also talked about when she was going to be born. "Oh yes," she said, "I have two brothers behind me," but she had forgotten the whole story. She was born around the Ivillik area. They were about the same age, these people.

The last one I heard about was Meeka Kilabuk's grandfather. Viivii was his name. His daughter Aluki was my mother-in-law. She told me that her father came from Alaska, or somewhere. She told me how he became the son of a woman, and inside, her womb was very clean and very holy, light and bright. She was pregnant until he was born. I found out about three males and a female who had travelled. They say that the other one, the last one, went to Greenland. But I still have to find the descendants of those people who had the same origins. It's not supernatural. It's a travelling holy life. These people were not strangers to each other; they knew each other.

It's written in the *Fifth Thule Expedition* books. My father was little when the two brothers met. They never knew each other physically before, but eventually they met. They were all built alike. They had no shoulders; like a polar bear's neck!

So that's the story. People may think it's weird, but when people tell the same story about someone that you met, you have to wonder about it! I've seen only one of the male brothers, Maniloaluk, when he was already old! He told his grandchildren that he had brothers and a sister living somewhere. I guess in your language, you could say that they were alive before they were born. They were together before they were reborn, or whatever you would

call it. They all went into a mother who was very clean, and very holy. Maybe she was one that believed in everything or whatever! It's a strange story!

It's really a reincarnation story.

Yes, I guess so. That's what it means! They came from a polar bear family, apparently from somewhere in Russia. They all got together and said, "We travelled," or whatever. It's like some kind of a cult. I guess one could put it that way. But it's better than a cult; it was reincarnation and they knew who they were.

I happened to meet the grandchildren of the brothers and sister here in Canada, but the last one was in Greenland. They said that their brother was maybe from Ammassalik, from the last camp. I don't know, I never asked people over there about it. I haven't talked to them. Yes, reincarnation, I guess that's what you call it!

The Western world would think it's gibberish or maybe supernatural, but some of what we heard from our relatives was really believed. My uncle was not a very good storyteller, but the last time I saw him, he told me the story that I heard from my grandmother in a very similar way. You see, we come from Noatak. My ancestors, my great-great grandfathers were raised there, and my great grandfathers used to go down to a place called Sisualik with a boat or *umiaq* at that time.

The reason I told the story in Alaska is that they asked me to recite it in Nome! I did a story telling every hour for one whole week! I took the floor on Canadian legends and Inuit legends all across the North. This one is not a legend, but a true story or a true legend about how people were always scared of this *ugjunaqpak*, this big shrew! You know a little shrew, an *ugjunaq*, is smaller than a lemming. It's a small creature, different than a mouse, but very small. The story goes that when this *ugjunaqpak*, this large giant shrew used to come, they made all the dogs be quiet, and said that nobody should make noise. They drifted down

the river, trying to pass this monster that lived in a lake. If he heard a child or a young baby cry, this monster would get someone! Then they would all be scattered right away. You know it was a real mean monster that killed whatever that bothered it!

There were a couple of old women and old men. They were young at that time, and they prayed to the *angakkuq* to have a family that might destroy this monster! And so they gave birth to three brothers whose names are still known in Alaska. The oldest one was a very fast runner. The second one was fast in a *qajaq*; he could paddle a *qajaq* really fast. Then the last one was a good swimmer, a very fast swimmer. He had webbed hands and feet. His hands and feet were not normal; that's the way the legend goes. When they were growing up, they practised what they knew. The family was maturing and the parents said, "We're going to go and challenge this killer." People were always scared of it. If they wanted to go down and up the river, they would have to go through some other pass, which was very hard, because the big shrew had control of the river.

So when they grew up, they finally challenged the monster! Well, the brother with the webbed feet used to go to the sea and swim after walruses and seals, and he would bring them to the camp. He was a very good swimmer. He was partly amphibious, I guess. The other one was really fast at the *qajaq*! They decided to harass this creature.

The one with the webbed feet made a harpoon, a long lance. They had tried to kill it with an arrow, but the arrow bounced right off the skin. This animal had some kind of, not a shield, but a cover of hard fabric, like hard leather, I guess.

Anyway, the one with the webbed feet was running around harassing this animal. His brother was waiting in his *qajaq* in a lake, and when the monster came, the person in the *qajaq* also harassed it. The thing dove down and was starting to go after the one in the *qajaq* who was paddling

across this lake really fast. The other brother dove into the water and swam behind this creature, whatever it was, this monster. The man ran his canoe up on the shore and he took off running. The animal was still in the water. The one who was a good swimmer poked him through the rectum with his lance, and killed him!

The story goes that after the monster was dead, they all got married, and the guy who killed the monster became very, very mean. He had several wives and he decided to kill them. They used to use a net at the caribou crossing, and catch caribou in the net by their antlers. One of the women talked with the other four wives and they decided to do something. They threw the net on him while he was resting and sleeping, and they cut his throat! So they got rid of him too; that was the sad end of the story!

My namesake Auktalik, Sam Lennie, and I were in Calgary on a trip one time. The first time we went there, we went to that dinosaur museum. We saw this huge creature about that big, called an armadillo; you know the one that has a long nose and a tail. We said that was the one they tell the story about. We recognized it, and it's an amphibious animal. My uncle told me that my grandmother had seen the bones of this monster.

They were still in the ground, but you could see the backbone. I told that story in Alaska, and several people came to me and said, "Abe, our grandfathers saw that, too!" Our grandmother saw the bones; they were still there. We don't know where they are, but they are right around Noatak!

Maybe what I'm saying is true, but I got it from hearsay. I say it must have been a big armadillo that died about twenty thousand years ago. It disappeared or something. Ten or fifteen thousand years ago there were the mastodons and those types of animals. Long after, they were gone!

Its skin, its body, was covered with layers of, I don't know what! I've seen some creatures in Australia with a similar skin. Well, they had giant beavers in those days

too, you know, four hundred pounds beavers! But this is the legend that we know from our ancestors. They told us that it happened at one point in time. It's not just that somebody went around making up the story. My grandfather and my grandmother had seen the bones also, and they were not the only ones. When I was in Nome, Alaska there were some old guys who had seen them, too. The big shrew we are talking about was called an *ugjunaqpak*. It had a nose like that [Abe made a gesture suggesting a big nose], and when we saw it, it was already on display, just the bones.

Those legends are not written, but people know something about them. There were small horses on the continent, too. I saw their bones. An archaeologist was digging near Old Crow when I met him. His name was Doctor William Irving. He also worked around the Noatak River, in Alaska. He was the one you used to see on the television talking about how people came across the Bering Strait and then went all over. We know that's history now.

Listening to your story today, Abe, I have this question; do you have the feeling that Western scientists express the essentials of Inuit culture? Do you know what I mean?

You mean people who learned from us?

Yes. People who came here to study the culture, do you have the feeling that what they're saying expresses the essential reality of the culture?

For instance, Vilhjalmur Stefansson[1] was in our area in my father's time, in about 1904 or 1905. He had already seen and heard about how people used their supernatural medicine power and how they cured people.

He was related to you?

His son was my brother-in-law.[2] My oldest sister Mabel married him. I knew the mother,[3] too, because they

were all from Prince of Wales, Alaska, right on the tip. They called them Kiggirmiut. They had a Yupik dialect. They spoke Yupik, not Inuktitut, but they also spoke Inupiaq. Anyway, Stefansson talked about what he saw, and he wanted to study them more. At the same time there were Anglican ministers; Mister Fry and Stringer came in and they converted many Inuit, so he missed out on some of the *angakkuit*.[4] They went underground! But Knud Rasmussen caught up with some of them, and he did a very good study. Stefansson was a good writer, and he did good anthropological research. He wrote a bunch of other scientific books. He was also studying ocean currents and things like that. He was Icelandic to begin with. He wrote a lot about different scientific matters, but he actually saw the people when they were living traditionally. When he came back after several years, after raising money, the Inuit were already converted. So, he missed out on some of the famous *angakkuit* around there that knew what it was all about.

Even us, we used to laugh about the *angakkuit*. But now as we get older we say, "Gee, we must have lost something that belonged to us through some misinformation or other factors!" The white men were trying to teach us their way, not the white men, but the priests. I read about what happened in Alberta with, what's his name, Father Lacombe. When I went into Charles Camsell Hospital for older people, the Indians knew him! They thought of him as some kind of holy man. They were converted too, some of them.

The real medicine men still go back to their old ways in some places now, and it's not a supernatural thing. I think it was there for us to make the most of it. For some of them, it was not for the better. There was always a control issue. Some of them had natural gifts; we're talking about the power of suggestion. I was working as an administrator in Spence Bay, and Ernie Lyall was working there, too. He knew the people. I was new. I heard this

conversation between this old lady and Ernie. She got mad at him for something. I don't know what it was about, because I wasn't in the office. Before she went out she said, "Something's going to happen soon!" Of course I didn't pay much attention. There was a young man who was about twenty who lived there, but he was mentally unbalanced. He was living with his mother and he used to be on welfare. They had no institutions at the time for those kids.

That same day, the RCMP were cutting ice on the lake; we were, too. We hauled our ice outside the house where we put it into a barrel to melt. The next morning Ernie came and knocked on my door. "Somebody drowned," he said. The young man was trying to get cold water in a pail for his mother. It was windy, and he was wearing rubber boots. He slipped and drowned. One of the people found his tracks with their dogs, so we made hooks and we hooked him out. It happened overnight. That's when I got really edgy and thought, don't make any suggestions, and don't get anybody angry, because they might get back at you. I heard this from my father, too, and other people who had command of it. That's what happens if you don't listen to their way. My father used to do drum dances.

We started this discussion by talking about the namesake. Is the naming tradition still practised today by mothers and families?

The namesake is still very much part of the culture. If you live, not necessarily here in Iqaluit, but in a community with your immediate family, this tradition is still there. Some people reject names that don't belong in their family at all!

There are different systems of naming; there is the official surname to be used with schools, health services, government etc…

This was just to satisfy the politicians and those people who thought that they were being lost, or missing out on

certain things. That's why I did the work. But the people themselves know who they are!

They know who they are, so the traditional system of naming is still going on, and then there is the Christian naming when people are baptized.

That's another flow!

That's another flow. Are there three systems of naming still going on?

Yes, they figured that. There were some that said that I had given everybody a second name, that I did this on my own. Everybody had to have a second name; but that was not our traditional way. We all know each other. When I go home, I know who I'm talking to! I recognize my relatives. I have two children that were born when I was still in the West; I called one *anaana*. That's all we needed to call her by. I never called her by her name, Aligut. Aligut was an older lady! She was handicapped and we used to help her. The other one I call *aganja*. His name is John Kivak but I never called him by John Kivak, I called him *aganja*. My uncle, Big Jim, is another one like that. I call him whenever I need help. I say *anaana* and he has to respond. It's inside of you; it gives you inspiration! At least you're holding onto something.

This happens all over, and I think that people understand. When I first came here instead of introducing someone as their son, they said this is my *ataata*, father, or *anaana*, mother, or *akkak*, uncle. Although the person is long gone, the body and the soul are gone, but the name lives and it is a whole.

I'm sorry I never really went deeper than this. I did what I was told to do at that time, when I did Project Surname, but I should have done more while I was interviewing people. I should have asked, "At what time were you born, or do you think you were born?" Some of them suffered. Their entitlement was not recorded, and when

they turned sixty, they went without the old age security and pension! I really regret that sometimes. I could have done that at the same time while I was interviewing people. This was in 1970; that's thirty years ago, twenty-six years ago. These people are in their seventies now!

Getting back to that namesake tradition, people are still aware of it now. Jonah Kelly is now a radio announcer and everybody has a surname. John Amagoalik's brother does not have the same name. He has a different surname. People are keeping some of that tradition.

After I left Project Surname, I came here to be an administrator, and I started working full-time again in office work. I was counselling young children and teenagers when they first opened up the Ukiivik residence. Then I worked as a teacher, and to learn more, I went to Greenland. In 1975, CBC phoned me, and Nellie Cournoyea, who was working with land claims and became Premier, recommended that I should go back West and cover the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline hearings. For two years I travelled all over!

NOTES

1. Many foreign governments sent people to explore the Canadian Arctic such as Franz Boas (Germany 1882-1883) during the German International Polar Year, Otto Sverdrup (Norway, 1899-1903) who discovered and named several islands in the High Arctic, Roald Amundsen (Norway, 1903-1906) who was the first explorer to sail across the Northwest Passage, and Robert E. Peary (United States, 1895-1909) who claimed to be the first explorer to reach the North Pole. All this foreign activity called for a stronger presence of Canadian officials in the North.
   In the Western Arctic, the Canadian government launched its own Canadian Arctic Expedition (1913-1918). The expedition was organized by a Canadian-born American of Icelandic origin, Vilhjalmur Stefansson, who was already known for discovering some blond Inuit on Victoria Island on his first arctic voyage in 1906. Three ships took part in the expedition, the *Mary Sachs*, the *Alaska*, and an aging former American whaling ship, the *Karluk*. They sailed along the Pacific coast and around Alaska into the Beaufort sea. Stefansson led the northern route of the expedition, boarding the old *Karluk* which got stuck and crushed in the ice. Eleven crewmen never made it back. Anderson led the southern route accompanied by Diamond Jenness.
   This First Canadian Arctic Expedition was important for the Allen family. As with many foreign explorers, whalers or adventurers, Vilhjalmur Stefansson developed an intense relationship with an Inuit woman named Fannie Pannigabluk. She had been his main informant, interpreter, seamstress, guide and eventually lover. Pannigabluk gave birth to a son, Alex Stefansson, who married Mabel Allen, Abe's sister. Stefansson never publicly acknowledged the existence of his son in the Arctic and never answered his letters. [LACO Hunt: 1983]
2. Alex Stefansson.
3. Pannigabluk.
4. Reverend Fry and his wife moved to Herschel Island in 1916. They left in 1919, when the Anglican mission moved to Shingle Point (Tapqaq). [Nagy, 1994. p.39]

The Canadian Eastern Arctic
& Greenland
Eureka
Thule
Thule
Air Base
Melville
Island
Grise Ford
Litttle Cornwallis
Island
Resolute
Pond Inlet
Nanisivik
Arctic Bay
Boothia
Peninsula
Fury and
Hecla Straits
Thom
Bay
Igloolik
Committee
Bay
Cambridge
Bay
Kugluktuk
King William
Island
Taloyoak
Hall
Beach
Queen Maud
Gulf
Kugaaruk
Gjoa Haven
Bathurst Inlet
Perry River
Umingmaktok
Repulse Bay
Contwoyto
Lake
Coral Harbour
Baker Lake
Chesterfield Inlet
Rankin Inlet
Whale Cove
Arviat

Ammassálik
Arctic Circle
Clyde River
Sisimiut
Baffin
Island
Qikiqtarjuaq
Padloping
Island
Nuuk
Pangnirtung
Iqaluit
Cape Dorset
Markham
Bay
Kimmirut
Killiniq
Island
Kangiqsujjuaq
Ivujivik
Salluit
Ungava
Bay
Kangiqsualujjuaq
Kangirsuk
Puvirnituq
Kuujjuaq
Inukjuak
Goose Bay
Sanikiluaq
Kujjuarapik

Chapter 13

Working With Language

After a while the Department of Education was concerned about schooling on Baffin Island. When the American air force left the Federal building, they bought it from them. The one that they use now, called the old Ukiivik building, used to be the SAC base. They had about five to seven hundred men and pilots, during the cold war, at the Strategic Air Command (SAC).

They had one here and one in Anchorage, Alaska, one in Thule, Greenland, and one in Goose Bay. The planes used to take off from here, and they refilled them in flight. The tankers used to come back and forth all the time. I don't know how long the planes stayed up there, waiting for whatever was going to happen. But we didn't really get involved with that. We knew that something they were doing was different, but nobody was allowed there.

When the American forces left in the early sixties, the territorial government took the building over. I went to a residential school run by the Anglican mission; the Roman Catholics were running one, too. There were two religious groups in the same town! They had one in Chesterfield Inlet and one in Hay River in earlier times. The base in Churchill, Manitoba, was also transformed into a residential school when the armed forces left. Some of their former students are grandmothers and grandfathers now.

John Amagoalik, Jose Kusugak, and Meeka Kilabuk all went there. In 1964, they started sending the children from Baffin, and from all over the Keewatin; Jack Anawak was one of them. They sent them all to Churchill, because the armed forces had left the base. They offered vocational training there. I don't know how long it lasted. I guess the last year it was operational was in 1970.[1] When the territorial government took over education, they made that Ukiivik building into a new residential school. In the West, they had Akaitcho Hall in Yellowknife for people, including the Métis, from all over the region. The school was called Sir John Franklin High School, and they had students from all the communities housed in Akaitcho Hall. Some of them are old now. They first set it up in 1959 I guess.[2] Students came there to high school from all over, from my hometown, from Cambridge Bay and so on. They just closed the residence last year.

There was a residential school in Yellowknife, and when I lived there, my nephews and nieces were at school there, too, in 1965. They had these kinds of institutions for years, from way, way back! When the Presbyterian missions went into the field in Alberta, they used residential schools. The federal government paid the missions very little money to provide education to students. Eventually, supervisors and teachers were hired, and federal residential schools created.

So, we had one here, and I worked there. When I finished completely with Project Surname, in August, 1971, after I went to the last court hearing to say this project was finished and so on, I wanted to come back East. My wife and family had been here before, so we came back and I got the job as the administrator of the Ukiivik residence, working with children who are now fathers and mothers! I spent two years there, two and a half years, and I was also teaching Inuktitut language at the high school. Well, some of them were just coming out of the wilderness,

but I knew their parents because I was the one who wrote down all their names.

And then everybody knew me! I got along with everybody. I told them, "This is right, this is wrong. That's the right thing to do!" I was counselling, but I had no professional training. I had done a lot of social work. It was the first time that children from Cape Dorset, Lake Harbour, Pond Inlet, Arctic Bay, and from all over Baffin were brought together. There were about a hundred girls and a hundred boys, and they were lonesome. They didn't know too much about Iqaluit, and at that time Iqaluit had a liquor store open and all these other clubs!

Lazarus Arreak was one of the top students there and Jonah Evaloarjuk. They were all good athletes. They played hockey and the girls played volleyball. Of course, they're all married, and some of them are teachers now. But I also worked with the high school assisting the teachers with Inuktitut language. I knew how to write syllabics; I learned how to read syllabics when I first joined the government way back in '59.

I was appointed to a committee at that time with Jose Kusugak, Mark Kalluak, Tagak Curley, Jacob Partridge and one of our administrators, Ian Moffat. They had an institution in Eskimo Point [Arviat] at that time called the Inuit Cultural Institute. We worked through that to produce a new writing system, which has forty-five letters. Mark Kalluak and Jose Kusugak got rid of the 'E' for 'I'. They shortened the syllabic alphabet and then added finals. The syllabic writing system is one I was never introduced to in the West when I was small, but I had to learn it.

So we worked on that writing system issue and we travelled to Greenland and Ottawa. People from every dialect had input and some of them worked well. But in the Central Arctic and the West, some refused to change their old writing system to the new! We assumed at that time that we were going to set up a new orthography. We had two experts from Greenland, linguists, Puju Christian

Olsen and Robert Petersen I believe were their names. They were experts in their own language and they were trying to get away from their old writing system. They had developed a new orthography, getting rid of 'H' and 'B' and 'O,' and putting 'I' for 'E'. We used fifteen letters out of twenty something.

Some of it worked and is still working today, but some people, because of the influence of the missions, didn't like it. Both the Roman Catholic Mission and Anglican Mission didn't like it, because they had already written their Bible. They had put it into their typewriters; the old Underwood Corona! They refused to change, because it would cost them a few dollars to update the typewriters and everything. But we were working with different younger groups who were willing to change.

We worked on that, and that's how I got involved with teaching for a couple of years. I was teaching grade seven and eight. We would alternate, me and another guy. They really appreciate what they learned now, because it helps them in their work. They are improving the written language all the time. I had to go to Saskatoon in 1973 for eight weeks to help Mick Mallon who is an expert now, I suppose. People were saying, "If young teachers are going up North, we should teach them the Inuktitut language."

Annie Ford, who lives in Rankin Inlet and works with CBC radio, was interested in this, too. Now we are getting something through, and although the dialects are not the same, you can write and be understood. Now you hear people from the Central Arctic understanding an Eastern dialect. Even though my dialect is different, I still understand. I'm still trying to understand the old words that they use around here, because our infixes and affixes and pronunciation are different.

I think the environment has a lot to do with the language. If you are a long time resident in an area, you grow up with different expressions. I'll give you an

example. I remember when they first put out a skidoo, or auto-toboggan; some people called it *kukilikallak*, which means 'the one with small nails'. Another dialect called it 'the crawling vehicle', *paarnguqtuq*. Other people called it *qamutaujaq*, which means 'like a sleigh, but it moves on its own'. They are all very similar; it's the same principle. In Alaska they have a word for a bottle, which probably contained alcohol. They say *misuruqtuq* in the Kuuvagmiut dialect. In my area we call it *nakasunnguaq*, which means 'something like the colour of a bladder when you get an animal and you open the guts', like whisky for instance. In the Central Arctic, around the Cambridge Bay and Coppermine area, they call a bottle *sikuliaq*, meaning, 'you can almost see through it like ice'. Around here they call a bottle *aliguqtuq* or *pullaujaq*, which means 'like a bulb'. It is very similar. Whenever people see something they give it a name resembling what is reminds them of, what they imagine it to be. These words are still in existence, and we understand when people use them. That's the kind of thing that you have to listen for when you go from one place to another.

I worked with language for several years. In 1973, I went to Holsteinborg [Sisimiut] in Greenland, to observe how they taught Greenlandic.[3] All these guys were professionals. There was another teacher with me, and all we did was try to listen and observe their culture. Times were changing for them, because their children didn't want to read the old Greenlandic writing system with all the letters in it. They were trying to change it, and I got involved with that for a bit. I learned something when I was in Greenland. I told you I read most of the *Fifth Thule Expedition* books about people from around my area and from down here. When I got back from Greenland I wrote a letter to the Department of Education. I said, "There are Inuit in the schools here. You should be teaching Inuktitut. Get the books of the *Fifth Thule Expedition.*" But no schools ever got these books.

Are there words Abe, which are used from Alaska to Greenland in Inuktitut?

There are basic things like *tupiq,* a tent, which everybody knows, right from Alaska to Greenland and also *nuna,* land; *nanuq,* polar bear; *nirliq,* Canada goose; *kanguq,* snow goose; *natsiq,* seal; *aiviq,* walrus*; arviq,* a right whale. These words are common, but when you go to a community, each has its own variations! We are talking about infixes, affixes and other variations. Some say change things later, some say do it now, others say we've already done it. The words mean the same thing, but each group changed it to the way they saw it! It was not difficult to understand. For example, in the West we say *hila* but around here they say, *sila.* I hear the 'H' in the Paallirmiut dialect, too, and even people in Pelly Bay use the 'H' all the time, like we do. There was a certain group in Kittigazuit that used 'S' as they do in Northern Quebec all the time. It's easier to say I suppose.

That's the kind of thing we had to study about the Inuktitut language and teaching. The children got really interested, because we went as far as grade eight. I found myself in a situation where I began to realize how the language holds itself together.

But someone else who learned more about it could describe the grammar and syntax. I also said one time, even if it's not going to be taught here in the North, at least there should be books in institutions like colleges or universities, books so that anyone who wants to study Inuktitut could come and pick it up. I met a couple of administrators who never spoke Inuktitut when they were young. They studied the syllabarium and when they came up North, they were able to catch on to the language in no time.

It's kind of a stepping-stone for trying to learn the language. Some people said you can learn Inuktitut with four hundred basic words. I think it's little bit more complicated than that!

Oh it is!

I worked on that until 1975, when I was in Ottawa for some reason or other. I happened to meet Whit Fraser by accident. He had been in radio in Iqaluit; he was with CBC at that time.

We sat down in a hotel café and talked. He asked me, "Abe, where are you from?" "I'm from the West." I replied. That's the last time I heard from him for a while. I hadn't heard about the proposal for the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry[4] either. Pat Reilly, I think, was the manager here; I knew him from Yellowknife. He called me up one day and he said, "Abe, CBC wants to hire you." I asked him what for. He said, "It's about a proposal, an oil pipeline going through that homeland of yours, down the Mackenzie from Prudhoe Bay, Alaska." My homeland! I thought. Pat said, "We'll hire you because you are from the West. We are going to hire someone from four other native language groups, and we want to include you." We had a long talk, and finally I said, "Okay, I will talk to my family." I talked to my sister, who was still alive at that time, and to my brother.

I left the school and a little after Christmas I went over to Yellowknife for an orientation about those Mackenzie Valley Pipeline hearings. There were two proposals from corporations that were really involved in it. One was called the Foot Hills Pipeline, the other one was Arctic Gas. We had to learn how to do tapes and listen to them. The course was about a month long, and some of us caught on pretty well. That's the way the pipeline thing started for me, but it's a long story, too. If you want to hear it, it's after the coffee break!

NOTES

1. Churchill Residential School.
2. Akaitcho Hall.
3. Greenlandic is a variation of the Inuktitut language.
4. The federal government created the Mackenzie Pipeline Inquiry, headed by Justice Berger in 1974, to analyze the possibility of building a pipeline down the Mackenzie Valley.

Chapter 14

The Mackenzie Valley Pipeline

Before I worked on Project Surname, when I was still on the Territorial Council, there was a group of interested people in Toronto, who supported native people, that got together with our council in Ottawa. We had dinner with them, very prominent people of this country; that was when they began what was called the Indian and Eskimo Association across Canada. These people sponsored it with some money, and later on, Ernie McEwan, who became our secretary treasurer, had the mandate of lobbying for money. Finally, when they got sufficient money for all of the native groups across Canada, Canadian Inuit got their share and established the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada. That was around 1969, '70, or '71, in that area. Native people were all lobbying for the same things. In Yellowknife they organized the Indian Brotherhood. All the Mackenzie Valley Indians and the Métis were recognized.

A court case about Indian rights in the Nishga Valley in British Columbia went to the Supreme Court of Canada.[1] The lawyer who represented the Nishga people at that time was Thomas Berger. He was a real advocate for the rights of native people. He was also a member of the New Democratic Party in Ottawa for one term during Diefenbaker's last days. He only served six months, but he is still recognized as one of the hard working individuals who believed in the rights of people that he grew up with.

Aboriginal people were lobbying all over about land claims. My own group in the Mackenzie Valley was called COPE, which stands for the Committee on Original People's Entitlement. There was Sam Radi and Nellie Cournoyea, newly elected for ITC, but they had their own organization for the Mackenzie Valley Inuvialuit. They were trying to make a claim because of the pipeline development. When I got involved with these hearings I started to get more details on what was happening.

Nellie Cournoyea recognized me as a person who had lived in the Eastern and Central Arctic and came from the Mackenzie Valley. I'm pretty well versed on some of the dialects of Inuktitut. I don't know if I am or not, but that was her opinion. The hearings were going to start in February, but I got to Yellowknife around the end of January. My sister died, and I went to her funeral. I left my family here, and moved to Yellowknife. For about a month we went through a kind of orientation; tape, go, tape, listen to people, and then type your own story!

Before ITC and other native organizations were created, we never heard about what natives were doing. They had nothing, you know. A fellow by the name of George Manuel from British Columbia was trying to organize something, but nobody really believed in him. He and another man, Bill Wuttenee, who was an Indian lawyer from Saskatchewan, tried to get people organized, but they were too busy having personal power struggles. That's what they told me anyway. This time they got the money, and they were starting to move in the right direction.

I was living in Yellowknife when the Indian and Eskimo Association started. I was one of the directors. We got a few people together, like Georgina Blondin and Noel Carpenter, who is a doctor now, just amongst ourselves. Anybody could join us; we had Bishop Cook who worked with the Indians for a long time and a lawyer, Mark de Weerdt. He was helping us to get organized. There were young guys like Wally Firth, who became the first native

New Democratic Party Member of Parliament from the Northwest Territories. He went through that whole system.

When I moved to Yellowknife to start working, I didn't know too much about the proposal. I got some files, and I started getting all the information for myself. I had my own little typewriter and a tape recorder and my own radio. I learned how to make a tape and put news together in ten minutes. But my specialty, when I was really working, was reporting in Inuvialuktun to the Inuit in the Mackenzie Valley area. I had five minutes on television on Friday evenings. I was also telling the story in the Eastern Arctic about why they were building a pipeline.

So it went on. There was a lot of pressure coming from the Indian Brotherhood. They had their own lawyer and so did ITC. When the hearings were in Indian territory, ITC didn't come, but when we went to Inuit communities, they travelled with us. The ITC lawyer was Connie Hunt,[2] I think that was her name. The Indian Brotherhood had a couple of lawyers and the panel listened to their arguments.

They met with the Indian, the Métis and the Inuvialuit organizations for about two weeks of deliberations, to decide on how they were going to make this thing work. They had famous lawyers like Pierre Genest from Montreal, who was a big corporate lawyer. He became an appointed member of the Territorial Council. But the Territorial Council lawyer that Judge Thomas Berger[3] used to invite in these meetings was Ian Scott, who became the Attorney General for the Liberal government in Ontario. These guys were brilliant! The Foot Hills Pipeline lawyer was another one! The head lawyers were really something; they had their own system of taking notes. It was interesting to listen to them and to what they were talking about. They argued amongst themselves all day, and then they got some specialists to come. They got involved with the organizations. I remember when I first started reporting about this

new pipeline. I stated, “This is a forty-eight inch pipeline! This gas is coming through to the surface with pressure!”

From where?

From Prudhoe Bay, Alaska, across the Arctic coast and through the Mackenzie; tap in some more gas from there, gas from the ground, and then send it up to the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline, all the way down to the depot outside of Edmonton and Calgary. And then from there, pipe it down to the United States!

No wonder! They had the pipeline all planned, and they had pictures that we studied. Because I used to live there, I got really interested. They were already doing a lot of research and a lot of seismic work. They had a lot of experts working on it. The oil companies had their own experts, and the Canadian government also had theirs. They had all this information about water currents, fisheries and fishponds, and where the birds nested. They had caribou experts from the Yukon on the Bluenose Caribou Herd. Listening to those people was something else! It put me in a different world! Because I came from the wilderness myself, I just assumed all of this; shoot now and then see if you get anything! That was the way I looked at it. Some of those experts looked at it in different ways, and I learned a lot from them.

Like the bird men. There were several of them, but one was really special! His name was Ian McTaggart Cohen. What do you call in your language a person who studies birds, an ornithologist? This man was something else. Every time I went there I was glued to his information. He had pictures and designs to explain how it all worked! One of the things that really struck me was what he said about the peregrine falcon, which to Inuit, even to me, and even now is a marvel.

They didn’t like it because it killed other helpless birds or something. I remember I used to canoe around and when I saw muskrats, there were eagles’ nests there. We

would shoot muskrats under their nests. They ate muskrats and they ate rabbits. We never had time to study where they went. This guy said that a peregrine falcon, when it was nesting, owned everything that was in its territory: the mice, the muskrats, and the birds. In its own sector, it protects everything in about a twenty-five miles radius within its realm, so that everything could survive.

It would go outside those twenty-five miles to get its food! That really struck me! He said they protect the little ones from other predators coming in, and that they chase other predators away. Those experts knew the system, better than we did anyway!

The other bird that fascinated me was the Arctic loon. There are four different types of Arctic loons. He told us that when they are nesting at a lake, there are fish there. I suddenly realized that sometimes you see a loon flying and it has a fish in its mouth. It had gone fifty, seventy, eighty or a hundred miles to get that fish and bring it back to its nest although there were fish right there for its little ones. That's the way they work. They teach them how to survive. This guy was something else! They leave the fish in the lake for when they start training the little ones.

The other bird I learned about was the Arctic sparrow. They migrate, too, and they go towards Alaska after the summer. They go to Alaska, all the way down through the Aleutian Islands, to the very last islands and then they fly to Hawaii! What they do is, they get the right trade wind and they go up to ten thousand feet, and off they go. The wind just blows them down there. He had pictures of when they landed, and they were asleep. You could pick them up. They are not water birds by any means; if they went in the water they would drown. Ian McTaggart Cohen was Canada's best ornithologist!

He taught me a lot about birds. He said when the birds congregated in large nesting areas there was always enough food for them. Even snow geese get different kinds of food. When I used to wait for the geese to come, sometimes

one lone goose would fly around. But it wouldn't fly low; it would fly high and we could see it. We could hear it honk. They said the geese sent some kind of spy out to look around. They said maybe it was to find the best route. That's why we have to use blinds to shoot them down. I found that out. They have very keen vision, and they can see for miles, like a crane. They said that they see you from afar! I mean, this is eyesight like an eagle's.

It was interesting. Anyway, when I first started the newscasts in Inuktitut, I had to do them in English, too. I began, "These two companies..," but the people were already working in both fields. The Inuit were labourers on seismic crews; my brothers and all my relatives were already working as ground crews.

I said, "These two companies are the two biggest oil companies, one is American and one is Canadian. They are going to take the gas out of the North. I can't explain to you in words that I can understand because it is so huge! It is like two guys or maybe a bunch of guys who went to play poker and they put a lot of money on the table! The winner is going to get the pipeline ready for the gas sale! This is the biggest poker game that ever was developed in the history of this country." That is what I told them; I mean, all the native people like to gamble. The public got a hold of that, too, and they said, Abe Okpik says it's the biggest poker game ever developed. It was for big money, you know, fifteen billion dollars; in those days fifteen billion was a lot of money.

They had already developed research centres and the seismic route for the pipeline. They were going to build a forty-eight inch gas pipeline. They had trillions and trillions of cubic feet of gas in Alaska, in the northern islands, all along the Mackenzie and in the Beaufort Sea. They gave us the reports about Melville and Victoria Islands, and there were trillions of cubic feet up there. One time I was listening to their particular arguments, and they were talking about trillions.

"Trillion," I said, "What's a trillion?" They told me that in cubic feet, there were seven cubic miles of air. That's a big, big, big cube, a trillion cubic feet. So I thought, "I can't explain this to Inuit." So, I came up with this comment, "When you talk about trillions, imagine six sand hill cranes and maybe six caribou, and try to count all the feathers and the hair they have on their body if you have enough time! You will never get near. A trillion is so huge!"

The Toronto *Globe and Mail* got hold of another of my reports. I've got a copy of it somewhere. We were in Toronto. That's where the money was coming from to develop this pipeline; people invested a lot of stock in it. I was staying at the Holiday Inn on the 22nd floor. I was still trying to explain how huge Toronto was. I compared it with a pipeline that would go from my hometown in Aklavik down to Nelson Island, across the Mackenzie and up to Inuvik. That's forty square miles of people and buildings concentrated in a way you couldn't imagine! There were two and a half million people in Toronto and I said, "I'm living as in a mountain. I'm looking down the street, and I can see people walking. They disappear and come out some other place like a harp seal dives and comes out, because the transportation is underground!" I said that! It's unbelievable to look at it from an Inuit perspective. You could go to Black Mountain and look down and almost see the whole place. I said, "In the Eastern Arctic, Little Cornwallis Island where Resolute Bay is, is about as big as Toronto's industrial zone. There are so many people roaming around, buildings built up on top of each other to make apartments and so on!"

It was not easy to explain, but you knew you had to get across to the people that this was no small business; it was big business. There were twenty-eight big companies from all over the world, British Petroleum and Esso, and big oil companies from Arabia sinking money into the project. They said, "We're going to set up this gas pipeline

and sell the gas down to the States." Some of them had already hauled pipes. Foot Hills was also fighting to get its share of the contracts.

They had already done the seismic line. There was a fellow who was an expert in the oil and gas industry. I don't remember the number of university degrees he had. He studied the growth of trees; black spruce, white spruce, black birch and white birch. He had pictures from the air, and he had marks on a map where the gas was, according to the colour of the trees in the ground! There was six trillion cubic feet in there. He turned the pipeline around to follow the river, but over some mountains. What are they called, the Ebbutt Hills? In the Fort Simpson area it was all recorded. He had dug there, and they had drilled about five thousand holes to get the seismic work done to get out the gas. Black spruce and white spruce cover some of the area. This guy was some kind of, what do you call a person who studies tree growth, a botanist?

They made him admit that there was gas there. It was hard to decipher at the start, but at the end you got interested. Every day they went into a formal hearing at the Explorer Hotel in Yellowknife. This went on for two weeks. Then we went on the land and travelled to each community for two weeks with the Territorial Council lawyers. One of the lawyers' assistants became a member of Parliament.[4] He was a New Democratic Party member from the Northwest Territories. There was a social scientist who had all kinds of degrees, and Michael Jackson, who was a treaty agreement specialist. He knew regional treaties inside out. He used to travel ahead of the group to meet with the chiefs and the councils in communities, telling them, "We are coming here and you can ask all your questions. We want to hear every concern that needs to be said at this point and time."

When we sat in a community, all kinds of people spoke from the native point of view. When I first started listening I heard, "We don't want industrial development

before land claims," that was the argument they had. When I heard it first, I just thought, "Ah, another one of those!" But when I really started thinking, I used to go sleepless wondering, "Why, why, why?" They were saying, "This is our mother earth. It looked after us." I used to think about all the things that happened in my life prior to that; about going to the residential school; about the Hudson's Bay Company. I started to think that maybe these people were right. This is what gives us life here, the whales, the birds, etc. But some people wanted industry right away. They said, "Let's get this thing over with and let's get going!" But that's not the way it turned out.

So in the communities, people were against this project?

Yes, especially the native people all down the Mackenzie; even Inuit. Some older people like my uncles said, "Well, if they're going to build it, they should build it in the right order. Don't bother the muskrats and..." But they had seismic crews all over the place. It was not an easy thing, I guess!

I also learned during the formal hearings, from fisheries experts, that once you destroy the spawning ground even in a creek or a lake, by bulldozing it, the fish would be gone. They have been there a long time before us! The nesting grounds for the birds are the same. I also learned how the water down the Mackenzie floods, breaks down the hills, and the trees fall down. These guys were landslide experts; they studied the land. There were forest fire people, and people who studied the caribou. We had an expert who had studied caribou around the Keewatin, the Qamanirjuaq herd. He told us interesting things about caribou, but Inuit already knew about them. When my father and my uncle used to go to the hills, they would see a bull coming about one month before the other caribou. Two of them on each side would leave a scent and then the herd would follow. I believe that strongly because I have seen this myself when I was young. We used to say, "There's the bull! The herd

A sitting of the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry, also known as the Berger Commission, at Fort Good Hope in August 1975.

Photo courtesy of René Fumoleau and the N.W.T. Archives.

will be coming through here soon, you know!" Another month and they were there!

He told us that when two or three bulls are travelling alone, way apart, it means that the herd is coming. The others follow the track, and the scent they leave. He showed us in a picture that the caribou have scent glands in their hoofs. All animals have that I guess; the beavers have their own, too.

This commission travelled to each community?

Yes. The only community they didn't go to was Coppermine, and what they called at that time, Snowdrift [Lutselk'e]. They went to Fort Smith, Hay River, Fort Resolution, Rae Lake, Lac La Marte [Wha Ti], Fort Rae, Dettah and Fort Providence, all down the Mackenzie; and in the Yukon, Old Crow and Whitehorse; Fort Norman, Fort Good Hope, Colville Lake and Arctic Red River, Inuvik, Aklavik, Fort McPherson, Tuktoyaktuk, Paulatuk, Sachs Harbour, Holman and up to Trout Lake, Fort Liard and Fort Simpson.

At the time there was no land claim signed.

Nothing. The Inuvialuit didn't get their land claim signed until 1979. They were working on it. There was a lot of talk and there was a lot of animosity, too, from the West, from our point of view. The White Paper was out and you know...

Jean Chrétien's White Paper in 1969?

Yes. Back then even our territorial government, through the Commissioner, didn't want anyone to have land claims. I was in two hearings when we got to Inuvik and the regional director there had sent word to all his employees not to talk! So I asked my cousin who was working for the government, I said, "You are not going to talk?" I told Whit Fraser, and he went to the Territorial Council. He had sent them a telegram saying, "This is not

your hearing; this is for the people to share! We have to invite everybody. We can't leave people out. Except you, if you don't want to come. The native people are really the ones who will be affected if the pipeline becomes a reality."

There was a good saying that I heard from an anthropologist named Peter Usher. He was in the North for a long time as a social scientist. He made a statement, which went like this, "You know in the North if you travel and you see a graveyard, sometimes you see a white man's name, but there are mostly natives in graveyards outside the churches. The white man does not die here, because he wants to die at home. He gets buried here only by accident or because of some unfortunate situation. All the white men who come up here eventually leave for somewhere else and retire." You know that struck me. Oh, he was right! You know they don't stay here, even though they live here for years. Now it's changing. After all these statements, they started to understand!

Most of the missionaries and the old Hudson's Bay Company people, and even traders and businessmen, when they get enough, they leave the North and say goodbye. That's what he was saying. I started to think, "This guy must have studied different points of view!" In fact, it was only by accident that a priest would be buried here. Even the Anglican ministers when they retire, they go; they take off. We don't see them anymore. We remember that they were friends at one time. The RCMP are the same, and school teachers and the Hudson's Bay managers and the ones that lived long enough to get out. Ha, ha, ha!

That was one of the things I also learned about social sciences and human resources people. They had the people living in the North tell us their stories. During two years of hearings, it was travelling, travelling, night and day. In summer, when we had finished in one community, we flew at five o'clock in the morning to another town to start another hearing. We had to sleep in schools in sleeping

bags. You had to buy your own food. Some places like Fort Franklin had a lot of trout, so a native friend and I used to cook some. We bought some fish, put them in a pot, and had a big feast; not only us but also all the other people. Judge Berger used to eat with us. Ha, ha, ha!

In Old Crow they put us in what they called a Tourist Transient Centre. They didn't have too many good places, but I had a sleeping bag. I was sleeping and all of a sudden I felt something crawling all over me. I got out of my blanket and I said, "What's that?" There was a great big gopher walking around in the house. That was the first time I had ever seen one. I know they're harmless but it was very unpleasant for me! I was scared of that type of creature. They call it a ground squirrel but we call it a gopher. Yes, and mosquitoes, there were lots and lots!

The people in the communities, the Inuvialuit or Dene, would they have the same arguments?

Yes! They had the same way of expressing it. "Land claims before industry," some of them said. But then others said, "This is our mother earth, why do you want to disturb it?" Well, I said, this is not news to me. Later on, I started to think. You know, when they're talking about gold mines, there were several gold mines shutting down outside Yellowknife. They just took the gold out and left everybody and left the junk there. They showed us pictures.

I found out from social scientists from British Columbia and people who studied the land, about a hill in Northern Quebec, a fairly good-sized mountain. There was some timber on it, and they just took a barber machine, and cut it, and left that place white. The timber was being hauled out for some other people. One of them said, "You know if you look around, among us here in this room, we love industry. Native people don't do those things as much, but even on a small scale if you build a cabin, you knock trees down that are four hundred years old. Human beings are

the worst predators, if you look at it from that angle; the humans are the worst predators on the planet!"

He also showed us different kinds of fish in a lake like Lac La Marte, for instance. The lake is not all that deep and there are different types of fish in one place, blue herrings, and what they call graylings. They all have their own spawning grounds, and once you disturb that, they are not going to be back! So it was interesting!

They put a ten years moratorium on the project after this last report. It was ten years before they could even think about building a pipeline of the same size. But about eight years after, they put a twelve-inch pipeline out of the Northwest Territories. Would you believe in the Northwest Territories they have a gas plant right in the corner between British Columbia, Alberta, and the Yukon, called Pointed Mountain? I was there and it smells awful when you get close to the gas. It's not a very pleasant place. They told us in the wintertime if you want a cup of tea you just put your pot on top, and it will boil because the pipeline is really hot, coming from the ground!

NOTES

1. Abe is referring here to the Calder Case which was heard at the Supreme Court of Canada in 1973. The story began in 1886 when the newly founded province of British Columbia decided to survey the Nishga ancestral land, the Nass Valley, to set the limits of a reserve. The Nishga Chief expelled the surveyor and later that same year went to Victoria for discussions with the provincial Premier.
   The Nishga never signed any treaties and never conceded any piece of their land. As they could not secure any agreement with British Columbia, in 1913, the Nishgas turned their claim to the Crown of England. They claimed that their tribe had a previous agreement with the Crown, the Royal Proclamation of 1763, where their aboriginal title to the land and their ancestral rights were asserted.
   The federal government retaliated in restricting the rights of the Nishga to courts and lawyers in 1927. These rights were restored in 1951 with the revision of the Indian Act. In 1964, the Nishga tribal

council decided to go back to court against the government of British Columbia. The tribe collected money among their people to afford the legal fees. They were obviously not subsidized. Thomas Berger finally took their case to the Supreme Court of Canada.

The judgment of the Supreme Court in the Calder case, in August of 1973, is still today a cornerstone of Canadian policies on Aboriginal rights. The Nishga lost their claim to over 2,500 square kilometres of land in the Nass Valley. But in their judgment, six out of seven judges recognized the existence of Aboriginal title.

That same year, Jean Chrétien, then Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, announced that the government would negotiate to settle aboriginal land claims. In 1974, Ottawa opened an office of native claims.

The Nishgas signed a final land claim agreement in 2001 with the federal and provincial governments.

See: http://www.ola.bc.ca/online/cf/documents/CWberg.html

> This case strengthened the hand of Native groups, and, in August 1973, the government changed its policy toward land claims. The new policy, articulated subsequently in an annual report of DIAND, "recognized that non-native occupancy of land...had not taken...native interest into account, had not provided compensation for its gradual erosion, and had too frequently excluded native people from benefiting from developments that had taken place as a result of non-native settlement." This was quite an admission for the Federal government, and it was followed, in 1974, with the creation of an Office of Native Claims in DIAND. [Dickerson: 1992; p. 106]

2. Now Madam Justice Constance Hunt of the Alberta Court of Appeal. During this time period, she was the in-house lawyer for the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada.
3. Most probably Wally Firth.

Chapter 15

Looking Ahead

So, Abe, up to now we discussed the past and your own life, but things have changed a lot. I would like you to talk about what you see for the years to come.

If you read books about changing times, it is very important that you also look into the future to see what is going to happen, what has happened, and what is happening now. This is why, when I was covering the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline hearings, there were some powerful anthropologists and sociologists who talked about the changing times, and the problems people had when leaving their rural areas to become urban citizens.

It is very similar in the North. In the old days we used to think that the missionaries had the role of spreading love. Then there were other missionaries that came and changed our spirituality. When education first came in 1949, where I came from, there was a one-room classroom in Tuktoyaktuk with one teacher; her name was Mrs. Robinson. The children and the grandchildren of those kids now are getting to understand the fact that it takes several generations, maybe two, three or four, to become really part of the melting pot and the creative forces of our Canadian society.

Nunavut is looking to become a part of Canada as a different territory in 1999. Now, if we look at the West, we were unfortunately forced to think in a particular way.

Luckily some of those kids got good high positions with the government. Some of them are pilots, some of them are doctors, some of them are teachers, and some of them have expertise in business.

But in the overall picture, we must look at the native make-up of our population. I'm talking about the aboriginals of the Northwest Territories. There are Crees, there are Dogribs, Chipewyans, South Slaves, North Slaves, Loucheux, Hareskins and a whole bunch of us Inuit, too! There are Inupiat, Inuvialuit, Inuinnait, Inummarit and they all have their individual identity! In South Baffin here, they call themselves Uqqurmiut; north of here they are called Tununirmiut; over in Quebec they call themselves Tarramiut. You could say that this place is warmer than further north where they don't get the sun in the winter. We get the sun. They figured that out! Further south they are called Tarramiut, which means land of the long shadow.

In the West we have similar geographical variations. We live in the Northwest Territories, but we call ourselves the Uummarmiut because we live in an area with willows and trees and we can burn wood. When we go to the coastal area further east, there are no trees so we call them the people who live at Qammalik, which means the place where there is a sod house.

In Alaska it is the same thing. In Nome they have Qammalik too, but it is not the same group; they also learned how to survive where there was no wood, in sod houses.

So that's one of the things we have to understand when we look into the future, that we are deeply rooted in geographical and regional differences.

Recently, they told us that we have the highest birth-rate in the country. What are we going to do with all those people coming in with no industrial activity? You know there are a few arts and crafts here and there, but not everybody is a skilled craftsman.

Right now, people of about forty years of age, younger than me, are kind of bewildered, because they never had a chance to show what they could do or what they have learned! Some of them are working, but not all. It's not a good healthy system! A lot of people who were independent on the land now are living under social welfare, which is very hard for them.

According to studies done by Margaret Mead, if you keep people in a social structure where they are dependent on government for one or two generations, that is where they start to belong. You know, that is what they start to believe, and that is very sad!

They get dependent on the government. The price of fur has gone down and the technology of trapping has not been passed down to the people, like in my father's time and in my brothers' time. In our generation, we were independent. We could go out and make do, as long as we got paid for fur. But now you can't even do that, so you are dependent on the government. When you look into the future, you have to think about the growth of the population and the work force, about learning in schools, and training more professional people, teachers, anthropologists, doctors, geologists, dentists, nurses, and so on. This is what they have to do to survive!

You cannot keep importing people to work in the North, and then say that we Inuit have to learn how to move into this new environment soon. Now that there are only eight hundred days before Nunavut comes; what are they planning?

You can't mix politics with administration. Everybody knows that being on both sides is not good; you can't mix politics with administration. You hear about Nunavut every day, but what about the real know-how of working with people and the competence to carry out what needs to be done. But every day we hear about Nunavut this, and Nunavut that.

In the West, they are bewildered! They are not getting as much government support there as we are in Nunavut, mostly because of the aboriginal peoples and their different ancestral backgrounds. They are not very organized.

Language is one problem, and religion, too, because some communities are really forceful about their beliefs. The Métis people are almost all Roman Catholics. Now, in my time, I had a few relatives, and several of them were married to white trappers. They had more privileges than we had because they were mixed. The trappers themselves were more forceful with their children; they never let them run around and get into trouble. When they trapped on the land, they stuck together like our family did. We stuck together and didn't bother anybody, but that was because of the times we lived in.

When I'm talking about the privileges they had, what I mean is they were the first people to build their own houses, and send their children to school in Aklavik. We couldn't, because we were nomadic. They went to the first schools, and they stayed there until they finished whatever they were doing. Whereas we didn't have that kind of privilege, because we needed to go back on the land.

Some of them went to the school hostel and decided what they wanted to do and did well. But what I'm trying to say is that they had privileges. For instance, one of the big factors was that they had the privilege of being able to vote in elections! We couldn't vote in federal elections until 1952,[1] I think! But before that the *Qallunaat* had their children already trained in useful matters. And the Métis could order anything, liquor or food through the system, whereas we couldn't.

Very few people ordered their supplies directly from the retailer down south. We didn't know any better. That's how those people saved their trapping money and so on.

In this Baffin area, it is relatively recent that Inuit are coming off the land! In 1965, the first survey on housing was done in Iqaluit, and I was here already; that's not too

long ago! Thirty years now, but infant mortality has gone down, and our elders have gotten older, and generations are spreading out, even in Iqaluit.

In one survey, I think it was in Pangnirtung or Cape Dorset, sixty per cent of the people in the community were under eighteen. That's a very delicate thing for people to understand. What are they going to do? Is everyone going to be a carver? Not everybody is going to be a hunter! Hunting is all right if you want to have country food, as they call it. But it's not something that we should just demand and say, "Here's what I want. I want to be a hunter!" Or, "I want to make sure that our language is very popular!"

I'm not saying this critically, but I think that when we teach people the new syllabic orthography, it is not very useful. The syllabic system was foreign to us, and was brought in by the missionaries to convert us. I taught syllabics, and I learned to read syllabics, but I find it very slow. When I pick up a translation, I read the English part because it's easier for me to work with.

Even where there are syllabics, the language is still very complex. I'm a Nunatangmiut and I speak a particular dialect. People in the Keewatin speak a different dialect, and they try to use the same writing system. They should do some research and come up with one writing system in Roman orthography like they did in Alaska and Greenland and Labrador, and get rid of the syllabics. Syllabics is not our writing system; somebody introduced it a hundred years ago.

Do I understand, Abe, that if Inuit want to move on to modern ways of living, they have to let go of their own traditions?

Some of the things, yes! Sure, it is nice to get seafood and other things, but it is not nice to see your children failing when the opportunity is there. I think the teaching has been available, it had faults sometimes, but the teachers came up here and made their contribution.

When I was in the high school in 1971, this one here, Inuksuk High School, twenty-five years ago, we had music teachers, mathematics teachers, art and science teachers and so on. They set it up nicely when you look back. They had music teachers, but we are still waiting to hear a band![2] Music is beautiful when you know the instrumental technique, but you have to look into it more. If you are going to learn something, you had better work on changing your own system. There were artistic people out there that recognized you, and you seemed to be recognized.

When you read the history of Canada you find that the people who were designing clothing were men, and it was the women who sewed; the men were designers! It would be pretty hard for me to sit down at a sewing machine and try to sew something, because my whole feeling is that I belong to the land. I control certain things in domestic life, and the woman controls certain things. It's hard to do it another way. My sister ran a sewing centre in Tuktoyaktuk for several years, and one of her pattern cutters was a man. The women looked and said, "What's he doing here? Why is he doing this woman's job?" They had the idea the other way around than down south. This is the kind of thing that I began to understand when I read in history that the people who designed fur coats were mostly men! It's an Inuk woman's job.

We have to change in that respect, too. There was a fellow from Hamilton, a Hungarian, who came up North from Ottawa, trying to teach Inuit women how to tan skins with machines here at the Rehabilitation Centre. Another one that we brought up one time could quarry rocks. He knew how to split them. They took him to Markham Bay to crack the rocks. He was a mason, but Inuit wouldn't accept that. They said that's not our way! They are still trying to bulldoze themselves through the ground! It's so easy to watch people working when they know what to do. I knew a couple of Indian guys from one reservation, when I was in the hospital in Alberta, who did shale work. That's

all they did in their life, they split rocks and sent them to builders, or people who made headstones for graves, and so on. These people did very well because they knew how to work on marble and rock like that. Those are the kinds of projects that could happen here.

You're saying that there's a resistance, there is a cultural gap there.

Well, it will take a long time to change, to change from one set of values to another. Even in my time, my parents started to sail around using whaleboats from the whalers, and they were successful, not only them but other relatives, too. They were able to buy schooners. They were mobile; they had engines in their boats and they would go away to the trapping area to do their trapping!

So what we are discussing now, Abe, is in order for the Inuit to step into a post-industrial society, they have to leave behind a lot of their own culture? This is what's happening now!

Yes. Today there is the computer world, and people are marvelled by it. It's nice to have all the conveniences, television and so on, but you have to be part of the development, too! For instance, in Korea they have production lines to make the televisions we buy. We are a growing population, and we should have similar activities. People like to have something to do where they have to follow the next person. You learn to do certain things at a certain time, like a production line. You can't change the system, you know, you have to be in that line!

I think it is coming. I saw it here a couple of times. For example, a guy designs a carving roughly, the next guy takes over and smoothes it, and then there's the final polisher. I've seen that in a small way. I think that is what they have to learn to do so that everybody works.

There was a fellow who came to Pangnirtung Sound in 1964 by aircraft. His name was John Hickock and he owned a leather company in Texas. He was the great

grandson of the first Hickock, the one that made leather belts. He took a whale skin and he said, "Put it in salt!" The Inuit asked, "What's that?" He showed them a belt. He said this is why they were going to try to make the skin useful, because they were running out of leather.

I noticed when I was at Fort McPherson, in Loucheux country, that they used canvas to make tents, but they also made handbags, and flight bags, and all kind of things from coloured canvas. You can order from their catalogue now! There are about twenty people steadily working on that whole production line.

But nothing like this is happening here?

No! We used to have a laundry here, but they closed it down. It was a project that the government was running, and nobody took it over. They taught the people how to use the machines. They also had a sewing centre here until it closed.

If you are a brilliant Inuk student, and let's say you pass your Management Studies Certificate, you can come out of the college, and have a big job at Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated or Qikiqtani Inuit Association. You don't have to struggle as a private entrepreneur, risking your shirt on making something to sell. You know what I mean?

In fact, when I first came out of the hospital, they asked me to work for the government for the summer. They were paying me a dollar an hour. I said, "I have no time for that! I could live better out on the land!" That was my prerogative. A dollar an hour is ten bucks a day, and at least I had power of some sort, but I didn't accept it. It was only when I went to Ottawa that I started thinking about it. I had just come out of the hospital for the second time, and I thought that I couldn't live the way I used to any more. I started to change, and I took the bureaucratic role. But you have to learn everything. Every day you make decisions and write your memoranda. You learn it the hard

way. It's not an easy system when you don't know the language that well, but you learn how to write!

What about Inuktitut, Abe? Is there a future for Inuktitut?

I'll tell you what I think. Inuktitut should get rid of the syllabics and people should write the language in Roman orthography, which is easier. You could see all the agmas[3] and suffixes and infixes. The syllabic system is not used anywhere else; it's only used in this area. A person with an Education degree or a Bachelor of Arts degree doesn't have to use syllabics. Inuktitut can also be taught using Roman orthography, with only fifteen letters. I think that it would be more powerful then, because in time when the churches and all the elders will be gone, the syllabic system is going to go anyway. It all has to do with biblical translation, and when all the old timers die, they are going to lose it! They are losing ground everyday! We have to look into getting rid of syllabics now, and start looking into real language issues.

In fact when you pick up *Inuktitut* magazine, you find syllabics, Roman orthography, English and sometimes French; that's four languages. Some of those should be dumped, because you can't print all that. Even with *Nunatsiaq News* people are bewildered, because they translate everything. Everybody has a different dialect and everyone criticizes different interpreters. I see this all the time. It's not right! You have to have a basic fundamental writing system in order to proceed! Too many people say, "That's not right, because it's not my dialect." They have to learn to focus on one; let's get this thing going!

Mick Mallon went to Northern Quebec and taught for two years there. He thought he knew the Inuktitut language, but when he went to the Keewatin he had to change and use that dialect. You have to make guidelines for the whole, to achieve the best in teaching the language. If people would listen, they would understand what it's all about!

Abe Okpik, probably in 1994 for the Queen's visit to Iqaluit.
Photo courtesy of Martha Ningeok.

Bryan Pearson, then Mayor of Iqaluit, showing off with
Abe Okpik's Order of Canada medal at the Iqaluit Centre.
Photo courtesy of Martha Ningeok.

So can Inuktitut be the working language of the Nunavut government?

Not unless they learn another language, because it's hard to include technology in the Inuktitut language. It is difficult.

Yes. You have to create new terms.

When they first saw a skidoo here somebody called it *paarnguqtuq,* that's something that crawls, another person called it *kukilikallak,* something that has nails, and another one called it *qamutaujaq,* the one that looks like a sled! We still haven't produced a real name for a mobile vehicle like the skidoo! Everywhere you go it's the same. We say *nakalanngualik* for truck and somebody else uses *nunasiut*. We travel by *nunasiut* and *ingirrajuq* means travelling itself. You have to pay attention to what you are naming things. In certain places *tingmijualuk* is an aeroplane, and some others call it *timmisuuq,* yet others say *qangattajuuq,* the one that goes up in the air. We have to try to make it one! Everybody wants to stick to their own dialect but I think that to become a nation, you have to try to learn to be flexible. In Greenland, they are slowly getting rid of the old writing system because it has too many letters. I worked with the linguist Robert Petersen when he came to Canada. I listened to him and we agreed. They are just starting to make changes in Greenlandic Thule, getting rid of 'L', 'D,' 'C' and whatever they use over there. Here we need only fifteen letters of the alphabet. We have no 'Os,' no 'Es,' no 'Hs.' We have to continue to work on it. I think it will work better if we shorten it.

In Greenland they use a lot of their own Danish ideas along with the Inuit language. They kind of interbreed the words in certain things. I noticed that in some places in the Northwest Territories, also for instance, in the Coppermine and the Cambridge Bay areas, the language is very hard to understand. When someone says it is time for school they use the word *skuulirit.* Part of it is in English. It's an

Inuit version of "go to school." They use language like that in some Cree areas in Northern Alberta; the Swamp Cree use a little bit of French and Ukrainian and English when they speak. They grew up with that, and they have changed to it. I think that we have to try to build our own curriculum from our own perspective, so that at least we have one foot on the ground.

That's just my idea! We could make our own curriculum for people who want to use another writing system. I always think about it! Is it okay if we get rid of syllabics? Don't just say no! Put it in universities where they can research on syllabics and see what happens. Maybe they will prove it to be good, we don't know. People do studies on things like that.

If somebody gave me a book and said I had to read it using a different writing system, like Arabic writing, if I was forced to, I would learn. You know what I mean. You too, I'm sure. Even Japanese or Chinese or Hebrew writing, if we had to live with it, we would find a way to communicate. We would have to learn. Most learned people can read several languages and use several writing systems!

Do you think Inuktitut should be the teaching language in high school?

Yes, to a certain point. Yes, I think that!

Okay, so what I understand is that the language should be kept alive, the philosophy of the Inuit should be kept alive, but adapted to the contemporary world?

Well, a revised system would be useful to everybody. I have a Bible at home that was translated in Alaska, and because I speak the dialect I can read it, but when I read the syllabic version it's not identical! You know what I mean. We say *angajuk* which means 'father' but around here people say *ataata*. But to us *ataata* means our grandfather. "*Angajuk, qilamik qiqilaaqtuq kaitun,*" which means give us the grace of God, give us food. This is just my opinion.

There are several dictionaries that have been written. I've got one at home from the West and I look at it once in a while. They did it in three dialects, Inuvialuktun, Inupiaq and Kangiryuarmiut, in three volumes. You have to study it; some words are the same, but others are different.

I would like to ask you about mining, Abe.

Well, that's something that we have to work on. We should have geologists or professional prospectors to teach people how to look at a rock, break it, and then magnify it. This is a big project. This whole island has never been walked upon yet, so we don't know what is out there. Some mining projects in the Keewatin are only now starting to develop.

Do you mean that Inuit should be trained at prospecting?

Yes. Because it's their land, they should be given training. For instance, they just found this rock on Victoria Island that we usually get from Brazil. It has been there for years, and the Inuit knew about it, but a geologist told them what it was. They just found some, and it's good for carving. It has a nice colour! What do you call that? I just heard the name on the radio not too long ago. It's a very popular carving material in the artistic world; alabaster is the name. They found some on Victoria Island and it had never been seen in any area, other than Brazil. We have to look into the rock formations and see what is there.

Tappani told me that he used to live close to Cape Dorset, at a place called Uqsuriat. There's a long line of quartz, miles and miles of quartz or marble and rock like that. Some people should really be teaching about rocks. There's a lot of jewellery making around here, too. We had jewellery in our Rehabilitation Centre. We used to go and pick up stones from the seashore and polish them. This is so important you know!

These are all things that should be looked at. Geology is one area they should really study, because they're going

to have a lot of exploration and mining to do. When everything is gone a hundred years from now, when some countries have used up their natural resources, we will still have a lot of potential here to fill the gap.

What they should do is send the people with potential, young workers, to mines to train them, and then have them come back and do the work. I know a couple of people that worked as mechanics in Nanisivik. One is my son-in-law. He worked at the Polaris mine. But the funny part is that Inuit do not want to go underground; that's not their style. This is why the mining companies have problems filling their quota. They say, "We are going to have sixty percent native miners here!" Now, if they hit twenty percent that would be very high, because the native people do not want to go underground. There have been mines for generations in England, for years and years to get coal. That was all they would strive for!

People from different parts of the world bring their own ideas when they come to a place like this. "I want you to build something for me," they say. But we don't think that way. This is our land. It keeps you here, but what does it give you? I mean, that's about it. When foreigners come, they invest money, and they work with people, and companies move up. Now there are a few native directors in some companies, even though they are having problems trying to give people opportunities. There are some construction crews here. It is difficult; human resource development always has created conflicts, whether here or in other places. That's my opinion. Now, don't quote me! Ha, ha, ha!

I would like to hear you talk more about the co-op movement because this is a very important tool of economic development for Inuit.

We had a co-op here and I used to interpret when we had meetings. Also, when I was in Taloyoak we were always conscious of the need for a co-op, but it was difficult for

people to stick together sometimes. Now they're coming along under new leadership. Father Goussaert was one of the initiators when he was a priest, but he is not a priest any more. His name is André Goussaert now. He was from Pelly Bay. I call him my priest; and he was a very good man. He is in Winnipeg now.

Igloolik was among the first to have a co-op. When I went there doing Project Surname, the co-op was on the Roman Catholic side of town, and the Hudson's Bay Company was on the Anglican side. "We are on the Hudson's Bay side," people would say. You know they were all cousins and they were not communicating! They were all productive making carvings, but religion had very strict rules on one side or the other, and the people respected them.

Have you been to Igloolik? It works like that; there are Anglicans on one side and Catholics on the other! In Pelly Bay they were all Roman Catholics! You couldn't have any preferences if you were there. In some communities they split values because of religion. They are very spiritual in Igloolik. The Anglican minister was an Inuk, Noah Nasuk.

Many people said that the co-ops were for Catholics, but they were not, they were supposed to be for all people! They said this because the priest worked with the people and was creative. He did this and did not ask if they agreed with the Bible. I like some of those guys.

I was in Ottawa when they first started to develop the co-op in George River in Quebec.[4] Another one was started in Puvirnituq by Peter Murdock, who had been a Hudson's Bay clerk and manager at one time.[5] But they got this thing going, Pete and Father André Steinmann who was a marvellous man. In Inuktitut they called him Umikallak! He was a professional. I don't know what he studied, but he went there as a priest. He said, "Well, we can't convert them as they are all Anglican already in Quebec, so let's make them do something creative." And

that's what happened; people got the idea. "Here's what we should do because it's for the good of all of us!" they realized. He was one of the ones that started the co-ops in Northern Quebec.

Inuit worked with people in Nova Scotia from the Coady Institute. Father Coady was the great co-op movement leader in Cape Breton, with Don Snowden. That was all they talked about. "You have to start something!" They started with an industrial division and now they have co-ops everywhere, even in Dene country. They work well and are very productive. I know Billy Lyall personally; he's one of the leaders. His father was a Hudson's Bay clerk or manager at one time.[6] He works with the people. Billy wanted to set up a credit union, but I don't know why they held their money back on him.[7] I think that he's right; we need to keep the money here!

NOTES

1. The right to vote for Canadian Inuit was recognized in 1950.
2. Abe is making this comment in 1996. The music scene has evolved rapidly since then in Iqaluit. Also, Abe is probably talking about an Inuit big-band or orchestra.
3. Agma refers to the symbol for ng in linguistics.
4. Now Kangiqsualujjuaq, the most eastern community in Nunavik.
5. The Puvirnituq Co-operative was one of the first co-operatives established in northern Québec, its origins going back to 1958. At that time, it was actually an association of sculptors, organized with the support of André Steinmann, a Catholic Oblate missionary who was involved in the region for many years, and Peter Murdoch, a marketer for the Hudson's Bay Company.

   Case Study Analysis Prepared by Jean-Pierre Girard, Isabel Faubert-Mailloux, and Sarah Beaulne.

   More on the development of the Puvirnituq co-op: http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/pr/ra/coo/puvi_e.html
6. Ernie Lyall.
7. In 1996, Arctic Co-op Limited with Billy Lyall as president tried to establish a Credit Union. ACL needed to come up with seven million dollars. Ottawa had agreed to provide one million and the government of the Northwest Territories had agreed to provide four hundred thousand dollars. Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. decided in March that they would contribute one million dollars to start the project. ACL then did not have the sufficient capital to start the project. See: http://www.nunatsiaq.com/archives/back-issues/week/60419.html#2.

Chapter 16

The Co-operative Alternative

Moving into Town

Those who built the new houses when the people started to come in from the wilderness were on the board of directors. They were the bum boys. They became the chairperson and secretary of the Housing Authority, and the last ones to arrive in the communities suffered; they didn't get electricity or good houses. The bum boys were janitors and honey bucket people and they got the better housing; they left the old houses for the ones who were just coming in! That's what they did. They would say, "We have the prestige now. You don't!" You heard that.

They had little square houses like the ones down by the beach. You see the ones with what they call ridged frames, they called them *angijuqtaujaq*. They had ten to twenty people living in some of those houses, no bigger than this. They were square so we called them match boxes. They had *qammait* too, with windows. These were all designed by someone. The insulation was very poor, one space and that was it!

You see that building by the museum there; they called that a ridged frame. People lived in them and everybody moved in, because they didn't have any choice, sleeping on top of each other. In the West, when a family of sixteen moved in, there were problems, and problems became more

problems. The father had to maneuver them around. Some had to leave. That was all they could do!

So the living conditions of the Inuit here, close to communities, were much worst than in the West because you had trees to build houses?

Yes, but in the coastal areas they had the same problems. Then they built the schools and they said, "You have to go to school!" That was life then. In 1965, when I was appointed as a territorial councillor, the government started a housing survey. We talked about the problems, but some people in the West, from Hay River for example, were conservative at that time. People wrote and said, "Leave the Inuit alone; they are happy in their *igluit!*" We talked about the rising birth rate and the growing population. Some people said, "We'll leave them as they are; the climate and the harsh world will take care of the sick ones, and the fittest will survive." That's the way they thought! Explorers wrote about 'the survival of the fittest!' You drown, you drown! You freeze to death, you freeze to death!

The explorers came with all their equipment; their primus stoves and so on, but the Inuit were never mentioned in their stories. It's like those people climbing Mount Everest. Every time someone lost their way, they wrote something about it. But they forgot to talk about the people who also went down with them; the people of the land. You know what I'm talking about? When they perish, well, they perish! You know what I mean?

So here, were there houses for Inuit before 1965?

In Apex the Rehabilitation Centre had buildings, the ones that had ridged frames. Even then, we had people who had spent years in hospital, and were involved with doctors, the health department, and social services. Our intention was to work with disabled people who had come back from the hospital.

Well, the first time I went into government service was in 1959. I came to Ottawa to have meetings with the Eskimo Affairs Committee. I met three other Inuit there; Singiituq and Ayaruaq from Rankin Inlet, and George Koneak from Fort Chimo. We had only one day of deliberation; it was on May 25th. There were people from what they called the industrial division, social welfare, education; people who were interested in the North. The administrator of the Arctic was Alex Stevenson, who was an ex-Hudson's Bay Company man. So we talked about the social problems of the North, and the things that were really happening. Bobby Williamson, who became a member of the Legislative Assembly from the Keewatin for one term, was working with us. I joined the Eskimology section where people were talking about language and things like that, but I also got involved with the co-op movement, not directly, but listening to others. There was Elija Menirak and Joan Ryan and their boss Don Snowden, who was the industrial division chief, along with Fraser Simmington and Paul Guth. I got to know those characters. I worked in Ottawa for four months.

That same summer there were people going to George River surveying the possibility of maybe setting up a co-op in Northern Quebec. It's called Kangiqsualujjuaq now, but it was called George River at that time, on Ungava Bay. They had people working with the co-op movement, but the Inuit didn't really understand. They made movies at the National Film Board about how to start one. They started building log houses and setting up a service centre with a little store and so on. At the same time there were some people in Igloolik who were also interested. There was a fellow who I met, a very interesting man, Father Goussaert knew him well, who drowned taking a cat train from one of the DEW line sites.

His name was Pacome Qulaut. He was one of the leaders, and as they were crossing a lake they went through the ice. They were retrieving equipment from the DEW line

site, to take it to Igloolik, so that they could build roads and build houses. That's how this man lost his life. I met him at a co-op meeting here, the first one they had, in 1962, I believe it was. There was a representative from Northern Quebec. George Koneak was there, and a priest from Igloolik.

You mean Father Louis Fournier?

Yes. Fournier. Paul Idlout, who is a bishop now, was then with the RCMP. He was there and another constable from Resolute Bay. There was also a person from my home area, Charlie Smith, who started a housing co-op in Inuvik. It is still there. They built the building with their own hands. It is still standing. They still have their own lots. That's when it began to move in the right direction!

People were from various places. Father Tardy from Holman[1] was also a priest and a very nice guy. I had met him before. They were talking about this movement, of creating something for the people. It got big around there, and also in Northern Quebec. Nobody really knew much, but they started to hear that others were moving in the right direction. Father Steinmann was a very strong influential man. He had a lot of training where he came from; France, of course. He went to Puvirnituq as a missionary. Most of the population in Northern Quebec is still today predominantly Anglican. Father Steinmann started working with people at Puvirnituq along with Pete Murdock, who used to be the Hudson's Bay Company manager there. Eventually he gave up his job and joined the government. He became a co-op director somewhere down south. I used to work with him here in Iqaluit at the Rehabilitation Centre. We created a small work area, and started the carving movement here. We had our own system, and we got official tags from the government that had the E-Number on it, like E-70. We had five numbers printed on a label which said it was a genuine Inuit carving, and we pasted the labels on the carvings.

Just a question Abe, was this in 1959 or '60?

This happened in 1960. In '61, it really began.

People were not carving here before?

Not too many, maybe the old guys, but you should have seen their carvings. Today they would call it very primitive carving, but I say they were the most powerful carvings in design! They worked with a file. They didn't have big machines in those days, and they didn't have a respirator. They had very little equipment; files and an axe, that's about it. They did no polishing, but they were doing it! I can still see them.

I went to the Kleinburg Museum near Toronto when I was travelling one time and saw some of the really old carvings.[2] These were true, powerful carvings; not polished with shoe polish or stuff like that.

Handicrafts also started at that time. Something in Northern Quebec called an 'ookpik,' an owl, made of sealskin, was first made by a woman by the name of Jeannie Snowball. She started sewing an 'ookpik' image with seal skins, and it was popular for a while, but then it died out. People were copying this everywhere. Every community in the North was making its own 'ookpik' out of rabbit and caribou skins and fox tails!

When they saw that people were ready to buy these, they just made them from their own imagination. That's the way it went, and they became pretty common. The co-ops were growing. They had one in Cape Dorset,[3] too. At that time it used to handle carvings. That is how it all started, with crafts.

James Houston was the administrator of the co-op in Cape Dorset at one time and they called him Saumik, the left-handed person.[4] He was also a very good artist with his hands, and he wrote several books, *The White Dawn* and other things of that sort. He was the first to generate Inuit art. He said, "See what we can do! It is Inuit culture craft!" He told me a story about how one day he was

sitting with Usuittuq, who is a noted carver today, and an old man now. They had a package of Players cigarettes and Usuittuq said to him, "You see this picture here of a man with a little captain's hat in a naval suit. How can we make some of those?"

That's how he got the idea that maybe they should go to Japan and get that silk-screening going. They started that print shop which still exists today. They started to flatten the rocks, and somebody drew a picture, and they put it on and started making prints.

They tried to set up a rule saying that nobody could copy another community. The whole thing started in Cape Dorset. In Holman, they had the same idea. They have a print shop over there, and now they have one in Pangnirtung. They also have weaving in Pangnirtung. All these things started to crop up in different shapes and different forms in different places. The magazine today on First Air advertizes this co-op movement very strongly.[5] All this happened not too long ago during my career in the northern government! I spent twenty-some years with them. It all became what it is today over that period.

Some co-ops really suffered from poor leadership and poor management and lack of materials sometimes. In Inuvik they did very well with housing. People had three of four bedroom mobile homes. They started one co-op in Apex, called the Apex Hill Housing Association. They got the materials and built houses with their own hands; we used to help them! There were six, seven, eight, nine or ten of them, I think. But then when they started to pay for the houses, the payments were too high. People got only three hundred dollars a month, and they wanted them to pay a hundred dollars a month for their first loan!

I think that some of the houses still exist, but they sold them back to the government, and they have put them up for rent. It was a start; it was really nice to see people living in their own homes. At that time, a house only cost about, at the most, eight thousand dollars. Eight thousand,

but you got your own material and you got to build it with your own hands. The administration and the people who were looking after this really didn't understand the importance of people working together. There were people like Paul Guth who was a very, very good organizer for the co-op. He worked in northern Saskatchewan with people so that they could be independent. They got people from the North working with Father Goussaert, who I mentioned earlier, and Father Fournier who I think is retired now, and also Father Tardy.[6] The priests worked hard with the local people, and they didn't discriminate and say, "You belong to this or that faith!" They believed in the people's creative abilities!

So the Catholic priests, the Oblates, were important in developing co-ops?

The Oblate missionaries, yeah, yeah, they were very important, and not only on the Inuit side, but on the Dene side too. They were very creative, you know, and they had a lot of training before they came here. I think that had a lot to do with it. For instance, in Resolute Bay, there was no store, but the co-op is still operating there. In Pelly Bay there was no other store. It really worked nicely there, and in other places such as Sachs Harbour.

Was this because, as in Pelly Bay, there was no Hudson's Bay Company store there? Did the Oblates have to operate a store to supply the community with merchandise? Is that how the Oblates got involved in the co-ops?

Well, in the one I knew about in Pelly Bay, this was very much so. They used to save every caribou tooth and caribou antler and seal tooth and walrus tooth and polar bear tooth and they carved small jewelry items. They also carved caribou hooves. There was a fellow there who was an artist. He had quite a bit of training in terms of art. He did drawings once in a while. He was one of the people who made small handicrafts at the time. He used to make

things with his own hands. I have seen some of his work and it was very beautiful. He made earrings and all kinds of things. But it was a little difficult for people in places like Spence Bay, because the Hudson's Bay Company was already there, and also in Gjoa Haven, Cambridge Bay, Coppermine and Holman. In Sachs Harbour, there were just no stores so they created one. Paulatuk was another place. It was also a predominantly Roman Catholic community.

When the real thing started to happen, people became aware that they could do their own thing, with proper leadership and proper training. Some Inuit did it on their own. It was very controversial. There was a lot of opposition to it from the Hudson's Bay Company!

They built houses in Pelly Bay through the co-op, and they didn't put any tenders out. "We can build it for you," they said. They had Father Lorson, who was a craftsman and a carpenter. Father Lorson later moved to Rankin Inlet. They built the houses when they brought housing into the Northwest Territories.

A housing survey started in 1965, and, would you believe, Tagak Curley was an assistant. He was flying around with this guy by the name of Bob Simpson who is now gone, of course. They made the survey in all the communities. People were coming trying to get houses, but they were miles and miles behind! The people who were living there first, like the janitors for the school, the administrators, the Hudson's Bay Company clerks and the RCMP special constables, all got the first houses! The co-op is really something to remember when you think about it.

Our Inuit culture has what you call in your language, a socialistic way of life! If someone got a whale, everybody got a little part of it. That's the way we were educated. If somebody got a walrus or something, they shared; it was a community contribution!

Goussaert said on the phone, "When people are hungry, everybody is hungry. There is not one family with food."

That's true, that's very true. They also have, like I said, when we talked about shamanism, a gift, so that when a person is very sick, there's someone to comfort him; when someone loses a family member, there's always someone comforting him. It's not necessarily some big social worker or some big priest or some minister coming and crying over the whole thing. They understood themselves first, and that's the way they used to do it. I've seen people on the land, and they knew how to take care of themselves.

I was just listening this morning to the radio about a fellow called Lypa Pitseolak from Pangnirtung, who lives on this side of the bay. He left in October and just came here now, over the mountains to get supplies, because the ice is no good over there. That's the kind of thing that they did in order to survive. Sure, they made a mistake from time to time, but they knew how to be patient. I always think about one thing when we talk about patience. I saw a man from Holman sit out over a seal hole. I couldn't stand there for five minutes without moving. He sat and sat for maybe ten hours until he got his seal. It was something else! Some of them can do that. The seal has to come up one time or another. I wouldn't last ten minutes; I would say I was getting fatigued. It was something that they learned years ago. It was the same with the co-op. They said, "It is not going to get you everything now, but in the future you will be able to become more powerful," and that's what happened. They're doing seventy million dollars of business easily in the North; some figures are in that line now.

It all started with carving. Puvirnituq was one of the first co-ops. I worked with Pete Murdock when he left the Hudson's Bay Company. He joined the government, and we set up a co-op here in a small way. It started to grow on people. We used to bring rocks from Three Rivers, Quebec,

tons of it; five tons at a time from Trois-Rivières, I think it was. They blasted out the rock, and sent it to us. When they carved it here, they began to understand that it was breaking, because it had been blasted. So here, they didn't use any dynamite; they used their hands to wedge it out and saw it away. That was how they got the solid rocks.

Now getting back to carving, I'm not a carver by any means, but the industrial division brought up two carvers from Cape Dorset. They are both still around; one was Ejevaluk Pootoogook, the other one was Kenojuak Ashoona, who got official recognition last February; I just heard it on the radio. They came to Ottawa in 1959, and were asked by this great artist, "How do you make a carving out of a rock?" They looked at each other and said, "Well, we know that it is a rock, but it is a soapstone rock". Ejevaluk said, "Well, what we think is that we take out the part that doesn't belong there, and create something that wants to stay there. That's how it starts!" This artist, a great carver, said that he had to go through school, but the Inuit surprised him because they were natural-born craftsmen.

The co-op movement was really surprising! If you could count three or four co-ops in the days when I first joined the government, we were happy, but now, you see their development!

I think Iqaluit is the only place where there is no co-op?

They had one, but it was poor. It didn't function well, and the people were not trained to serve clients. There was poor management, and I think they had money problems. I never got involved in any of those things, but I do know that I attended many meetings to listen to them. Around the Pelly Bay area, people are very concerned about the future and what's going to happen to their children. The co-ops are hanging in there very well now; they are well established and they have their own directors and presidents, and the Inuit and Dene have input.

There was one in Fort Resolution that started about the same time as here. I think it is still going on. Saskatchewan had many co-ops, too. It all started with one man. I read about his first co-op with the fishermen. His name was Father Coady.[7] He was a tall priest. I know a doctor who knew him, too. They have a university or a college in that place, what do they call it? He was a famous priest in Canada, and he started the first movement in Nova Scotia among the fishermen!

An interesting fact about co-ops, and I don't know what you know about this, but when the Inuit from Northern Quebec signed the James Bay Agreement, there were a few communities that resisted the idea. What I understand is that they were the communities where there was a strong co-op movement on the eastern coast of Hudson's Bay.

Several communities in that area, when they signed the agreement, I guess didn't get the same kind of administrative services as others.

If I remember right, the federal government at that time was looking after all the schools in Northern Quebec for the department of Northern Affairs and National Resources. They also had the RCMP servicing the people from Great Whale River [Kuujjuaraapik] to Fort Chimo [Kuujjuaq]. But they were asked to leave when the government of Quebec said, "We'll put our own police in and so on." The James Bay Agreement was already established around Fort Chimo, but Great Whale River was most affected by that dam, whoever it was built for! The new leadership was not listening to the central northwest corner of the region. There were several communities there, and they all had co-op movements at that time, and they weren't getting any services from the land claim organizations. In fact the teachers left there for a year, I think, without doing any teaching!

They didn't want to go with the Kativik School Board, which was an institution set up out of the land claim agreement.

These communities had their own organization.[8] The co-op movement was important in three, four, or five communities. They didn't want anything to do with the James Bay Agreement, because they had their own strong leadership. They were servicing their own people through the co-op, and selling carvings to whoever wanted to buy them. They weren't asking for any grants or anything! They had money!

It took a while for the James Bay Agreement [JBNQA] to sink into their minds, because the James Bay Agreement would make them part of Quebec! This was Inuit land! I'm assuming that it was not explained well on both sides. The co-op movement was moving forward, and here was something else coming up. People on the street at that time didn't really understand it. They were all well-versed in the education system. They were carvers and they were only focussed in one direction, to build the co-op.

The concept of millions of dollars was something new to them, and they didn't know what to do! Nobody explained. In some ways, we lost communication amongst ourselves over the Nunavik, Nunavut, Inuvialuit and Dene land claims.[9] They are going to have problems if they have the same attitudes as they have today. They're overlapping each other with their land claims.

It's dividing us now and then. People are still wondering, where is the balance? Is Nunavut getting more or the West getting more? Are the Dene getting something out of it? It's all a big vicious circle to me. One time we thought we belonged to a group or two churches, and that was all. The Hudson's Bay Company was there and the federal government schools were there, and we were all trying to mobilize ourselves around one system.

The government spoon-fed one and they spoon-fed another and spoon-fed the third and fourth. They are

all getting a little money, and the people are bickering among themselves. People don't understand the fact that fundamentally, basically, we live under the same sun, on the same land, and hunt in the same way. Sure there are different Indian peoples, and different reservations, but in the North it is not the same; we should stay together! Look at how much land we own, and how much influence we could have if we put our heads together! We are all together, although we may differ in language. Let's keep our cultures and our power together. This is the biggest part of Canada, one third of the country! Now they are going to split it into Nunavut and the Western region; to me it's not a healthy situation.

There is a new generation coming up. We are growing in number. We have a correctional centre in Iqaluit, full of Inuit. They have one in Yellowknife, too; a correctional centre for native people. There is also one down south. Those kids are going to get married, and they will have children, too. We're not going to keep telling them, "This is the way you lived. That's the way you are going to live!" We have to give them rehabilitation programs. We can't just say, "Well, you were bad, so you behave now!" They will still think the same way. The attitude is, if we are going to have tolerance, we are not going to allow this! You have to take the good and the bad and work with them together. You can't deny this and give that. It's not a healthy system!

But people don't do that. They say, "Well, we're going to get money and we are going to do this." Using money from the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement, now Makivik has bought the airlines out.[10] I don't know how much they paid for it. That is none of my business, but the whole idea for Inuit should be to try to stay together now. You hear people say, "If Quebec separates, Inuit want to become part of Nunavut!" But whose power are they talking about? I don't know what kind of power they're referring to! We need an overall general philosophy. We

have the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, maybe we should work through that.[11] We could be unified internationally, along with groups in Canada and groups from Greenland. Perhaps that could be the new unifying force?

Like other countries in the world, northern people have been exploited. So now we have to learn how to control our own destiny!

Is there a kind of solidarity between different groups of Inuit from Alaska to Greenland? Did you experience that?

When I was in Alaska, I observed that. I stayed in a senior citizens' home. There were people from the southern part of Alaska there, from St. Lawrence Island. They are called Yupik. They always sat together and the Inupiat sat together and, you know, it was natural! I went to Ottawa to get my Order of Canada in 1976, and my wife at that time was with me. We went to Rideau Hall with Governor General Leger, and I looked around, and gees! There was nobody that we knew! There was another person I didn't know, but we had seen on television. I thought, "This guy looks a bit like us," so I told Rose, "Let's try to see who these people are." It was David Suzuki and his wife! You know, unconsciously, when you see people who look like you, you start to mingle together. We unconsciously search for each other. I said, "We want to know who you are because maybe we could talk!"

Some people play both ways too often; that's what we used to say in the old days. I had a brother-in-law whose father was a white man. When he was on the land he travelled with us, lived like us, hunted like us, and trapped like us. He was good and sometimes he did things better than us. But when we got to town, he went on the other side and lived with his Q*allunaat* people for days on end. He used to maneuver himself around. Whereas we used to go trading and that was it. We were aware of all this at the time, but we liked him. He raised his children like us and we are all related.

But once in a while he would get the idea that he needed a few dollars for his family, so he travelled and got contracts and jobs. It was simple, and that was the way he operated. I think that is the way the Métis survived in the old days; they played both sides of the field! Remember I said that some people had opportunities that we never had, such as privileges; that is the same thing.

I never really got involved in or studied the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement because I'm not from there, but I do know that one Christmas, quite a while back now, every beneficiary in Northern Quebec got ten thousand dollars. Everybody involved in that land claim got money before Christmas. I talked to George Koneak who told me that they were getting ten thousand dollars for Christmas, and they were buying skidoos!

In Alaska they settled some land claims. The only claim that is really doing well is the North Slope. Others got some grants and they built hotels for tourism, but tourists never came! They remained open because nobody expected bankruptcy! They figured they were going to do things better than their neighbors. It was the same way around here. Some of the co-ops just collapsed, and others grew. It's very simple; it has to do with leadership and who is influential!

There are many things going on now in the communities. For instance, I was just reading some articles about Pelly Bay [Kugaaruk]. They now have their own hockey teams, their own arena, and their own managers. They worked through the people who represented them very well. They didn't ask for grants or anything like that. They worked hard to be where they are. Pelly Bay is an example of progress. If you see the *Netsilik Series* films that were made not too long ago, and you look at where they are today, that's progress, I would say!

Sure, it is nice to see the implements and things they used, but people still live on the land, but with different equipment. They can go out and visit their traps now in three hours. We used to go and visit our traps and it took

one week. The equipment we have today shows progress in some ways, but it is fast-moving.

So, is it possible to adapt to both ways of life?

Yes. Some of them adapt too quickly and can't handle it, and others adapt slowly and get what benefit they can get out of it. It is very, very complex if you look at it from different angles. Sometimes it's very good. For instance, I met Johnny May when he was a young pilot; he owns an airline of his own in Fort Chimo [Kuujjuaq].[12] He's retired now, I think, but he's the one that dropped candies on communities. He had his own ambitions. He just decided that he was going to do something, and that's the way some people are starting to think. When people get the right idea they say, "We'll run with this thing, and we're going to do it, because that's what we want!"

Billy Lyall was an auto mechanic. He lived down south but he wanted to come to live among us. Look where he is today! His brothers are all doing well. Some of my relatives are in that category, and some people here, and in Igloolik. But anyway, if you ever read my article, you will find out how I saw it at that time, long before any leadership was ever recognized. I wish I could write more, but I have some notes at home.

So, in the long history of the co-ops, who the heck was that priest? I am still trying to think of his name. Father Moses Coady was the one! He founded the Coady International Institute in Nova Scotia. But as I said, the priests were very creative. They were learned people; they studied a lot. They didn't just say, "Go to church. Otherwise, we will disown you!" You know what I mean? They used their knowledge, and passed it on. I really appreciated them because they didn't try to change us! I think they changed to our way of thinking, too, and that's very, very powerful now!

They didn't confuse people by saying, "Because I'm a priest you are going to follow my way. I am going to give

you my values." That's not the way they operated. They listened to the people. I remember when the two priests came from Paulatuk, and our relatives who lived there sent something with them for us. They came by dogteam. They were tired because they had travelled for three hundred miles to go to a retreat! That was their lot! I helped them feed their dogs. While supper was being prepared, before they ate, they used to say their own mass in our house, and we prayed with them. The way I saw it, we were just one group. But my father used to say, "Let them be! That's their way and their custom!" He understood all this.

Are you telling me, this is maybe a delicate question, that the Catholics had a different approach than the Anglican ministers?

Oh! By far! Yes! In the whole society that I know; for example, in Paulatuk they are predominantly Roman Catholic. They had their own boat, but they couldn't bring in all the supplies they needed. There was a local coal mine, and the priests let people go and dig the coal with their meager equipment, and haul it to keep their houses warm for the winter!

That's the type of people they were. They didn't re-supply too many people at their own missions. They made do with what they had. They were fishermen, and they became dogteam drivers, and boat runners, and captains and they lived like us! If you've read Émile Petitot's diary,you can feel that![13]

And who was Émile Petitot? He was a real champion in his own day! They didn't believe that he should have done all of the things that he did. I think that he was learning to understand the people! He told the story about how he lit a match and it popped, and the people figured that he was an *angakkuq* making a miracle! Ha, ha, ha!

What the Anglicans and Roman Catholics did agree upon was that, if I remember rightly, when we were trying

to get rid of the syllabics to write in the new orthography, both missions were really, really dead against it. I think what they were trying to say was, "Let's keep our fowls under our wings with the syllabic writing!" That's the attitude they had. That's how I saw it. I never minded syllabics; I had to teach it, you know.

NOTES

1. Father Henri Tardy, a priest who ran the Catholic mission at Holman from 1949 to the early 1980s, was inspired by the success of the arts and crafts enterprises in other Arctic communities. He and a group of artists formed The Holman Eskimo Co-operative in 1961. Four years later, the Holman collection was praised by the Canadian Eskimo Arts Council (CEAC).
   From: http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/Exhibitions/Holman/english/art-making/index.php3
2. McMichael collection.
3. West Baffin Eskimo Co-op.
4. Inuit have always worked soapstone to make cooking pots, lamps (*qulliit*) and small amulets of miniature size. The whalers were the first buyers of souvenirs such as small carvings or engraved muskox horns or caribou antlers.
   In 1948, James Houston decided to go North to draw and paint James Bay landscapes. He got enchanted by the miniature carvings (*pinnguat*) that Inuit from Port Harrison, now Inukjuak would show him. He managed to collect as much as he could of this genuine art form. Back to Montreal, the Canadian Handicraft Guild organized an exhibition with the collection that was immediately successful. [Canadian Guild of Crafts Quebec: 1980]
   > The reactions were so positive that the Guild requested his return to the east coast of Hudson's Bay in 1949 to encourage the production for export of more of these delightful pieces. Houston travelled to Port Harrison (Inukjuak) and then north to Puvirnituq and Cape Smith, asking the Inuit to make more stone and ivory carvings for sale. While some were confused at this sudden burst of interest, Houston encouraged them by offering credits at the Hudson's Bay Company stores, exchanging their art for his sketches, and assuring them of the worth of their creative efforts. He returned South where the Guild held a very successful sale in the autumn of that year and promised to take a steady flow of Inuit works to be bought through and shipped out by the Hudson's Bay Company store managers.

> The federal government of Canada heard of this venture, and, being concerned about the Inuit financial straits and the amount of welfare payments at that time, negotiated with the Guild to pay for Houston's 1949 trip and for him to travel more extensively in the North the following year. Thus, Houston became unofficial roving crafts officer in the Canadian Arctic, continuing his successful encouragement of the budding artists in many Eskimo settlements. [Graburn 1984 p. 72]

Carving proved to be a highly appropriate activity in these years of rapid cultural change. It did not require a heavy initial investment nor any rigid schedule. A hunter could carve at the camp and bring his production with him when returning to the settlement. A carver could work part-time or full-time any season of the year. Carving stone was usually available nearby and could even be extracted by the carver himself.

Also, the money was badly needed. From 1945 to '55, the military was returning to the South and there were no more large investments in the Arctic. Epidemics ruined the life of most Inuit families. The fur market did not provide enough revenue. According to Diamond Jenness the average income of an Inuit family in 1950, including family allowances, welfare and trapping barely reached four hundred and fifty-four dollars. [Simard: 1982]

The news spread quickly and carvers sprang up in many communities. Peter Murdock, the Hudson's Bay Company manager at Puvirnituq encouraged the carvers and even promised twenty dollars a week to carvers who would improve the quality of their pieces each week. The business did so well that by 1957 the Puvirnituq carvers had a forty thousand dollar credit at the Hudson's Bay Company store! In 1960, they formed the Puvirnituq co-op.

In the sixties, the only way the new co-ops could be profitable was by selling Inuit arts and crafts. The revenue from the daily work of the carvers created the cement to build the co-op movement in the North.

Art buyers were more interested in representations of Inuit traditional life than in anything else. It was very important for the Hudson's Bay Company or co-op buyers not to get stuck with a dead inventory. The market was encouraging Inuit to express their own cultural world, myths, perceptions of the animal realm, and spirituality. Anything modern in a carving such as a rifle, a snowmobile or any Christian religious symbols did not sell well.

Inuit carving provided the economical strength to develop the co-op movement. The co-op movement was the first opportunity for the Inuit to meet as a contemporary society facing the challenge of the industrialized world. In 1971, ten years before anybody discussed such a possibility, the co-op movement in Northern Quebec first claimed a real regional government for their region.

5. The First Air Magazine is called *Above and Beyond.*

6. Father Louis Fournier is still active in Nunavut sharing his time between the communities of Repulse Bay and Coral Harbour.
7. From Larry Turner:

   > First Director of the Extension Department at St. Francis Xavier University, Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Father Moses Michael Coady (1882-1959) conducted a remarkable program of adult education for the fishermen of Canada's maritime provinces. While pioneering the organization and expansion of co-operatives and credit unions, his work contributed greatly to the well-being of outreach communities and hundreds of isolated families. "Self-help" could easily have been the motto of this giving, caring priest. The "Antigonish Movement" which he co-founded is carried on today in the Third World by the Coady International Institute.

   http://collections.ic.gc.ca/heirloom_series/volume5/170-171.htm
8. Inuit Tunngavingat Nunamini (ITN) was the organization representing the dissidents of the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement. An important leader was the late Tumasi Qumaq. The communities of Puvirnituq (49%), Salluit, and Ivujivik refused to sign the *James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement* (JBNQA) in 1975. The JBNQA allowed the Quebec provincial government to develop the La Grande hydro-electric project on James Bay.
9. Nowadays, Abe would have to add the Labrador Land Claim Agreement to this list.
10. Makivik Corporation, the JBNQA organization for Quebec Inuit, is now the owner of First Air, the main airline in the Canadian Arctic, as well as Inuit Air, a regional carrier for Nunavik communities. After the signing of the Nunavut Land Claim Agreement in 1993, Makivik engaged in discussions with Nunavut Inuit to become partners in First Air. The Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., representing Nunavut Inuit, preferred to invest in partnership with the Inuvialuit of the Mackenzie Delta, in the purchase of Canadian North Airlines in 1998, a regional carrier owned by Canadian International which was then rationalizing its operation to avoid bankruptcy.
11. The Inuit Circumpolar Conference is the international organization that represents all the Inuit from Canada, Greenland, Russia and the United States. It held its first conference in 1977 in Alaska. The president of the organization is currently Sheila Watts-Cloutier who has her office in Iqaluit.
12. Johnny May's Air Charter from Kuujjuaq, Nunavik. See: http://inuit.pail.ca/johnny-mays.htm
13. Émile Petitot was a linguist, a painter, a carpenter, and an ethnographer as well as being a Roman Catholic missionary. He was the first missionary to try to christianize the Mackenzie Delta Inuit in 1865, with no success. He was expelled from the area by Inuit leaders and was lucky enough to return alive to his mission at Fort Good Hope.

Chapter 17

The Beginning of Aboriginal Political Organizations

When I first joined the Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories as an appointed territorial member, at that same time in October 1965, there were some people who asked us to attend a meeting of the Indian Eskimo Association in Toronto.[1] Prior to that, we had heard a little bit about it here and there. I was among those invited. There were also George Koneak, Minnie Freeman, Annie Palluk and Elija Menirak. We represented various Inuit groups. Representing the Indian point of view was a fellow named Rufus Goodstriker who was an ex-RCMP officer, and Omer Peters and a fellow by the name of Russell Moses. There was also a Doctor, Gilbert Monture. We ended up with, oh, there must have been at least one hundred and fifty people, all big businessmen talking about the problems with Canada's native people and how they could settle these issues with treaties, and so on. Some anthropologist made a big presentation.

So what was their perspective? Why did they call such a meeting?

Well, they called that meeting to try to discover what we were doing with the native people of Canada. Some people had been studying them for years, and the government was not really doing anything to improve the

situation. The problem was, I guess, that there were all these Indian agents trained to look after the reservations, but they never really did the work they were supposed to do. Because of their training they got involved with the job, and they just assumed that they were not fit to work with Indians. There were very powerful missionaries working on that, too, but they were at opposite ends. The older missionaries said, "No, we can't let the people organize," and some big government officials said, "We can't let these people have these powers!" But the people who arranged the meeting rejected these ideas; they were people who had money, who had influence, from Toronto.

We elected an executive director, Ernie McEwan, who was a very interesting man. He had all kinds of influential documents about how the government was treating natives. He gave us some insights. But amongst the people who were really running the meeting, was a lady by the name of Clark. She was very influential and she came up North to see me a couple of times. She came here, and she went to Yellowknife when I was there. I talked to her about the situation, not only me, but others who knew something about what was going on.

They had studies. I have copies of some of the reports they did. For instance, in Edmonton, there used to be what was called the native skid row with native people just wandering around. It is also called 96th Street. There was also one in Regina and in Vancouver. We did see a movie about it called *Harbour Light* shot in Vancouver, where people hung around going nowhere!

I was involved in the first meeting, but I didn't really understand why. Soon we started to get correspondence, and then I went back to Yellowknife. The president, her name was Clark, came over, and we talked to other people about our concerns. We got together with Georgina Blondin, who was a young student who had just graduated

from university, and a doctor, well he was studying to be a doctor, Noel Carpenter, myself, and James Wah-Shee who was at that time the chief, or assumed chief, of the association. We wanted to start up the Indian and Eskimo Association in Yellowknife, and luckily, we had Mark de Weerdt who became a Supreme Court Judge of the North-west Territories. He was interested. We pulled together, not just Indians and Eskimos by the way; other people were also involved. Wally Firth, who was a pilot, and who became a member of Parliament eventually, came with us. The company, or the people that we were affiliated with, were in Toronto. They were big people who gave money away.

They provided a small plane for Wally, who was posted in the Northwest Territories, and he used to travel around the area. That was when? 1969. Well, it was started in 1966, ‘67 and ‘68. We had another director, Harry Leishman, after Wally came, and this continued until about 1971. The Inuit Tapirisat of Canada wasn’t the first organization to work on Inuit concerns; we had already begun working on them. There was a fellow there who was a writer, named Harold Cardinal. He was from Sucker Creek in northern Alberta, and he had been educated through the mission schools.

He wrote a book about how they were treated, taken from their homes, put through residential schools and trained. There was a lawyer, a Cree Indian from Battleford, Saskatchewan. His name was Bill Wuttenee and he and another Indian from British Columbia by the name of George Manuel were trying to organize people in the South before that! They tried to have meetings with the chiefs, but they told me that when there was a powwow they wouldn’t attend, because they were too busy doing their own thing.

That’s how it started. We finally got money from the federal government, from the Secretary of State, and that’s when organizations like ITC and the National Indian

Brotherhood were established. In the Northwest Territories and all across Canada, Friendship Centres were introduced through the organizations that we were working with, because native people had no place to go in large towns. There are now large Friendship Centres in the West; in Edmonton, Calgary, Vancouver, and Winnipeg, and even in Montreal.

They had their minds set that they had to get together to talk about their problems. But what really happened was that ITC became recognized officially as the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada. People still believe today that the founder of ITC was Tagak Curley! But he was going to school while we were working on that whole idea.

People were against it; even high government officials didn't want us to start something like that. In Yellowknife we wanted to raise some money and we decided to use the gymnasium in the high school to have a dance. We advertized it, and the director of education came to us and said, "You can't do that at the school, at the gymnasium!" I said, "Listen, this is a native school you're working in; this is where you have all your native students. You're an educator for the native people. We can use it! It's not your school! It's our school!" So he said, "You go ahead then." He couldn't argue us down because we had some kind of influence, not forceful but effective. Right about the same time, would you believe, there were people in United States called AIM, the American Indian Movement, and they thought we were connected to them. But we weren't; we were doing our own thing in Canada! They were violent and we weren't! We read about them, too. They started at Wounded Knee and did all kinds of things, but we were separate from them.

A couple of years later, when I was in Spence Bay, I got a telegram from Ernie McEwan asking, "Do you want to go to Australia to visit a group that's having similar problems over there?" I accepted, but my regional director said," No! You can't leave your administrative work to make a visit!" So

I sent a telegram and told him that somebody from Inuvik should go. Somebody else went from Inuvik, and he reported how the native people were treated all across the world, not only in Canada, but in other countries like Australia. He listened to some people from Hawaii who said, "When the Americans came here they just took our land and built big hotels." Tourism directors and money makers were there, and they said that was what was happening.

Can you maybe explain why the organization was divided?

They asked me to go to the Board of Directors meeting at that time. It was in 1969. They started to realize that they should have a separate organization. I had a telegram from Tagak Curley, and Nellie Cournoyea, who at that time was starting COPE, the Committee for Original People's Entitlement, asking me to go to a meeting, but I was busy with Project Surname. Wally Firth was working with them to get the land claim going, but eventually he became a member of Parliament, because somebody had to speak for them publicly.

It really went in the right direction. At the beginning it was a grass-roots movement, but they never mentioned that! They said that we started it, they said, Inuit started it! No we didn't! It was guys like Russell Moses, an Indian, and there was a Mohawk leader by the name of Ernest Benedict.[2] He's an old man now. There was Goodstriker. Some chiefs in Saskatchewan were starting what they called the Métis Movement. There were a lot of Métis and they were getting organized. In 1967, when I was travelling across Canada, after I became a Northwest Territories councillor, I went from Edmonton to Winnipeg, and we had dinner with the mayor of Winnipeg, his name was Stephen Juba.[3] He had gathered native people together through their organizations. "Get the natives together in the centennial year and let's have dinner!" he decided. I had to make a presentation. There was Doctor Adam Cuthand who was an Anglican minister, Doctor Ahab Spence, who was an archdeacon,

and native people belonging to different groups. We went to Regina, and we met with people representing the Métis, and they were moving in the right direction!

Every group was organizing?

Yes. They heard that there would be money available to start an organization! It was a centennial project, because it was 1967.

You know, Abe, in 1966 the United Nations voted on the declaration of the right of people to self-determination. That was a big shift!

That's right! But I think at that time, because of the residential schools through the missions, people didn't know that freedom of speech was a right, that every soul could speak what he thought. That's when we were given what we call, we don't call it democracy, we call it in Inuktitut, freedom of speech! You can say whatever you think is best, whatever is on your mind, if you know what I mean! You can say, "This is democratic. I could do this!" Speech is very powerful sometimes, you know!

The Minister at that time was Arthur Laing. There is a building in Yellowknife named after him! He was also a promoter of Yellowknife as the capital of the Northwest Territories in 1967. Stu Hodgson was his front man and he was the Commissioner. We made him Commissioner.

The Liberals then were preparing the White Paper that came out in '69?

That was the next election when they presented the White Paper. I read it, too.

About the same time, the federal government started to give money to aboriginal groups to get organized and negotiate land claims.

What happened with the land claims was that in the West, oil companies were coming in and they were trying to organize land claims but ...

From the left to right, Jack Anawak, Cecilia Erkidjuk (Back), unidentified participant, Mrs Erkidjuk, Joel Erkidjuk, Dennis Patterson, and Abe Okpik, 198?, Elders Centre, Iqaluit.
Photo courtesy of Martha Ningeok.

Martha Ningeok and Abe Okpik, 199?.
Photo courtesy of Martha Ningeok.

The Inuvialuit in the Mackenzie Delta?

Yes. The Inuvialuit; that's how they got the first land claims agreement in the North. Prior to that there was the Nishga claim in British Columbia and their lawyer was Tom Berger. He was recognized as being a very good lawyer, and that was why he was appointed as a judge. Later he became a New Democratic Party member of Parliament. So they had a lot of expertise around that whole thing, because Berger was, and not only him, but several others were expert native lawyers. They were not native but they were working for the native organizations, too.

Were the Nishgas present in Toronto at the founding of this association?

They had representation. They sent a young man; he was trained as a lawyer. There was also a young man from Manitoba. He, too, was becoming a lawyer, and a couple of lawyers from the Mohawk people. I think they were a woman and a man, and they were all very influential in our organization.

So, besides this central organization that started in 1965, what kind of organizations were there in the communities?

Oh, right here in Iqaluit we had no organization other than the Apex Hill community association. We started that! We worked with everybody! They gave us that IODE Hall [now the Abe Okpik Hall] to have our own dances, and we worked with the Toonik Tyme organization. At first people rejected it, but eventually it became a community event. We had the armed forces here, two, three branches of them. The navy was here, and the American air force, and the Canadian air force. The Ministry of Transport was over there, and we were over in Apex. There's an anthropologist who wrote about that. You can read the book, *Eskimo Townsmen.* His name is Doctor John Honigmann. He was probably the last anthropologist to study the people of Iqaluit. That's a while back; nobody studies them anymore, I don't think.

ITC began and they had their first directors meeting in Coppermine. I was invited, but I didn't go. I think there was a Cree from somewhere in Alberta, who developed, with Tagak Curley, a scenario to work with. There was Meeka Wilson,[4] Mary Cousins, and Leena Pedersen,[5] who was an Inuk member of the Legislative Assembly from Coppermine. Before that, we worked on the Indian Eskimo Association, even for the Territories. But when they got the money, they started working with Inuit; that's how ITC came into existence.

When ITC started, were the regional organizations already founded?

No! There was one meeting some place, which I didn't attend. I think it was in Northern Quebec. I did attend the one in 1973 in Cambridge Bay, which was the first time I had been invited to the organization. I knew that they were working with Tagak Curley, and he wanted to do something else, so he was going to ask somebody to take his place.

That's when I first met people from Labrador, and there were also influential people from Northern Quebec and from the Northwest Territories there, too. I was living in Iqaluit then. COPE had sent representatives, and there were some elders there. I said, "What we should do here is try to focus on the people in the small regional organizations." But they rejected that for quite a while, until we discussed it. I said, "Ottawa is Ottawa. ITC is there and we are not going to get any feedback from the people. Let's start something on the ground!" It took about two years to eventually start that.

Baffin had the first regional Inuit association, then the Keewatin, and then Kitikmeot. The first president was James Arvaluk, I think it was. Labrador was on its own at that time, because they had to negotiate with the province of Newfoundland. COPE was alone working on their own land claims agreement, and there was friction

at the meeting. I wasn't there, but Roger Gruben was representing the Inuvialuit at that time. John Amagoalik and Rhoda Inuksuk and others were involved in some of it, but they knew what the regions wanted. Shortly after, they started to put together the Baffin Regional Council but that fell apart eventually, because it was the same idea supported by the territorial government.

You mean there was a parallel organization developing?

Yes. They tried to set up a Baffin Regional Council, with all the mayors; they were always funded by the territorial government. They asked the same questions as they always did before, about better housing; the same things the members of the Legislative Assembly are doing today. I think they dismantled that.

In the beginning of all those things it was not easy, because first of all, you had to read well to understand what it was all about! I remember when I left the Mackenzie Pipeline, I went to work for the Public Service of Canada in what was called Northern Careers. Some of the first participants were Paul Quassa and Thomas Kudloo, who is now with the Water Board. Michael Kusugak was one of them. He's a writer now. I was edging them to go on in the right direction!

In other places the Métis did well, because they were influenced by Brandon College. Some of them became directors of Northern Affairs in Winnipeg, and here in the Northwest Territories.

The first person elected for the Indian Brotherhood in Yellowknife was James Wah-Shee. According to the people who were in the same class with him at Brandon College, he was always right at the top of everything. He was a born leader in the society where he grew up.

When I first moved to Yellowknife, I used to pick up the children from the airport and drive some of them to Fort Rae during the summer holidays. James told me, "I remember you, Abe. You drove us to Yellowknife in our

second last year, in grade eleven." I guess it was in 1965. Later on, he became chief of the Indian Brotherhood. I went to Ottawa with them on one occasion, just to listen to their appeal. In the Yukon, they started their own organization. It all started very suddenly, and evolved pretty fast considering the short time they gave us! 1965 is not too long ago!

Do you remember, Abe, in 1973 a judge declared that Treaty 11 was not valid because the people didn't know what they were doing at the time?

Yes, it was Judge Morrow. Later on he presented that to the people, and they got working on it. There was Rick Hardy who became a lawyer out of all those deliberations, and Nick Sibbeston. They were all working it out in their minds! They said, "This is our chance to do what we want to do!" There were younger people who at that time were in high school in Yellowknife, at Sir John Franklin, and some of them are social workers and recreation officers now. Although they may have forgotten some of their culture, they still live traditionally. They don't have to speak the language and eat like an Inuk to live their traditions, if you know what I mean.

So how did the clergy, Anglican and Catholic, react to all this political organization?

Oh! For a long time they said, "Don't do that." They said, "We are going to keep them this way as long as we can!" Years before, at Fort Providence, if I remember right, there was a Roman Catholic residential institution, and in Hay River it was Anglican. After the government took over in Fort Simpson there was Bompas Hall for Anglican Slavey children, and the Roman Catholics went in because the Anglicans were there. It was funny how they worked it out. They thought that they would hang in there, and make everybody think the way they did. But you know, it had some merit in it! It was not all bad, I'm sure!

But the thing that I did understand, and I talked to people who were once married and then separated about this, was that they didn't know how family life was lived at home. I was the same way. I was raised partly in an Anglican school, but my family raised me with the other kids as well. Some of them didn't know how to return to the system! There were a lot of breakdowns. Nobody really studied this, but I do know there is something to this!

People didn't know how to live anymore?

Well, not only that, they didn't know how to go about being in a family. They were told, "Have a shower, clean your room, fix your bed, line-up for meals." When they went back home, they expected everything to be the same! "What am I going to do here? Are they going to give me something, or what?"

They continued like this even when they got older. I talked to people who had graduated from grade twelve and then went home to their families. There were two brothers who went to school in Churchill, and they were in the cadets; one of them is still in the armed forces, I think. Their father was James Wilkee who lived on Baillie Island. They lived at Cape Bathurst. The missionaries took them to their schools, and left them there for twelve years. The father never went to see them, and they never brought them back! They didn't know the language! Both of them are very active today. The other brothers who stayed at home didn't have any education. The two brothers finally decided to come back after graduation, and one of them was in uniform as they came off the plane. It was spring, around June, and there was still ice on the water. Their father and mother came to see them. They were told, "Here you are. Here are your children!" The father and the mother looked at each other and told the pilot, "Take them back! We have no place for them here! They haven't got the right kind of clothes. They can't stay here! Take them back!" It was their way of saying, "You took them away

and now you can keep them! Don't ask us to communicate with them! They can't eat the food we eat!"

The father was a whaler, and he was always on the land! That was the way it worked. I'm not saying it from hearsay.

I went to Norman Wells in 1972, and I stayed there for a week.

What were you studying? Was this before you went to university?

No, while I was in university. There was an archaeological dig. I spent a few days in Norman Wells. A family lent me their shack on the riverside. I used to visit them. The lady would drink a bit. One afternoon I was sitting in their living room, and she was a little drunk. Her husband was very much ashamed. He would say to his wife, "Get out of here!" But the lady was dancing in a circle in the living room, and she was looking at me and saying, "Why did they take my kids away?" She kept dancing and saying, "They shouldn't have done this to me!" She knew just a few words of English, and she repeated, "They took my kids. Why? Why?"

Because you were French! Yes, that's right! Because of the priests!

I never though about that!

They knew. They knew right away because of your accent. She probably thought, "Is that a priest?" They blamed the priests for that. Now you know! Ha, ha, ha! I could tell you right away. When you started talking they knew! It was so difficult! People from France came here and people from England and they tried to impose their beliefs and their values and ideas onto us. They never looked at our values! People with high profiles came up, and they said, "We are going to educate these people!"

I got to know one family fairly well. In fact I knew two of the brothers, Josh Bernard and Pascal Baptiste well. The family all spoke French. Their sons spoke French; that was

the second language they learned, and they couldn't speak very good English. It was always nice to hear Josh whenever he said something using his own name. "By Josh I'm going to do this! By Josh I'm going to go there," he would say. Ha, ha, ha! That was an expression he used. They were diligent people who believed in their lot. They were good craftsmen, and the brothers, years ago, used to make square timber logs; they had no sawmills and these guys were very skilled! They had huge log cabins, huge! They were already old when I met them; they were trappers, independent trappers. They used to come to town. I got to know the boys because I was in hospital with one of them. His name was Pascal, but he was a little older than me. Because we came from the same town, when we went to the hospital, we talked about news from home.

Is a land claims agreement some kind of a treaty?

Well Treaty 8 and 11 were signed by two groups, I believe. Father Lacombe worked on Treaty 8, at the turn of the century. Doctor Conroy was the Commissioner of the Treaty 11 Commission.[6] He took a priest along, Bishop Breynat, who spoke Chipewyan. He spoke several languages. He's the one that wrote the book on caribou or whatever. I met him when he was an old man.

You met him?

Well I saw him. I was a little boy but my father knew him. When they came down in 1921 to sign Treaty 11, all the Indians went to Fort McPherson and Aklavik. Then they went to Kittigazuit; this is Inuit country and the people are called Kittigazumiut. We called them that because that's the land they belong to. The language they speak is Siglitun. Remember I told you about this guy who was reincarnated, William Maniloaluk, who was a respected middle-aged man. People knew him as a powerful, strong provider. They brought an interpreter along, and gathered the people in the whaling camp. The interpreter

said, “This is the Commission. Do you want to sign the treaty?” They talked for two days. The people said, “No! What do we need a treaty for? What’s five dollars to us? You can’t buy anything here! We’ve got whales; we’ve got ourselves!”

At that time the whalers had left, and there were no more caribou in the region for about ten years. They had to go a long way to get caribou. Finally, the white men called on chief Maniloaluk. He was not chief, but they tried to call him chief! He was a leader, the leader of the group! He said, “If you want us to sign, don’t give us five dollars! Bring the caribou back. Then we’ll believe you! We’re not signing any treaty. Five dollars is five dollars to you, but don’t come here until you bring the caribou back!”

That was in 1921. In 1929 they brought reindeer from Alaska. It took five years to get them to Canada, and he was still alive! They brought caribou but then it was controlled by the federal government, and they couldn’t kill them. If someone killed an animal, they were charged. He said, “My dream has come true, but it’s not for my time. Somebody else is going to get the benefit!” You know, that was his philosophy!

“We don’t want money. Five dollars is five dollars,” he would say. What was five dollars for one year? They might get a plug of tobacco or something! There was a lot of fur around, and they always had seafood there! William Maniloaluk was recognized as an Inuit leader, but he was not a chief! The white man decided that he was a chief, and whenever they wanted to consult somebody, they went to see him!

Well I guess it was the same for the Dene. For Treaty 8 and 11, they didn’t really have official chiefs!

For the Dene, and all across Canada, especially in northern Manitoba, Indians accepted that you had to respect the chief! In fact I’ve seen a chief wearing a uniform and a medal from Queen Victoria. They told them,

"We could give you free cows, horses, and ploughing implements," but the people didn't know what a plough was. They had probably seen somebody ploughing, but they said, "Here take it!" The stuff just rusted! They said to the people in the North covered by the treaty, "We'll give you a free fish net, free ammunition and rifles at cost." Inuit were included, even though we didn't sign a treaty. The Hudson's Bay Company had to sell us shells at cost, the fish nets at cost, and, what were the others, ammunition and rifles. The treaty Indians could get those things free! The Hudson's Bay Company also gave us traps at cost.

The Indian agents were just clerks who wrote what they thought was best for the Indians. They didn't know anything! They were ex-army fellows, and they controlled the people to a point. But the treaties said different things in different places.

I read a book about the making of treaties with Indians all across Canada, from Nova Scotia and into Lake Huron. When they first started, they had no way of surveying. I talked to some Indian chiefs and they asked if I had heard about a gunshot treaty. What they used to do was make a guy walk some distance with a muzzleloader, and let him fire. If they could hear it, they would answer back. That was the only way they knew! "That was the line of the treaty!" I asked, "What happened when the wind changed? Did you get less land?" That's the way they did it! They were just a bunch of clerks! It was not right!

The federal government started to recognize all these things, and knew what they needed to do. The groups should have had a council elected, and then talk to their people and listen to them instead of using Indian agents! They became the controllers. The Indian agent was supposed to listen to the people who needed help and all this, but it was almost the other way around!

Was the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada mainly founded to negotiate the land claims agreement? Was this the purpose?

Well, the purpose was to be recognized first, I guess, and to show that people could run their own organization. There was pressure coming from two places, the Mackenzie Delta and Labrador. If I had my way, I would have joined with COPE and got more money altogether! But now it's too late. Government is good at that. They said, "Let's wait until they have a little friction among themselves!" We are the same people, but now there are two groups, one in Nunavut and one out West. Well to me, it's not a good system. Now they are talking about mining here in Nunavut. I call it the 18-82 agreement! You know why? The municipalities of Nunavut get only eighteen percent of the land; the other eighty-two percent is federal. Eighty-two percent! Figure it out! Eighteen percent belongs to the Inuit; eighty-two percent belongs to federal or territorial governments; the water and all this land. So, Nunavut is recognized, but we are going to grow in population; we are going to need a different education system; we are going to have to work with technology. This will create more mobility.

I had lunch with some people from Australia last spring, and they were interested in Nunavut, and how we are going to make it work. But over there they have trees and plants! They can develop; they have done it for hundreds of years. Here we have fish! We have seals and we also have other traditional animals like white fox. We could develop many things. Even the white fox, if you cut it up well, you could sell to China! You can get meat from that, too! It's no different than the dogs they eat over there! Ha, ha, ha!

NOTES

1. For more information about the formation of the Indian Eskimo Association, see Chapter 10.
2. Ernest Benedict was an important Mohawk leader from Akwesasne. In the 1940s, he founded the first Mohawk newspaper there, *Kawehras*, It Thunders! Later, Benedict established the *Akwesasne Notes*.
3. Stephen Juba was mayor of the city of Winnipeg from 1957 to 1977.
4. Now Meeka Kilabuk, former Commissioner of the Nunavut Implementation Commission.
5. Originally from Greenland, she married Red Pedersen from Cambridge Bay.
6. For many years, Anglican and Catholic missionaries lobbied Ottawa to obtain funding for schools, hospitals and a steady supply of food for the native population of the Mackenzie Valley and Great Slave Lake. They thought that if the different tribes in the Mackenzie Valley would sign a treaty with Ottawa, they could improve their economic situation.

   Oil was officially discovered on August 25th, 1920. Consequently, the administration of the Northwest Territories got organized to register claims for prospecting purposes. The commissioner of the Northwest Territories in 1920, William Wallace Cory, finally created an advisory council which had its first meeting on the 28th of April 1921. Since 1905, the commissioner had moved to Ottawa and had made all decisions by himself without any formal consultation. The council decided to open a territorial administrative office at Thebacha [now Fort Smith]. The new office had the responsibility of surveying the land, studying the feasibility of a pipeline, and inspecting the oil wells. All this development happened without any consultation with aboriginal populations.

   It is only when oil was discovered in Norman Wells in 1920, that Ottawa saw the importance of including the Deh Cho [Mackenzie] Dene in a treaty. The important questions concerning how to take the oil to the South, and further oil and mineral exploration brought more and more foreigners to the region. To protect the new industrial installations and the new settlers, Ottawa had to extinguish the ancestral titles of the local Dene to the surrounding land. Henry Anthony Conroy was named Commissioner of Treaty 11 and asked Father Gabriel Breynat, a Roman Catholic missionary who spoke the native dialects, to accompany the commission. The Treaty 11 Commission eventually planned to include the Delta Inuit [Fumeleau: 1994], but the advantages of the treaty were not evident to them, as they could make good money trapping fox and muskrat. According to Abe, an influential leader in Kittigazuit named Maniloaluk, refused to sign and told the treaty party that they would only sign the treaty if the government could bring back the caribou in the Delta.

Chapter 18

A Special Way of Communicating

The supernatural has been with us for a long, long time. Somebody picked it up somewhere. In my mother's and father's time, they saw actions performed when people got together to find out where the animals were, and so on. They told me a story about that. When my mother and her cousin were teenagers, they were told, "Someone is going to communicate through his spirit or whatever." So they all went into the *qammaq* or *iglu* and were told, "You have to put all the lights out!" When they put the lights out, my mother and her cousin were curious and they opened their eyes. The man said, "Close your eyes; otherwise you are going to spoil my travels to where I'm going!" Before he got going, before the communication, the man was tied up in his clothes.

They were having a hard time that winter because the ocean wouldn't open up! There were two of them and one was called Ituk. They tied him up, and they got an axe, an ordinary axe, and they tied it at the end of his legs. They tied it with a rope, and then they tied him up completely. Then he said, "Now I'm going to call my spirits; turn the lights off." All of a sudden they started to hear strange noises like the birds of the summer, like the loon, and the raven, and all kinds of geese. This was in the winter time. They continued listening and pretty soon he said, "I'm taking off now. I'm taking off," and they could hear

him as if he took off and was not there! He was mumbling some kind of communication through this other fellow but they said that they waited and waited, and eventually they heard the same bird sounds. Then they heard this big sudden clunk! He hit the centre, right in the middle of where they were lying. Finally he said, "You are going to open your eyes now and light the lamps!" When they lit the lamps and opened their eyes, the man still had his clothes on. He was tied up, but the clothes that he was wearing were all turned inside out! He said, "Oh it's going to be all right. Tomorrow there will be open water for us to hunt seals." That's one of the things they told me, and they didn't doubt it; it happened!

My father's father had a brother, my namesake, and they used to live in the mountains then. They went up two rivers looking for sheep. Sometimes my grandfather, this is my namesake's younger brother and his wife, played the drum. All of a sudden the drum would get caught by someone! Then voices started to come out from the handle of the drum, but my grandfather...

What would come out?

Voices from the handle of the drum! Someone was talking, and my father and his brother were watching. My father wanted to hear what was happening. My grandmother would understand the language that was coming out of the handle. My grandfather was in a séance or trance, and they said that it happened all the time! The voices wanted to know who they were, and what house they were in, and whether they were sick and so on.

Another time we were way out on the ice, and while we were having supper my brother said, "I think I'm going to shoot something, because I feel it in my hand!" There was moonlight outside, and all of a sudden a dog started to bark, and out he went. He just put his caribou skin socks on and ran out. He could see the dogs barking; they knew there was a polar bear! You cannot see a polar bear in the

moonlight, but you can see the shadow from the moon. It's a similar colour! So he let a couple of his dogs go, and the dogs started to attack the bear and he took one shot and killed it stone dead!

And he knew? He knew the bear was coming from the itching in his hand?

Yes! My cousin on my mother's side used to have strange insights. He's about a year older than I am. We camped with him one time, and he said," Oh, something's going to happen and we need to go back. Somebody will die or somebody will get sick!" He always had strange premonitions. I call it strange because I didn't know much about it.

Intuition?

Yes, intuition, That's what they call it, eh? But we do know about the power of suggestion. When you get angry and don't say anything; our words are more powerful than we think!

My sister said that a friend of ours, who was very close to my father, had three daughters. A man from Alaska married the oldest daughter. This brother-in-law was also a trader and a business man. He was more like what we call a half-breed. My sister grew up with him.

He used to take his wife trapping, and then he went trapping with the sister instead of his wife. We were close because when we were children we played with one another like sisters and brothers. My sister and the younger sister had been to residential school in Hay River. She was an adamant woman, too, you know, when she wanted something! So, she didn't like her brother-in-law leaving his wife and taking her other sister out trapping. They got into an argument, because he said that he was not with the other sister. She said, "What about taking her trapping? Where's your wife?"

My sister was listening, and in the end they got into a heated argument. My sister was very frightened and she

heard this young lady say to her brother-in-law, "Sometime you are going to die!" About three months later he was gone. That's the type of thing that was very frightening for us. We don't make comments like that, because the voice has a lot of power; we believe it!

There was an old guy. What's his name? LACO Hunt wrote about him in his book.[1] I was travelling on the land with this old guy, my brother, and my uncle, when that man died suddenly! Honestly. I had a prayer book and we buried him twelve miles inland. I took my diary from that day, and I gave it to the RCMP officer because he was the coroner. He said, "Well, we believe you Abe. You can go!" They got a copy of that diary entry in the "G" Division Headquarters in Ottawa. I had a copy of it, too. This old guy never went to church. He sat around, always smoking a pipe. He was a kind of in-between man for business men like the Northern Traders. He was a Kuuvagmiut from the southern side of the river originally, but he came to live in Canada.

He had relatives, and they said he had what you call an amulet. He had a gift for certain things so that when he was afraid of something, it would be his protector. This amulet was an ermine, a pure white ermine that they call a *nallumiaq.* He didn't tell me about it, but my brother knew. He said, "He shows something, and this weasel comes up!" "What do you mean something? It's just a real animal," I said. He used to tell us that he belonged to the coyotes in Alaska. He said he belonged to that group.

A coyote is like a fox, like those in Arizona. He was an Inuk, a Kuuvagmiut, and he never really believed in religion. He never went to church, but he helped people out. The strangest thing happened when he died on the land. My brother and I were digging the grave and shortly after we started we heard strange noises, like a human cry, aaaaaaah, aaaaaaah, aaaaaaaaah. I thought I could see loons out there, and I looked with binoculars and there was nothing! But there were strange noises, like someone was yelling.

I couldn't understand it! When I took the dogs home they swam around his boat; he had a schooner. He was travelling with an inboard motor. He had been there years before, looking for gold that was assumed to have been discovered by some musk ox hunters in the whaling days. It happened around Pearce Point, that story! He told me to come along because he wanted me to keep a record, a travelling diary. There was my older brother, my uncle and him; four of us! We were travelling on a nice July day!

Was this pretty common to have an animal protector of some sort?

Yes, pretty common. Some people still have them, but they won't talk about it! Anyway, I looked, and I could hear sounds like somebody yelling, aaaaah, aaaaah. I told his grandson about it, and he said, "Well he had some kind of gift. He was a really good trapper of all kinds of animals." Many years later, my brother was working in Roma, Alberta. I was in Leduc, Alberta, when Rose went to hospital with one of my little ones. I went down to see him. This was in August perhaps, and I was sleeping in his trailer. This was in Peace River country, Peace River Alberta. He was working there in 1966, or maybe '67 or '68, somewhere around there. The old man I'm talking about died in 1952. I was sleeping, and all of a sudden I heard that same noise! I opened the window and asked my brother, "Where's the light? What's all this noise? There's something out there!" He listened and he said, "Oh! Those are the old coyotes! There are all kinds of coyotes out there, and when they start talking to each other, they start yelling." This is no word of a lie. I said, "I've heard them before when that old man died, and it was way to hell from here! He died along the coast, and this is Alberta!"

He died where there were no coyotes?

That's right, and I never figured it out. At the time, we were sorry when he died. Something told them to come.

It was strange. He had two dogs, and we took them back, and they swam around his boat in the water!

So that's the kind of thing you don't understand, but there is something there! I know the Indians have very similar experiences. When I was in the hospital, the Cree Indians used to go outside and do their sunrise ceremony. I've seen it in other places, too. That type of thing was not uncommon. There is a true story about Kublualuk.[2] I missed him by about one year, but my uncle and everybody liked him because he was a supernatural giver of something.

He was the one who supposedly put a curse on the police, and they died in the lost patrol[3] outside of Fort McPherson. The old people that I knew talked about him. They knew it was him, but how can you prove it? They were intimidated by the bishop and the minister! They tied him up and threw him in jail, and he got out! They didn't know what to do with him! People knew about him, and even when he was long dead they said, "Don't make fun of him!" Everybody said Kublualuk had a strange supernatural gift of some sort.

My brother-in-law's grandmother told us they were sailing in a whale boat one time, and he said, "Well, I'll show you what I can do!" He stood out over the water from the gunnels. He didn't fall in you know! It's hard to believe, but he had some gift, or maybe they were hypnotized. We don't know! So those things are very real in places!

Abe, you told stories during our interviews about the relationship and the communication between hunters and animals. It was very interesting. You told stories about elders who could sing and almost charm whales.

There was what they call an *irinaliuti* around here. The Aivilingmiut practiced that, and Simon Awa's grandfather, Johanasi Uyarak told me about it. He knew Knud Rasmussen.

This one named Johanasi was a Christian. He said that when they went out and saw the animals sitting on the ice, and had no way to approach them, somebody started singing, humming or chanting, and then somehow the ice floated close by, and they got the walrus! In Alaska they believe the same thing to this day when they are whaling: the people in Tikiraq and Utqiarvik. Even in Canada, you know. They asked someone to start chanting to get a bowhead whale. They chanted away at it, some old lady or old man. They made a communication, and they listened, and pretty soon the animals came. It's simple!

I heard stories about people who knew when they were going to see a relative, or when they were going to have a visit, or when some strangers were coming, or when someone they hadn't seen for a long time was coming, before they came! In fact, some women were very good at that. There were no phones in those days!

They knew if something was coming up. The one that I told you about, when they tied him up, used to travel to visit some other part of the world. There was another one, his name was Uvayuaq from Tuktoyaktuk. Stefansson knew him. He was a medicine man and Stefansson was young at that time. Vilhjalmur went to see him and he talked to him and saw the trance. He wanted to record it, but when he came back five years later, the mission had taken over the congregation. They said that one time he went to visit his relatives in Alaska. They have reindeer herds; they worked with reindeer. Nobody knew anything about reindeer in Canada. Uvayuaq, who was my sister's namesake, her grandmother's father or brother, said, "I'll be here when the reindeer come!" He died about seventy years ago, but he had said, "When they come passing close to my grave, I will claim a few of them!"

And low and behold, his grave was one of those places where the caribou passed. My sister was there because she was married to his great grandson. Frank Cockney's grandmother is the one I am talking about; that was her sister

or brother, one of them. Sure enough while they were out, they saw this and they said, “Four reindeer were walking, and the four of them died right there!” You know that’s not uncommon, too, but you don’t believe it until you really actually hear about it. Some people say they believe it and have seen it! You know that the power hasn’t left the person!

I had a strange experience, too! This friend of mine had another brother, but he always called me brother. He drowned around 1980, in an outpost camp. He was alone. Prior to that, you know, I was very close to him. One time, he said, “I came to see you when you were coming off the plane with your little boy in Iqaluit!” I said, “How did you communicate?” All of a sudden, you know, around there something pressed me! I was reading a book one evening and I felt this again, and I said, “Isaac! Isaac! Don’t do that to me anymore!” Next time I saw him, he said, “You know, you remember me now when I come to tease you. I always touch you!” I said, “I know now, because it has happened to me several times after that, also!” He said, “ I will go visit you sometimes when I’m alone, and thinking of you.” It was like a joke but it was real! He knew the day, the time, and the moment. When he drowned and passed on, I never had that strange moment anymore, you know, that someone was communicating with me!

So that’s one of the things! He was the only one that told me more about that. He had some supernatural gift that he practised when he was alone, you know, and I guess he learned it from his mother’s or father’s side. His father was my father’s uncle from their cousin. We were going away one time and somebody bought a bottle of rum. We drank it. We were sitting alone. He said he tried to believe in God’s word after the missionaries came. They knew they were coming. He said, “You don’t worry about when I die. I will not be gone. I want to become one of the sea mammals, a whale maybe!”

So, you know, you should stick to your own beliefs. Like the Indians; they have their own ways. They can become an eagle. This is very close to our beliefs; or they become caribou, you know. It is like when Peter Freuchen wrote a book. I have the book at home. It's called the *Book of the Eskimos.*[4] He talks about this strange time of essence when he sees himself as a white man. He was married to an Inuk out of Thule. He tells a story, it's not just a story, it's real to me, because I heard it from other sources myself, not only from there but from some other sources.

When I went to Knud Rasmussen College in Greenland, I was there for three weeks studying and reading. When I walked into this building, there was a big mural of an Inuk in flight and right away I knew; I understood it right there! I said, "I know what that's all about! I haven't practised it, but I've heard so much about it, you know!" It was *ilimmaqtuqtuq*, when a shaman takes a journey through the air. Even in Alaska they still talk about it. Religion really tried to tell us that this was all taboo or gibberish, but it was not!

You know, when I went to Spence Bay as a government worker, I saw that the Netsilingmiut still practised this. We would go on the land and they would talk about how they used to communicate, but they wouldn't talk about it in town! I would say, "Are you an *angakkuq* or something?" They wouldn't say it, but they used to practise a lot of that communication when they were not in town because they were closer to nature. They told me that. I wasn't allowed to talk, because it was my uncle who should do that, or my brothers, I guess, as they were older, the older ones. My father did it. But it's just odd! When we live in square rooms like this one, I think we lose some contact! When I go in a tent out there and listen to the birds, you know, it gives me some kind of a, not an uplift, but a good feeling that at least something is there. You know?

I had another experience with my cousin, too. You know, it is not too often you put a hook in a water hole

and get a big pike. One time when I was a little boy, this happened, and then at the same time my cousin who was staying in another place got one, too. When we got together we both showed a big pike! About the same time! You know it's strange to hear some of those stories.

Abe, do you see it as important for Inuit to hang on to this heritage? Is there something precious there that should be cultivated and respected?

Really, really! Because, it's something that kept us alive, that kind of communication, all the way from Siberia to Greenland! You know, we have this similar culture.

One of my father's friends, I called him my granddad, and I, we took an RCMP officer and a DEW line worker and a superintendent way out in the ocean. They wanted to see some whales, but it got foggy! There was a current and everything, and we had no compass. This man put a little handkerchief on the mast. He said to steer with that. We had gone in close because we couldn't see any more than a hundred feet over in the fog, but that wind was strong. We looked, and there we were, where the entrance of the river was, from here to there, right dead on it! He got on that and he said, "We're here!" I mean you couldn't see more than a hundred feet around you! You know? He knew how to influence that type of thing, I guess.

You know people didn't get lost too much, before they adopted the skidoos, eh! One of the things that my father told me, was, when you get lost don't move until you know where you are, so as not to lose your energy. After a while it should get clear, someday! That's the type of thing he would say. In lots of cases the Indians have similar communication, but we had it, too, because we lived in the same environment!

Ha, ha, ha! My sister used to live in Tuktoyaktuk. She's dead now. They used to go to Inuvik to play Bingo. Every time they passed these three tents, I told her about these devils that had been there for hundreds of years. They

always dropped something there for good luck! She grew up with old people or whatever. One time, she was older then, and when we got there, we were playing Bingo, and I was behind the guy that dropped something there for good luck. He got the five thousand dollar Bingo! There's not a hint to it; it's just some gift you know. They always dropped shells or matches there and said their own little thing!

This happened in Alaska all the time, too; leaving a gift of something. It works as a charm; like when you throw coins in a fountain. Well, these are forever fountains, like I said, and they have some strange powers! Some people want to get lucky at something, or they want to catch something. There's a place called Candle Island. I was there with my son Kevin at one time. "Kevin make your wish! Don't tell anybody! Drop something in there, a shell or something that really belongs to you," I said. I wanted him to be given a gift to have luck! You know, that type of thing!

It changes, I guess. You know, Indians have sweet grass: they use that sweet grass. I've got some at home, but I refuse to use it because I have to use it with somebody else, I think because it's not my style, eh! But I talked to some people in Yellowknife, translators, and they said, "It's really good for your mind!" I got some at home. There were a couple of Indian people that came from southern Ontario and they went to visit the elders. They gave us that, but I said, "I just have to really understand this before using it! I'm not scared of it!"

One time there was a Ouija board where we were visiting, and my daughter Kathy was going to high school. She was at the residence. I told her, "Kathy, don't ever play with a Ouija board. It's not our system! We have a different way!" Other people used it and asked it things. They asked, "Where are you from?" They said that they wrote letters to this address. It came from a mental institute down in the States somewhere. They got an answer. Well,

that type of thing, you know, there are some strange ways of thinking!

I told you about how they used to do things, you know, when I was watching that whale. We would use wood to find animals! There are a lot of stories! My mom said that my grandfather used to put his foot on his mitten, saying "*Tigala,* come on now!" Then he would say, "The animals are there!"

He took what? A stick?

Yes! A stick. He had a special stick. Whenever he tied his mitts onto the stick he would say, "Tell me." Then, if he couldn't lift the stick, it was an indication. It was the same thing as the guys around there used. It was the same idea.

You went where your mind was telling you to go.

My mother said he didn't have an *angakkuq*'s power, but maybe you know, to them that was just communicating with something!

The Netsilingmiut were good at that, you know, even the Aivilingmiut used it.

What do you call that, Abe?

We call that *qilajuq*. It means you got some form of an answer. Like this Johanasi, when he was a young man, he was polar bear hunting with this other guy around Committee Bay, on the other side, around the Fury and Hecla Strait. They were travelling and they saw this polar bear. There were two or three tracks across. One of them said," Lay down this way." The man took off his parka and just lay back on it, and he said he tied a dog whip to his head and he pulled and his head moved on this polar bear track. Then he changed and lay on another track. When the other couldn't pull him up, he said, "Wow, it's there!" They knew the bear was there. And low and behold, they just went a little way, and found a polar bear that had just killed a seal and was sleeping, because it had eaten the

seal. So they shot it! I don't know how they knew, but it certainly worked for them...Ha, ha, ha!

Another story you told in these interviews, I think it was about your brother or somebody you knew who would ask the ravens for help.

Oh! Yes! I would do that all the time! Even when I was with my uncle. We believed in it strongly, like when we were travelling in the mountains. If we saw a raven flying, we would say, "*Tulugaq! Tulugaq! Tuktu tugalu kiinuginai*." It went, Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! It almost made that noise! And if you went there, you would get something!

So you can talk to these birds?

Yes! And if they answer you, then the animal was there. I was sitting with somebody in Clyde River and I said, just trying to make conversation, "Do you fellows use any birds as signs to help you hunting?" He said, "Yes, we use ravens, too." He said when he goes polar bear hunting, out on the sea ice, there are always some ravens around. He said, "*Tulugaq, Tulugaq, Nanuq tugalu kiinuginai!*" Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! They would go there and there would be a polar bear!

It's a type of communication they knew from way back! Even today I believe it! Now I'm getting old. My grandmother used to tell me, "Feed the birds, too, out there!" When I feed the birds, I wait one or two days, and somebody brings me a big chunk of caribou. I believe it strongly! They always look after you, if they see that you look after them! Well, ha, ha, ha!

It's like the white sailors years ago used to believe in birds, eh. They buried some of their dead on the land. There were some graves from a shipwreck. This guy saw these graves. The markers were made out of wood. Most of them were carved with a bird on it; something like a sea bird. So, we're not the only ones who believe in birds! This is real to us!

One time I was up here trapping white foxes. I just had five traps. I went out for one weekend with Akisu Naullak; who has passed on now. I was putting out seal fat for bait. He said, "Don't do that here! This is not seal land. There is fish and caribou that you can use." Then I said, "Why?" I found out later that you cannot boil seal meat and then put caribou meat in and boil it in the same pot! That's their way! That's the way they are! Otherwise, you would have trouble hunting! And you know, I believe that! If you believe it, you believe it!

Another interesting question we discussed many times together, is that even if Christianity is very strong now, those kind of beliefs are still alive, too!

Oh, yes! Yes! Yes! Well, you know, the Old Testament talks about Jacob and Moses and Abraham. They had special communications. This was easy for the Inuit to understand! Just like when Stefansson asked this old guy, "Do you believe that the Lord raised Lazarus from the dead?" "Oh yes," he said, "just a couple of years ago, this old man raised someone from the dead!" So it was easy for them to believe!

This is not so far away!

That's right! It's very close, because there is a bond. They believed in that type of thing. I mean, I'm not a religious man, but I believe in some of the philosophies they had!

NOTES

1. LACO (Leonard Arthur Charles Orgar) Hunt used to live in Aklavik as a federal administrator. He first came from England to the Canadian Arctic as a clerk for the Hudson's Bay Company and gained a vast experience of the Arctic. He wrote a book, *Rebels, Rascals & Royalty* about his life, including an interesting chapter on his stay in Aklavik. See: http://www.nwtandy.rcsigs.ca/down_north8.htm
   In his chapter about life in Aklavik, Hunt recalls the story of the death of Dennis Anuktuk as told in the personal diary of Abe Okpik, July 29, 1952:
   > After walking for nine and a half hours, we were going to pitch camp, unfortunately things began to happen exactly at 1 a.m. July 30. Dennis Anuktuk passed away, Owen and I were walking ahead and we must have been 200 yards away when he died in his tracks. I took my English prayer book and said a prayer for him. So did Tom, and as we knew we could not carry him back to Pearce Point, we buried him where he dropped. [Hunt: 1983 p. 135-136]

   LACO Hunt also gives interesting information on the purpose of the trip: "Abe Okpik and his Inuit companions, who sailed the schooner Saucy Jane to Pearce Point and beyond to look for gold." [ibid p. 135]
2. > At the time Kublualuk [was] on the big island [Herschel], many ships wintered in the harbour. Sometimes the Eskimos and the sailors fraternized in parties. On one occasion, Kublualuk drank more than he could handle and under Inspector Fitzgerald, was arrested and brought into the detachment jail. [...] The police heard the next morning that Kublualuk had made an escape and was at home. So the police went to get him and put him in handcuffs, then back to jail went Kublualuk.[...] He told the people that as soon as he was locked in again, he saw an opening, a cut in the bars. The cut becoming larger and larger. Then putting his hands up, the chain of the handcuffs fell to his feet. And through the opening he walked away again. [Nagy: 1994 p. 30]
   >
   > After that the police gave up and did not try to lock him up anymore. Instead the Inspector hired him as a special constable [...] until the departure of Inspector Fitzgerald to the Yukon where he met ill fate and died of exposure in 1911. [COPE 1990, 1-1-01:1-2]

   Kublualuk would fly from Herschel Island. They used to see him. Story told by Ishmael Alunik and Lucy Inglanagasuk, [Nagy, 1994. p. 30].
3. See: Dick North, 1995 *The Lost Patrol, The Mounties' Yukon Tragedy*. Vancouver. Raincoast Books.

4. See: Peter Freuchen: 1961, *Book of Eskimos*. New York. World Publishing.

Chapter 19

Put Your Mind in the Right Direction

In this chapter Abe tells many stories and episodes of his life that we already know, but then he is concluding, wrapping up his whole life. At that time Abe knew that his health was deteriorating. Obviously, we also knew this was our last interview.

When I joined the government in Ottawa, the first job that I had was to try to learn to read and write syllabics. There were three other people working on this, because of all the sick people in the hospitals in Hamilton and in Quebec. They had no means of communication other than through the Social Welfare Section of the Northern Affairs and Natural Resources Department. We went sometimes to visit Mountain Sanitarium.[1] Some of the people had been there for a number of years. There were others in Quebec City and nobody ever visited them. But they used to write letters to our office asking about their families and relatives. Some of them of course, never returned home, you know. It happened to us in the West, too.

So, that's when I started working in what they called the Eskimology section. At that time, this meant that they were trying to take care of the Inuit who were in long term hospitalization situations. Some of them spent seven or eight years in the South, and they had to adjust when they came back. But they couldn't adjust to the environment

they used to live in, because they were not in any condition to do so. They would eventually die, because they couldn't handle the harshness of the land!

I was working there for about a year, and I was interested in the language, because it was not my dialect. I came here to Iqaluit in 1959. There was a Rehabilitation Centre for people trying to get back, or trying to get into the work force.

I got involved with that and I learned a great deal about it. I was working with handicapped people, who were under Medicare. Some of them couldn't go back to their homeland because there was no housing for them, and they couldn't go and start living in an *iglu* in the middle of winter, which would be almost a disaster for them.

We brought their families in from Quebec and from North Baffin. One of the things that we worked hard on was helping the children to grow up and make a place for themselves. Some of them were very badly disabled, some of them couldn't walk! But we had to work with what we had.

So we set up an arts and crafts store with carvings and women's sewing. Some other guy wanted to run a movie business, and he worked on that. There were three or four men working in a laundry, and there were a couple of cooks and helpers learning how to cook. There was a lapidary for making ornaments and polishing stones. We had a couple of carpenters. We worked with hands-on projects. They were small, but we were trying to keep people busy doing whatever they wanted to do and liked. Sewing was one of the women's real trades at that time.

I was working with those people, and we were running a transient centre for people trying to go home from the hospital. Some of them spent six months here, because there were no planes to Arctic Bay or Pelly Bay or even Pond Inlet. If the RCMP plane came, or there was a charter from the department, or engineers or somebody bringing material, we could put the patient on, and hopefully they landed there!

They knew they wanted to go home, but there was no way we could put them on a plane unless there was a charter going. The social development department had only about two charters a year for their work! Most of the people who went to the South were picked up by the ship, the *C.D. Howe*. Years before, they used to sail all the way to Montreal, and then disposed of the Inuit on the railroad and sent them to hospitals. Some of them were very, very weakened, because they depended on southern food.

I closed the Rehabilitation Centre in February 1965, because we ran out of money, and the program was dissolved. The industrial division and other groups were taken over by the private sector, so we closed down.

In 1965, I got a letter from the regional director in Yellowknife who asked me to move over there to work with miners from the Rankin Inlet mine which had closed in 1962, I guess. The mining company was the Rankin Nickel Mine. People were out of work when they closed it. Arthur Laing was the Minister at that time, and he got some of his workers to try to get these miners to work in different mines, because they had already learned how to use mining machines and knew drilling and blasting, and so on. So, ten families moved to Yellowknife one day in a plane. They just landed them there and said, "Go and get a job!" They had no agent, nor any services. They knew each other, but that was about it. I moved there when they had already been there about four months. They had children, and their housing was inferior as they had been put into little shacks.

I started working with them. There were a few large families; one had eight children. The father was a really good miner, a good underground worker. There were two brothers, and about six or seven of them who were working, but the families were not looked after. Social welfare didn't understand the reason they were there. So, for two and a half years I went with them to the bank, put their money in and did things like that.

I was working with the social development department in Yellowknife, and I was also involved with the local social problems of the Dene nation. The Indian Nation was founded at that time, but I was working closely with people who had come to Yellowknife suddenly with their families and were trying to make adjustments.

They were working in the mines, in Con Mine, but the families didn't get just treatment. They wouldn't send their kids to school, and when I asked them why, they said because they saw a lot of Indians walking around. Whenever they had seen a movie, the Indian people were the bad ones, and psychologically this made an impression on them. They still thought that Indians were bad, and they were in their land. It took a while to get adjusted to that you know! That was one of the reasons why I was over there, and trying to give them some comfort.

People came from other northern communities, and I also helped by introducing some of them so they could get to know each other. I spent two and a half years there. Then I went, after my appointment as a member of the Legislative Assembly, to Spence Bay doing the same things, dealing with social problems and taking people in and out. I was also working with the justice department interpreting, and explaining what it was all about, because social problems always ended up in the justice system, too, because of the way people were treated at that time.

I spent two winters there working with social development, although I was the administrator. There was somebody else that could authorize major charters if necessary. People had no work over there in Spence Bay, now called Taloyoak, nor in Gjoa Haven and Pelly Bay, all three of which were under my administration. Every week I got a trip, when the plane came over and brought social assistance and took sick people out, south to Charles Camsell Hospital. From there, it was a long trip! When I went south, I used to visit all the hospitals just to see how everything was, and to keep in touch with people who were

suffering from several long-term illnesses, usually tuberculosis at that time. I spent about two and a half years there, and then I moved over here after Project Surname, and I worked with young people going to the Ukiivik Residence. When they closed Churchill down, they started taking students from each community in Baffin and Keewatin and bringing them to this Federal building. When the army left, they left everything there, and they made it into a hostel. I worked there for two years, too.

Students were going to school here in Iqaluit, and when they built the high school, I was the counsellor for those young fellows. We phoned their parents when they were lonesome, and talked with them. "How is my family doing? How is my son, my boy doing?" they would ask. You know we had them communicate with home. They never had that before. That is the type of thing I was working on most of the time. When I went to work with CBC to cover the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline hearings, I saw a lot of social problems. We went into the Dene Nation communities all down the Mackenzie. I left that country a long time ago. There were real social problems in some places.

Most of those people, when I was young and afterwards, had gone to institutions like the Anglican and Roman Catholic residential schools. Even when they moved to Inuvik, they still had Grollier Hall and Stringer Hall, named after two bishops. They were taking Anglicans to Inuvik all the way from Spence Bay, and the Catholic missions were doing the same thing, packing people in. Spence Bay is about five hundred air miles east of Inuvik. They would take those kids and put them there for a year without going back home. They were also doing this to the Dene children, too. Some people went to Yellowknife, and although they were not homeless, when they went out in the work force they couldn't communicate with their families, because they had gone through the schools. Some of them did well, I mean, some of them became engineers

Photo of a young Inuk with his dogs and small *qamutiik*. It could be a picture of the young Abe Okpik.
Photo courtesy of Kathy Okpik.

and sanitation people, and there's one doctor. But they had forgotten their language completely!

The parents sent them to a hostel at six years of age, and they didn't come back for years, until they had gone right through the system. I'll tell you a true story. I was working for our boss, the school boss; he was in the same office. He said, "Why don't you go to Fort Simpson for the school board, and take the Inuit back home, or take them out to Contwoyto Lake," which is out in the wilderness! It was springtime, and there were three girls and four boys from Bompas Hall in Fort Simpson. They were sending them home for the spring, for the summer holidays.

We flew out and saw dogteam tracks. They said, "Those must be the sleigh tracks we are following." The families were camping. I got these boys out of that airplane, in May. They had no rubber boots, just oxfords, a tie and a hat! The family was happy to see them, but they were living in tents and using fur blankets and so on. It was hard for them to understand what was going on. From Stringer

Hall, we took two boys who had been away at school all their lives back to their family, who were out camping. One was in a cadet uniform, and they got off the plane at this camp and their father said, “I can’t look after them, take them back!” He knew they were going to have problems; they wouldn’t have any books to read, no radio, and all those other things.

I saw some of them later at the Judge Berger hearings in 1976 or after that, students that had gone to Akaitcho Hall and Sir John Franklin. Lots of them, when they married, had family breakdowns. They didn’t know how a family worked! They assumed that they would fall in love and decide to go and do something together. They couldn’t handle it, because there was no family counselling. They only knew each other in high school and that’s the root that developed into social problems all over that area!

There was a lot of alcohol involved, too! Some of them did well, not all, but some of them did really well because they were interested in learning, although many could not speak their own language after. I do know that the Métis and Dene living right in Yellowknife went to the same school, but they went home and they spoke the language, which they never forgot. But the people who had to come from Coppermine or Holman, they forgot their language. It doesn’t take long when you’re young!

It was a situation where education was important, but they forgot the people that they really belonged to! Now it’s changing. When I came here in 1971, we were doing the same with the students from Baffin Island. It’s only in the last few years in ‘95 or ‘94, that they finally got their own high schools in the communities. That’s twenty some years later, you know! It’s a big generation gap! It’s not a one-day problem; it’s a problem created from way, way back, from school days, and even before that! It’s a long term problem that came upon us over the years, and I think that only now people are trying to rectify it. We have a college now, Nunavut Arctic College, and people

are getting closer together, but we are going to have a hard time mending some of the things that happened to families. The Baffin Correctional Centre is full of our Inuit, and the Yellowknife Correctional Institute is full of Dene. I guess it's because we took children away from their immediate family, hoping that they would become good subjects. To a certain point, they were, and then they started to have their problems.

Is education still a shock? There are no more residential schools; high schools are in the communities now, but is it a cultural shock for Inuit youth?

Oh! By far yes, yes, yes. The kids going to the high school here see more television and have more access to games than they did in the old days, although some of them go to the Cadet Hall. My grandson is doing well and he's interested in school, so we encourage him, but you have to listen to our side of the story, too! Some of the people living in the West go south and they mingle with the wrong crowd, and they end up in institutions! It happens over here all the time, and in the Central Arctic, too, and so on, but it's how they were brought up in their home, too! Being taken away from home was the worst thing that could happen. In fact when I went to school they said, "Don't speak your language!" I'm sixty-eight, so that would have been what, fifty-eight years ago, maybe. I was about eight or ten years old when I started school. That trend is still there, but how are we going to cure it?

Some people want to go back to their old culture; some people want to move forward with another culture. The people who are in-between are the ones wavering on both sides, doing a little bit of carving and odd jobs when they can. Nobody really gave them a steady income, or day-jobs like other people.

There are a few teachers coming up now. My daughter is a teacher. But you have to learn how to live independently, and not go back to your old system. We

trapped in the West, and when the price of fur was down, we would go to work! The price stayed down. You can't depend on fur anymore, and you have to work on something else!

I went to the residential school and we were taught to get up at seven, and have breakfast. We followed this routine of regular hours, because our teachers were raised that way. The principal was an Anglican minister. That was not too long ago, but it took a long time to figure it out! For instance, several communities eventually ended school in May, so people could go out on the land with their family. This was an important time of the year when the birds were coming back and other animals were giving birth. They could get closer to the people who, at that time, were involved in nomadic activities on the land. Some of them started school in August because, especially in the high Arctic, it starts to get dark early. We still enjoyed the long days, and this was most important because most of the time you were in darkness. In Grise Fiord and those places, you ended up in the dark all winter!

That's one of the reasons why, when the teachers and people from Europe came to my homeland, they used to put dark, dark blinds on the windows in the middle of the summer, because they wanted to sleep in the dark. But it was daylight outside. A lot of people used to ask me, "How come the Inuit kids always play around at night?" I said, "Do you blame them? This is the only daylight they have for the longest time! At other times they are at home at night, even in the dark days." They never thought about it themselves! It's the climate that changes! But they brought their system in, and they said, "Well, this is the system we are going to work with!"

Traditionally, Abe, would Inuit sleep more in the winter and sleep less in the summer?

Well in the dark you have to! You can only go so far! In the moonlight, they could go further, you know. People

moved around, but not as much as in the summer time. Nowadays they go in a boat and they go on skidoos in the spring, and they can see a long way.

I went to school with the present Commissioner, Helen Maksagak,[2] and her husband John. They're about my age. John perhaps is older. They talked about when they went back to Cambridge Bay, where they originally came from. It's very, very flat and they could see everything all around them. They both said, "When we got to Yellowknife we could only see that far!" As Commissioner, she goes to different places, to other communities. "It was all bush! I couldn't see anything!" she said.

I remember when I was in Ottawa, there were two guys from Igloolik, and we used to sit together. Whenever I moved, they moved; when I walked, they walked. Finally one of them said, "I'm kind of hesitant to lose you!" I said, "Why?" "Well, I can't see behind those trees! I can't see behind the houses!" he said. In Igloolik when he used binoculars, he could see everything all around, because the land around there is broad and flat. Even when we sat in the car and we would go for a drive, the trees were high. They were really aware of them. "What is going on?" they would ask.

It had a strange effect on me when I first moved into an open space, because I grew up in the bush. I know my way around in the bush. Commissioner Maksagak once said, "Although we were reindeer herders for ten years, and raised our family on the tundra and in the bush, we still can't forget the land we came from." That's really true, I think, in some cases.

I like to go back to the Mackenzie Delta in the springtime, in May, when the birds are coming back! Sometimes you get bad weather. It's the same as any other place. I guess what I'm trying to say is that when the teachers came up here, they had their own values, their own books, their own system, and they imposed it on us. But they forgot that we had a different culture, a different way of relating

to the environment which had been important to us before they ever came.

For years, the Hudson's Bay Company used to provide the basic things like tea, tobacco, coffee, sugar, and flour. They didn't have big freezers in those days, so they kept everything in cans and stuff like that. This never changed for years and years, until electricity came in, and then they set up a refrigerator and things started to be different!

I was in a couple of communities in Northern Quebec, and it happened in the West, too, where they would bring their hogs and steers in on the ship and butcher them there, on the land. In Quebec there's a place called Inukjuak; I guess in your language it would be Sheep Island. They brought in their own sheep and raised them on a huge island until they got fat. Then they killed them for food for the winter. That's the way they did it. It was strange to see how some people reacted when they saw a live pig. They said, "How come it's so dirty?" Someone said, "If you gave it a chance, it would be the cleanest animal!" A hog! Ha, ha, ha!

School was somebody's idea from the South. They said, "We've got to educate these people, get them off the track they are on so that they learn our system!" The Catholic and the Anglican missions both were in agreement. They both said, "We've got to assimilate them!"

Is this trend changing now?

Well, nowadays it's changing because of technology and computers. You see the people in the college. I knew how to type long ago with a Corona Typewriter or an Underwood, but I can't touch those electric ones! I don't know how to use them; they seem so sensitive to me! You had to press hard on an old typewriter.

When you started a motor in the old days, you might not move fast, but now you press the button and away you go! You don't have to work around it anymore. My father used to tell stories about when my uncles were sailing and

the wind dropped on the river. What would they do? They carried the whale boat. They walked on the land, one man pushing the boat along, and they would go for miles and miles. You know they had to go to Fort McPherson! But when the wind was right, they would be okay; they would enjoy that trip! That was their whale boat. Then when they got an engine, an inboard motor, everybody enjoyed it. You might only go twenty-five miles in a day, but that was better than carrying the boat, eh!

These kinds of changes have come upon us, and the school system is still changing. I'm still alarmed. When I first started working in the high school here, they had music teachers from the South; that was about twenty-five years ago. Now there are a few of them around here. I would still like to see a band! Most high schools all over the place and all across Canada have their own bands.

So that's the type of thing that they were trying to impose on us.

I was watching an interesting television program about culture. In every environment, people have a different way of doing things. I think it's only right that we keep what they poured into us, but our point of view is also important, and we have to try to work all this together. Someone said, "Here we are trying to walk on the moon. Never mind the moon for a while! Just keep on at what we are doing." I think it's very important that some of our land markers are still around today, like our *inuksuit*. When you were travelling you knew what to do. We knew how long it would take us to do something in the old way. Now people think they can make it somewhere in an hour, which they may do with a machine! Sometimes they get caught in the winter.

Someone was just telling me about a person in Pangnirtung who lost his skidoo because he thought he could make it somewhere in no time at all. He didn't look around! These incidents happen now, and a lot of people

get hurt. People do have problems with modern travelling equipment, in boats, and all that.

In the old days there was a saying that if I had a dogteam, the dogs would take me anywhere as long as I fed them. But when I get a skidoo, if I get hungry, I can't eat my skidoo! Ha, ha, ha! There was a time when some explorers did have to eat their dogs. It's not an easy thing to do to your friends! It's like someone not wanting to eat their horse, because that's their friend!

You know it costs about nine or ten thousand dollars to buy a good machine these days. When they first brought skidoos up, there were people who got lost, not only here in Iqaluit but in other communities, and they never found them! The old timers said that when you drove dogs in cold weather, you had to run and sometimes stop and look around to see where you were. You may travel the whole day, twenty or thirty miles in the whole day but you got there! Now they travel for an hour and they forget to look around to see what's behind them and the next thing you know, they are on the wrong track, and then they run out of gas! There are people who had to walk back fifty miles from here when they first got skidoos. They lost their direction and used all their gas. Next thing you know, they had to walk. People lost their lives, too, in the middle of the winter because there was no search and rescue. Changing times have caused some disasters, which you would never have encountered in the old days unless there was really bad, bad weather.

I remember, not only me, but other people remember, too, that when you had a dogteam and you were very close to them, they would detect things. They smell things and they always know where they are. You won't get lost if you have a good lead dog, even in a storm! They are the ones that know. They are trained better than your machine!

Are you saying, Abe, that with dogs, you have better instincts that when you drive a machine?

Yes! When you're travelling out there, you're alone, by yourself; you're closer to the supernatural and the spirits with dogs than with machines. Your mind is relaxed. You know there's a creator and you know that he watches you. People believed that and I believe it, too! It's not a mystery! When you start to doubt nature, it's difficult! You have to understand! If you start to doubt nature, then your mind is not in the right place. You need to point it in the right direction!

That's one of the things we learned. In the water it is different, too. I have been in boats before, but not in this kind of water around here. I'm used to muddy water; it's like being on the land. I could paddle. I didn't have any fear at all, because it was like coffee with milk or coffee with cream, a lot of silt and muddy water. But when I get in a canoe here and I see the bottom, oh! It's not my place! It's like high altitude for me or something. You have to get it in your blood! When I go to Broughton Island, I never look down at the mountains from the plane, especially on a clear day because I'm scared they are ready to grab me. Ha, ha, ha! Lots of things have changed in the present day. I don't know what things are going to be like fifty years from now. Maybe they are going to have electric cars, electric skidoos!

NOTES

1. In Hamilton, Ontario.
2. Helen Mamayaok Maksagak was born at Bernard Harbour in the Northwest Territories. Her professional history includes work as a civilian employee of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the management of a transient centre. In 1992, Ms. Maksagak became the Deputy Commissioner for the Northwest Territories, receiving in December 1994 an appointment to Commissioner. She was both the first woman and the first Inuk to occupy these positions. In March 1999, she was chosen as the first Commissioner of the then-newly created Nunavut Territory. Her term lasted until April 2000.

   From the National Aboriginal Healing Foundation website: http://www.ahf.ca/english/board.shtml

Glossary

Aapuq
[Western Arctic] A spouse. [South Baffin] *aippaq.*

Aarnguaq
[Baffin] An amulet. [Western Arctic] *nallumiaq.*

Aganja
A kinship term used as a form of address.

Aglu
[Baffin] A seal breathing hole in the ice. [Inuinnaqtun?] *nunaun*.

Aivik
A walrus.

Ajaaja
A traditional song.

Akkak
Father's brother(s) or male cousin(s).

Aliguqtuq
[Baffin] A bottle of alcohol. [Dialectal variants] *misuruqtuq, nakasunnguaq, sikuliaq, pullaujaq.*

Amautik
A woman's parka with a pouch and a large hood used for carrying babies.

Anaana
Mother.

Angajuk qilamik qiqilaaqtuq kaitun
"Give us the grace of God. Give us food."

Angakkuq (angakkuit, pl.)
A shaman.

Angijuqtaujaq
Small houses introduced in the 1960's that had a frame that looked like the outline of a dress.

Arviq
A right whale.

Ataatatsiaqqunaq
[Western Arctic] The term used to address an old man.

Atulluk
[Western Arctic] A chant used to get an animal to come closer. [Eastern Arctic] *irinaliuti,* or more specifically, *manilirijjuti.*

Atuvalluk
A song of love.

Auktalik
[Inukpiat] The one who has a mole or a birthmark. [South Baffin] *taqsaq.*

Avinngaq
A lemming.

Igjuaq (igjuak, dual)
Big testicles.

Igjuki
A person with small testicles.

Iglu (igluit, pl.)
Snow house.

Ilimmaqtuqtuq
A spiritual journey through the air by a shaman. [Western Arctic] *inikmaq.*

Illu

[Western Arctic] A sod house. [South Baffin] *qammaq.*

Ingirrajuq

In the process of travelling somewhere.

Inikmaq

[Western Arctic] A spiritual journey through the air by a shaman. [Baffin] *ilimmaqtuqtuq.*

Inugarulluk (inugarulliit, pl.)

Small human-like beings said to have lived near the shore. If you looked at them from their feet up they would look very large. They were strong. They suffocated people with their groins. [Dialectal variants] *inugarulligaarjukuluk, inugarulligannua&&uk.*

Inuksuk

A stone structure that has many functions, such as serving as a beacon for travellers. It was also used for hunting caribou. Also *inuksugaq* in some dialects.

Iqaluk

A fish.

Itinnuaq

Little anus.

Kanajuq

A sculpin.

Kanguq

A Snow goose.

Kigiarjuaq

A giant beaver.

Kinainna?

“What’s his or her name?”

Kukilikallak

A snowmobile. Literally, something that has nails. [Dialectal variants] *paarnguqtuq, qamutaujaq.*

Matuguk
[South Baffin] Close the door! [Western Arctic] Put the lid on the pot!

Mauliqput
Winter seal hunting where most breathing holes are covered, forcing the seals to come up through just a few openings.

Misuruqtuq
[Kuuvagmiut] A bottle of alcohol. [Dialectal variants] *sikuliaq, aliguqtuq, pullaujaq.*

Nakalanngualik
[Western Arctic] A truck. [Dialectal variant] *nunasiut.*

Nakasunnguaq
[Inupiat] A bottle of alcohol. Literally, something like the colour of a bladder when you get an animal and butcher it. [Dialectal variants] *misuruqtuq, sikuliaq, aliguqtuq, pullaujaq.*

Nalukkujaq
Blanket-toss. [Baffin] *qummuaqattatitait qisimmut.*

Nallumiaq
[Western Arctic] An amulet. [Baffin] *aarnguaq.*

Nanuq
A polar bear.

Natsiapik
A small seal.

Natsiq
A ring seal.

Naujaq
A sea gull.

Ningauksaq
Son-in-law to be.

Nirliq
A Canada goose.

Nuna
Land.

Nunasiut
A vehicle. [Western Arctic] *nakalanngualik.*

Nunaun
[Innuinaqtun?] A seal breathing hole in the ice. [South Baffin] *aglu.*

Nuujaaqpaq
A three-pronged lance.

Nuvujaq
A cloud.

Onalik
A person with a harpoon. Spelled *unaalik* in standard orthography.

Paarnguqtuq
A snowmobile. Literally, something that crawls. [Dialectal variants] *kukilikallak, qamutaujaq.*

Pullaujaq
A bottle of alcohol. Literally, means like a bubble. [Dialectal variants] *misuruqtuq, nakasunnguaq, sikuliaq, aliguqtuq.*

Qabluquttaarjuk
A person with long eyebrows.

Qajaq (qajait, pl.)
A one person skin boat.

Qajgiq
[Western Arctic] Large *iglu* used when people gathered together; a feast house. [South Baffin] *qaggiq.* Also *qaliqqiq* in some western dialects.

Qaliqqiq

[Western Arctic] Large *iglu* used when people gathered together; a feast house. [South Baffin] *qaggiq*. Also *qajgiq* in some western dialects.

Qallunaaq (qallunaat, pl.)

A Caucasian person.

Qammaq (qammait, pl.)

[South Baffin] A sod house. [Western Arctic] *illu*.

Qamutaujaq

A snowmobile. Literally, something that looks like a sled that moves on its own. [Dialectal variants] *paarnguqtuq, kukilikallak.*

Qamutiik

A dog sled.

Qaqqulaaq

Hardtack; a saltless hard biscuit, bread or cracker.

Qilajuq

The act of performing *qilaniq.*

Qilaniq

A ritual to find out the cause for something. It could be used by both *angakkuit* and non-*angakkuit*. When a person's head or leg or an object became heavy, the cause of the problem was identified.

Qimmiq

A dog.

Sarvaq

An area that doesn't freeze because of the current.

Saumik

A left-handed person.

Sikuliaq

[Innuinaqtun] A bottle of alcohol. [Dialectal variants] *misuruqtuq, nakasunnguaq, aliguqtuq, pullaujaq.*

Sila
Outdoors or outside. [Dialectal variant] *hila.*

Tasaupiaq
A great helper. The object used in the *qilaniq* ritual. [Baffin] *qillati*.

Tingmijualuk
Airplane. [Dialectal variants] *qangattajuuq, timmisuuq.*

Tirigluk
A bearded seal pup.

Tuktu (tuktuit, pl.)
A caribou.

Tulugaq
A raven.

Tuniq (tuniit, pl.)
The Dorset Inuit.

Uivaqtuq
Premonition

Ugjunaq
A little shrew, smaller than a lemming.

Ugjunaqpak
A giant shrew.

Ukpik
A snowy owl.

Ukuaksaq
Daughter in-law-to-be.

Umiaq (umiat, pl.)
A long traditional sealskin boat used to move camps or hunt whales. An *umiaq* could reach thirty to fifty feet in length.

Uqpik
A willow.

Uqqujuaq
Summer caribou skins that are good for making clothing. [North Baffin] *uqquksautit*.

Utsullukkut
Misshapen vagina.

Utsutuurniut
A tool to play with a big vagina.

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Index

– A –

Abe Okpik Hall, 316. *See also* IODE Hall
"G" Division, 21, 140, 160, 330. *See also* Royal Canadian Mounted Police
ACL, 287. *See also* Arctic Co-operatives Limited
Ajaaja, 49,50, 359
Akaitcho Hall, 181, 248, 254
Akkaga, 27, 87
Aklavik, 13, 17, 21, 23, 24, 28-31, 33, 35, 37, 38, 40, 41, 51, 66, 76, 80, 93-96, 104-107, 109, 113, 117, 120, 123, 124, 128, 129, 132, 141-145, 147, 152, 154, 155, 157, 158, 160, 161, 163, 170, 178, 184, 187, 197, 261, 265, 274, 322, 341, 368
Alaska, 10, 11, 16, 32, 34, 41, 42, 46, 48-50, 54, 57-59, 61, 62, 64-67, 68, 70, 72, 73, 77-79, 81, 89, 91, 93, 101, 111, 116, 118, 119, 132, 142, 145, 153, 177, 217, 219, 222, 229, 230, 233-239, 243, 247, 251-253, 258-260, 272, 275, 282, 302, 303, 308, 323, 329, 330, 333, 335, 337, 367
Alberta, 192, 193, 200, 239, 248, 268, 269, 276, 282, 311, 317, 331
Alcohol, 161, 163, 251, 349
Aleutian, 116, 132, 259
All Saint's Cathedral, 96
All Saint's Hospital, 40, 80, 96
All Saint's Residential School, 7, 13, 21, 93, 96, 103
Allen, Elijah, 10, 24, 28, 66, 117, 150, 218
Allen, Victor, 10, 24, 66, 117
Allukajarjuk, 147
Amagoalik, John, 242, 248, 318
American Air Force, 247, 316
American Indian Movement, 312
Ammassalik, 235
Anawak, Donat, 180
Anawak, Jack, 201, 248, 315
Anchorage, 247
Anglican, 17, 21, 30, 31, 40, 41, 43, 44, 46, 54, 80, 81, 85, 93, 103, 104-108, 125, 133, 140-141, 154, 160, 163, 165, 191, 211-213, 220, 221, 231, 239, 243, 247, 250, 266, 285, 292, 305, 313, 319, 320, 326, 347, 351, 353
Angus, Elijah and Edward, 105
Angutingnungniq, Jose, 221-222
Ansons, 153
Anuktuk, Alice, 40
Anuktuk, Dennis, 95, 100, 341

Anthropologist, 21, 156, 160, 179, 189, 192, 223, 266, 271, 273, 309, 316
Apache, 139
Apak, Caleb,81, 212
Apakaq, 31
Apex, 166, 168, 169, 171-175, 190, 210,212, 290, 294, 316
Arctic Bay, 173, 249, 344
Arctic Co-operatives Limited, 201. *See also* ACL
Arctic Ocean, 68, 70
Arctic Red River, 29, 104, 107, 265
Arctic Sparrow, 259
Armadillo, 237
Arreak, Benjamin, 210
Arreak, Lazarus, 249
Arvaluk, James, 317
Arviat, 111, 211, 249. *See also* Eskimo Point
Ashoona, Kenojuak, 298
Atkinson Point, 46
Aurora Borealis, 75
Auto-toboggan, 251
Awa, Simon, 206, 226, 228, 332
Ayaruaq, John, 159, 161, 162, 180, 225, 291

– B –

B-52, 101
Baffin Correctional Centre, 350
Baffin Island, 16, 89, 153, 185, 186, 195, 211, 224, 247-249, 272, 274, 306, 317, 318, 344, 347, 349, 350
Baffin Regional Council, 318
Bagnell Beach (Nunaluk), 55, 93
Baillie Island, 46, 47, 54, 320
Baker Lake, 211, 214, 215
Baker, Peter, 181, 182, 184, 190, 197
Balikci, Asen, 205, 223
Banks Island, 31, 32, 36, 38, 91, 95, 108, 130, 135, 136
Baptiste, Pascal, 321
Bar 1, 144
Bar 2, 143-145, 147
Bar 6, 149
Bar A, 144, 152
Bar B, 144
Bar C, 144
Baseball, 34
Bathurst Inlet, 75
Bear, 41, 58, 67, 74, 81, 82, 87, 111, 121, 137, 141, 181, 226-228, 233-235, 252, 295, 328, 329, 338, 339, 362, 365
Beaver, 59, 78, 99, 127, 237, 238, 265
Beechey Island, 224
Beechey, 79
Beetz, Jean, 183
Belanik, Philip, 143
Benedict, Ernest, 11, 24, 200, 313, 326
Berger Commission, 264, 265, 349
Berger, Thomas, 254, 255, 257, 267, 268, 269, 316, 349
Bering Strait, 41, 61, 233, 238
Bernard Harbout, 357
Bernard, Joe, 130
Bernard, Josh, 321
Big Death, 46, 71
Big Dipper, 74, 80
Blackfoot, 127, 200, 211
Blondin, Georgina, 256, 310
Bluenose Caribou, 258
Bolger, Clare, 190
Bompas Hall, 319, 348
Bompas, Bishop William Carpenter, 43, 54, 76, 77
Booth Island, 38, 95
Boothia Peninsula, 90, 204, 207
Bowhead, 63, 64, 68, 110, 333
Boxer, Albert, 141, 143, 147, 155, 157

Boy Scouts, 99
Brandon College, 318
Breynat, Archbishop Gabriel, 322, 326
British Columbia, 116, 185, 191, 198, 199, 255, 256, 267, 268, 311, 316
Broadcasting, 11, 20
Broughton Island, 152, 214-215, 220, 356. *See also* Qikiqtarjuaq
Brower, Charlie, 39, 42, 70, 71, 73, 79
Brown, Wilf G., 182, 183

– C –

CAM 1 and 2, 145
C.B.C., *See* Canadian Broadcasting Corporation
C.D. Howe, 21, 133, 345
C-46, 151
Cadet, 320, 349, 350
Calgary, 237, 258, 312
California, 39, 72, 73, 132
Cambridge Bay, 31, 65, 86, 96, 104, 107, 111, 127, 128, 145, 153, 181, 190, 195, 201, 214, 229, 248, 251, 281, 296, 317, 326, 352
Campbell, Hugh, 182, 184, 203
Canadian Air Force, 174, 184, 316
Canadian Arctic Co-operatives Federation Limited (CACFL), 201. *See also* Arctic Co-operatives Limited
Canadian Association for Adult Education (CAAE), 23, 198
Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), 11, 156, 159, 191, 242, 250, 253, 347
Canalaska Company, 31, 41, 91
Canso, 187, 198
Cape Bathurst, 320
Cape Dorset (Kinngait), 111, 133, 195, 204, 210, 211, 232, 249, 275, 283, 293, 294, 298
Cape Dyer, 152
Cape Parry, 95, 141
Cape Smythe, 72, 79
Cardinal, Harold, 192, 193, 200, 311
Caribou, 41, 57, 60-63, 67, 68, 74, 75, 78, 84, 88, 91, 120-123, 129, 138, 176, 181, 204, 205, 223, 227-229, 237, 258, 261, 263, 265, 293, 295, 306, 322, 323, 326, 328, 333, 335, 339, 340
Caribou Carnival, 218
Carmichael, Frank, 184
Carpenter, Fred, 86, 92
Carpenter, Noel, 256, 311
Carrothers' Commission, 183, 185, 187, 189, 197
Carter, June, 208
Catholic, 17, 21, 30, 54, 77, 85, 104, 106-108, 120, 127, 133, 140, 187, 200, 215, 220, 221, 231, 247, 250, 274, 285, 287, 295, 296, 305, 306, 308, 319, 326, 347, 353
Centennial Project, 208, 220, 314
Centennial year, 196, 203, 313
Central Arctic, 161, 179, 181, 184, 186, 249, 250, 251, 256, 350
CFRN, 119
Chaplin, Charlie, 120
Charles Camsell Hospital, 18, 22, 125-129, 200, 239, 346
Chesterfield Inlet, 92, 133, 187, 215, 247
Chicken Pox, 46, 55, 71
Chipewyan, 78, 127, 272, 322

Choque, Charles O.M.I., 11, 221, 223
Chrétien, Hon. Jean, 191, 200, 265, 269
Christmas, 35, 49, 52, 76, 93, 97, 98, 108, 123,124, 129, 147, 163, 166, 174-176, 215-217, 253, 303
Churchill, 132, 181, 211, 213, 216, 247, 248, 254, 320, 347
Clark, Clare Evelyn 191, 198, 310
Clyde River, 219, 227, 339
Coady, Moses Michael 286, 299, 304, 308
Cockney, Bob, 47
Cockney, Frank, 136, 150, 333
Colonial, 17, 19, 184, 185
Colville Lake, 265
Colville River, 70
Commissioner, 17, 22, 104, 166, 178, 181, 183, 184, 190, 193, 197, 224, 265, 314, 322, 326, 352, 357
Committee Bay, 204, 205, 206, 228, 338
Committee for Original People's Entitlement, 313. *See* COPE
Conroy, Henry Anthony, 322, 326
Conservative, 156, 290
Cook, Bishop, 256
Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), 196, 201
COPE, 256, 313, 317, 325, 341. *See* Committee for Original People's Entitlement
Coppermine (Kugluktuk) 86, 91, 92, 96, 104, 105, 107, 108, 111, 127, 128, 140, 153, 156, 189, 195, 209, 229, 251, 265, 281, 296, 317, 349
Coral Harbour, 111, 132, 152, 169, 181, 211, 215, 232, 308
Cournoyea, Nellie, 242, 256, 313
Cousins, Mary. See Panigsusiq, Mary
Cotterill, Ewan, 208, 224
Coyote, 330, 331
Credit Union, 194, 286, 287, 308
Cree, 78, 127, 192, 199, 200, 211, 224, 272, 282, 311, 317, 332
Cross, Harold, 208, 209, 217
Curley, Tagak, 192, 193, 249, 296, 312, 313, 317
Cuthand, Rev. Adam, 191, 313

– D –

D-8, 143, 146-148
Davidee, Elisapee, 218
DC-3, 151
DC-8 , 180
De Hurtevend, Leonce O.M.I., 142
De Sallis Bay, 131
de Weerdt, Mark, 256, 311
Delalande, Lucien O.M.I., 107, 113
Dene, 197, 199, 201, 267, 286, 295, 298, 300, 323, 326, 346, 347, 349, 350
Department of Education, 11, 40, 247, 251
Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources, 22, 160, 169, 171, 180, 190, 200, 299, 343
Department of Transport, 166, 172
DEW line, 7, 20, 67, 95, 111, 135, 143, 145, 147, 149, 151-153, 155, 164, 173, 174, 190, 211, 215, 231, 233, 291, 336. *See* Distant Early Warning

Dickens, C.H. “Punch”, 31, 40
Diefenbaker, Hon. John, 20, 158, 159, 162, 165, 255
Diomede Islands, 72, 233, 234
Distant Early Warning, 20, 40, 144, 150, 156 *See* DEW line
Dogs,21, 29, 30, 32, 34, 35, 38, 49, 52, 65, 71, 74, 90, 93, 95, 104, 107, 110, 121-124, 128-130, 135-138, 141, 142, 155, 156, 176, 227, 228, 235, 240, 305, 325, 328, 329, 331, 332, 348, 355, 356
Don McNeil and his Breakfast Club, 119
Douglas, Tommy, 196
DOT (Department of Transport), 166, 172
Drum, 49, 50, 52, 67, 74, 87, 199, 221, 222, 230, 240, 328
Ducharme, Lionel O.M.I., 211
Dulles, Allan, 166

– E –

East Coast Carriers, 169, 172
Eastern Arctic, 17, 22, 79, 90, 125, 133, 158, 178, 183, 185, 257, 261,
Edmonton, 7, 18, 22, 78, 115, 125-128, 148, 153, 158, 169, 170, 180, 181, 184, 195, 199, 208, 216, 258, 310, 312, 313
Eisenhower, 101, 115
Elks Hall, 183, 207
Ell, Ben, 152, 206, 211, 223
Erasmus, George, 192
Erkidjuk, Cecilia and Joel, 315
Erkloo, Elijah, 166
Eskimo Affairs Committee, 21-23, 155, 157, 162, 291
Eskimo Loan Fund, 22, 130,194, 200
Eskimo Point, 111, 160, 211, 215, 219, 249. *See* Arviat
Europe, 118, 132, 171, 221, 224, 225, 351
Evaloarjuk, 81, 169, 212, 249

– F –

Fairbanks, 11, 119, 143
FARA (Frobisher Bay Airport Recreation Association), 179, 197
Federation des co-operatives du Nouveau Quebec (FCNQ), 201
Fifth Thule Expedition, 206, 233, 234, 251
First Air, 294, 307-308
Firth, Wally, 192, 200, 256, 269, 311, 313
Fokker Universal, 40
Foot Hills Pipeline, 253, 257, 262
Ford, Annie, 250
Fort Chimo, 132, 159, 170, 178, 291, 299, 304. *See* Kuujjuaq
Fort Good Hope, 104, 107, 264, 265, 308
Fort Liard, 265
Fort McPherson, 29, 30, 43, 54, 76, 97, 98, 107, 120, 265, 278, 322, 332, 354
Fort Norman,107, 265
Fort Providence, 181, 183, 265, 319
Fort Rae, 181, 197, 265, 318
Fort Resolution, 265, 299
Fort Simpson, 80, 107, 184, 190, 262, 265, 319, 348
Fort Smith, 76, 128, 197, 208, 215, 265, 326
Fournier, Louis O.M.I., 201, 292, 295, 308

Fox, 30, 31, 32, 34, 40, 105, 106, 108, 111, 112, 129, 130, 136-142, 180, 194, 229, 293, 325, 326, 330, 340
Franche, Jean O.M.I., 107, 113
Franklin, Sir John, 71, 79, 181, 206, 207, 223, 224, 248, 319, 349
Fraser, Whit, 253, 265
Freeman, Minnie Aodla, 191, 198, 309
Freuchen, Peter, 84, 92, 335, 341
Friendship Centres, 312
Frobisher Bay (Iqaluit) , 132, 167, 185, 197, 216
Fry, W. H., 41, 239, 243
Fuller, Brother, 119
Fury and Hecla straits, 228, 338

– G –

Gagné, Raymond, 166, 212
Gambell, 50
Geese, 63, 170, 259, 260, 327
Genest, Pierre, 257
George River, 194, 200, 285, 291. *See* Kangiqsualujjuaq
Gibbons, Jimmy, 215
Gibson, Patty, 207
Gjoa Haven, 32, 36, 91, 108, 190, 201, 206, 229, 296, 346
Globemasters, 154
Gold, 58, 61, 62, 77, 78, 134, 267, 331, 341
Goodstriker, Rufus, 191, 309, 313
Goose Bay, 247
Goose, Jack, 108
Gopher, 267
Goussaert, André, 194, 195, 201, 201, 205, 221, 285, 291, 295, 297
Governor General Jules Léger, 302
Great Whale River, 216, 224, 299. See Kuujjuaraapik and Poste de la Baleine
Greenland, 65. 67, 81, 89, 92, 142, 149, 166, 177, 204, 206, 233, 234, 235, 242, 247, 249, 251, 252, 254, 275, 281, 302, 308, 326, 335, 336
Grollier Hall, 347
Gruben, Roger, 318
Guth, Paul, 291, 295

– H –

Hall Beach, 152, 181, 205, 214, 216, 223
Hamilton, 159, 164, 166, 168, 173, 276, 343, 357
Hamilton, Alvin, 159, 164, 166
Hardie, Merv, 181, 197
Hardy, Rick, 319
Harvey, Robert, 184
Hawaii, 72, 73, 259, 313
Hay River, 105, 182, 184, 247, 265, 290, 319, 329
Health Services, 125, 132, 133, 240
Hecla, *See* Fury and Hecla Straits
Hees, Hon. George, 166
Henry, Pierre O.M.I., 205
Herschel Island, 31-34, 41, 43, 44, 48, 54, 55, 72, 75, 79, 92, 111, 121, 144, 243, 241
Hewitt, Foster, 119
Hislop and Nagle, 40
Hitler, 116
Hockey, 119, 127, 249, 303
Hodgson, Stuart, 22, 182-185, 190, 195, 197, 208, 314
Holman Island, 41. *See* Holman
Holman (Uluksaqtuuq), 36, 38, 41, 95, 108, 128, 136, 139-141, 159, 160, 189, 209, 213,

229, 265, 292, 294, 296, 297, 306, 349
Holsteinborg (Sisimiut), 251
Honigmann, John, 174, 178, 316
Horton River, 75
Horton, Johnny, 58
House of Commons, 168, 201
Houston, James, 293, 306, 307
Hudson's Bay Company, 17, 29, 30, 31, 40, 41, 54, 75, 85, 91-93, 104, 111, 112, 124, 140-142, 164, 176-178, 189, 194, 195, 200, 207, 211, 224, 263, 266, 285, 287, 291, 292, 295-297, 300, 306, 307, 324, 341, 353
Hunt, Connie, 257
Hunt, LACO, 178, 197, 243, 330, 341

– I –

Igloolik, 81, 86, 169, 173, 194, 201, 212-217, 223, 228, 231, 285, 291, 292, 304, 352
Ikpiqiuk River, 70
Ikpiqiuk, 144. *See* Stokes Point
Immaculate Conception Residential School, 40
Immaculate Conception Hospital, 106
Imperial Order of Daughters of the Empire (IODE) 173, 316
Indian Affairs, 160, 198, 199, 269
Indian and Eskimo Association, 23, 24, 198, 200, 309, 317, 326
Indian Brotherhood, 23, 191, 192, 199, 255, 257, 311, 318, 319
Influenza, 46, 76, 80
Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC), 302, 308
Inuit Cultural Institute, 11, 249
Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK), 25. *See* Inuit Tapirisat of Canada
Inuit Tapirisat of Canada (ITC), 23, 25, 191, 192, 255, 269, 311, 312, 325
Inuit Tunngavingat Nunamini (ITN), 308
Inuk Limited, 180
Inukjuak, 158, 306, 353. *See* Port Harrison
Inuksuk, Rhoda, 318
Inuktalik, Roy, 137, 213, 214
Inuvik, 10, 24, 40, 95, 108, 117, 128, 152, 154, 157, 163, 169, 261, 265, 292, 294, 313, 336, 347
IODE Hall (Imperial Order of Daughters of the Empire), 173, 316. *See* Abe Okpik Hall
Iqaluit, 10, 11, 13-15, 18, 24, 79, 132, 135, 149, 152, 159, 166, 167, 168, 173-175, 181, 189, 195, 201, 210-212, 216, 223, 240, 249, 253, 274, 275, 280, 287, 292, 298, 301, 308, 316, 317, 334, 344, 347, 355. See Frobisher Bay
Iquugaqtuq, Bernard, 205
Irving, Bill, 58, 238
ITC, 256, 257, 311, 312, 317. See Inuit Tapirisat of Canada *and also* Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami
Itimangnaq, Zacharie, 205
Ittusardjuat, Serapio, 221
Ituk, 327

– J –

Jackson, Michael, 262
Jacobs, Mike, 119
James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement (JBNQA), 299, 300, 301, 303, 308

JBNQA, 300, 308. *See* James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement
Jesse Harbour, 135-137
Jones, Lionel, 168
Juba, Stephen, 313, 326

– K –

Kadlusiak, Josiah, 212
Kaeser, Paul, 184, 197
Kalluak, Mark, 211, 249
Kangiqsualujjuaq, 194, 200, 287, 291. *See* George River
Keewatin (Kivalliq) 111, 161, 178, 181, 184-186, 189, 210, 211, 216, 225, 248, 263, 275, 279, 283, 291, 317, 347
Kelly, Jonah, 196, 220, 242
Kelly, Moses, 220
Ken Albert Building, 165
KFAR , 119
Kiggirmiut , 72, 82, 239
Kikiktagruq, 57. *See* Kotzebue
Kilabuk, Harry, 173
Kilabuk, Meeka, 234, 248, 326. *See* Meeka Wilson
Kilabuk, Moe, 212
Killinik, Tommy, 105
Kimmirut, 82, 111, 133. *See* Lake Harbour
King William Island, 91, 207, 224
Kinngait, 133, 215. *See* Cape Dorset
Kipnik, 27, 28, 30, 40
Kitigaryuit, 54
Kittigazuit (Kitigaryuit), 46, 54-55, 75, 84, 234, 252, 322, 326
Kitikmeot, 317
Kivak, John, 241
Kivalina, 60
Kivalliq. *See* Keewatin
Kleinburg Museum, 293
Knowles, Stanley, 196, 202
Koneak, George, 11, 159, 162, 164, 191, 291, 292, 303, 309
Kotzebue (Kikiktagruk), 48, 49, 50, 57, 58, 61, 62, 78
Kublualuk, 77, 80, 332, 341
Kudloo, Thomas, 318
Kugaaruk, 201, 223, 303. *See* Pelly Bay
Kugluktuk, 91. *See* Coppermine
Kuliktana, David, 105
Kupsch, Walter, 183,
Kusugak, Jose, 248, 249,
Kusugak, Michael, 75, 318
Kuujjuaq, 24, 132, 178, 216, 299, 308. See Fort Chimo
Kuujjuaraapik, 216, 224, 299. *See* Great Whale River *and also* Poste de la Baleine

– L –

Laberge, Joseph O.M.I., 205
Labrador, 89, 118, 177, 224, 275, 308, 317, 325
Lac La Marte (Wha ti), 265, 268
Lacombe, Albert 78, 239, 322
Lady Harbour, 142
Laing, Hon. Arthur, 190, 314, 345
Lake Harbour (Kimmirut), 82, 133, 176, 219, 249
Lang, Knut, 184, 197,
Lapland, 49
Lapointe, Father, 213
Larsen, Henry, 19, 21, 140, 160
Laval University, 10, 11, 166
Leduc, 148, 154, 159, 180, 331
Legends, 34, 42, 59, 64-65, 67-68, 75, 84, 230, 235-236, 238
Legion, 179
Leishman, Harry, 192, 311
Lennie, Edward, 143, 146

Lennie, Sam, 237
Liberal, 156, 197, 257, 314
Lomen Brothers, 49, 62
Lorson, Georges, O.M.I., 296
Loucheux, 76, 96, 97, 107, 160, 272, 278
Louis, Joe, 115
Lutselk'e, 265. See Snowdrift
Lyall, Bill, 194, 286, 287, 304
Lyall, Ernie, 204, 215, 223, 223, 239, 240, 287

– M –

M.O.T (Ministry of Transport), 170, 174, 175
Mackenzie, Bill, 174
Mackenzie Valley Pipeline, 242, 253, 255, 257, 258, 264, 271, 318, 347
Makivik, 301, 308
Maksagak, John and Helen, 104, 352, 357
Maktar, 226
Mallokak, 137
Mallon, Mick, 250, 279
Maniloaluk, William, 233, 234, 322, 323, 326,
Manitou Inlet, 138
Manuel, George, 191, 198, 199, 256, 311
Marsh, Bishop Donald, 21, 160, 182, 184, 203
Martin, Paul, 187
Massey, Hon. Vincent, 165
May, Johnny, 304, 308
McEwan, Ernie, 191, 193, 200, 255, 310, 312
McMaster University, 185
McTaggart Cohen, Ian, 258, 259
Measles, 46, 54, 55, 71, 75, 76
Medicine Man, 13, 27, 228, 238, 239, 333
Menirak, Elija, 159, 164, 191, 194, 291, 309
Métis, 52, 78, 107, 181, 197, 199, 248, 255, 257, 274, 303, 313, 314, 318, 349
Michael, Simonie, 17, 174, 179, 185, 186, 189, 190, 207, 208
Midwife, 27, 46, 50
Milukshuk, Joe, 105, 142
Ministry of Transport, 170, 174, 316 . *See* M.O.T.
Mink, 34, 60, 129
Misericordia Hospital, 22, 125, 127, 128
Missionaries, 44, 45, 47, 54, 75-77, 83, 84, 87, 145, 163, 195, 266, 271, 275, 295, 310, 320, 326, 334
Moffat, Ian, 249
Montgomery, 100, 115
Montreal, 24, 151, 180, 181, 203, 216, 223, 257, 306, 312, 345
Morgan, Joe, 231, 232
Morrow, Judge William George, 319
Moscow, Molly, 149
Moses, Russell, 24, 191, 198, 309, 313
MOT (Ministry of Transport), 170, 174-175
Mount Fair, 138
Mountain Sanitarium, 343
Mowat, Farley, 21, 22, 164, 165
Muckpah, Jimmy, 211
Murdock, Pete, 285, 292, 297, 307
Muskrat, 29, 30, 35, 37, 40, 60, 100, 104, 106, 107, 112, 125, 128, 129, 141, 143, 160, 169, 170, 194, 258, 259, 263, 326

– N –

Namesake, 16, 62, 77, 82, 83, 86, 87, 212, 218, 219, 230, 233, 237, 240, 242, 328, 333
Nanisivik, 284
Nasuk, Noah, 81, 212, 285
National Film Board, 223, 291
National Health and Welfare Department, 164
Naullak, Akisu, 340
Netsilik, 84, 88, 90, 203-205, 207, 223, 227, 229, 303
Neville, Bud, 168
New Democratic Party, 200, 201, 255, 257, 262, 316
Ningeocheak, Raymond , 232
Nipalariuk, Jacob, 140
Nishga Valley, 255, 268, 269, 316
Nisku, 180
Noatagmiut, 57, 64, 78
Noatak River, 16, 57, 58, 60, 61, 65, 71, 78, 235, 237, 238,
Nome, 61, 62, 72, 78, 235, 238, 272
Nordair, 175, 178, 214
Norman Wells, 118, 125, 128, 132, 151, 321, 326
Norseman, 125, 140
North Bureau Thirteenth Corporation, 72, 79
North Slope, 72, 204, 303
Northern Affairs and National Resources. *See* Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources
Northern Electric, 148, 152
Northern Quebec, 91, 169, 189, 195, 203, 252, 267, 279, 286, 287, 291-293, 299, 301, 303, 307, 308, 317, 353
Northern Traders Company, 29, 40, 330. *See* Hislop and Nagle
Northwest Mounted Police, 43, 54
Northwest Passage, 19, 140, 243
Norton Sound, 58, 61, 82
Nunaluk, 48, 55, 93. See Bagnell Beach
Nunatsiaq News, 279
Nunavik, 24, 200, 224, 287, 300, 308
Nunavut Arctic College, 9-10, 14, 349
Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, 278, 287, 308
Nunavut, 9, 10, 11, 14, 16, 18, 24, 79, 92, 172, 200, 271, 273, 274, 278, 281, 287, 300, 301, 308, 325, 326, 349, 357
Nuwuk (Point Barrow), 71, 79

– O –

Oblates, 201, 295
Okpik, Abraham, 13, 14, 28, 158, 162, 197, 218
Old Crow, 59, 238, 265, 267
Olsen, Puju Christian, 250
Onalik, Jimmy, 174, 219
Ontario, 189, 191, 198, 199, 216, 257, 337, 357
Orange, Bud, 156, 164
Ottawa, 16, 17, 20-22, 153, 154, 157-160, 162, 163, 165, 166, 168-170, 178, 183-185, 190, 196, 198, 200, 203, 212, 217, 221, 249, 253, 255, 269, 276, 278, 285, 287, 291, 298, 302, 317, 319, 326, 330, 343, 352
Otter, 60, 95
Outpost camp, 28, 30, 38, 40, 173, 334

– P –

Palluk, Annie, 191, 210, 309
Pangnirtung, 133, 187, 188, 196, 210, 214, 219, 275, 277, 294, 297, 354
Panigusiq, Mary (Mary Cousins), 159, 165, 317
Panipakoocho, Eli, 218
Pannigabluk, Fannie, 156, 243
Parker, John, 181, 183, 184, 190
Partridge, Jacob, 170, 249
Patterson S.S., 32, 33, 41
Paulatuk, 36, 106, 107, 141, 142, 195, 265, 296, 305
Peace, Roy, 144, 149
Pearce Point, 31, 40, 105, 106, 143, 331, 341
Pearson, Brian, 166, 167, 280
Pearson, Hon. Lester B., 19, 125, 187, 197
Peck, Rev. Edmund James, 168
Pedersen, Captain Carl, 32, 33, 38, 41, 49, 92, 112, 122
Pedersen, Leena, 317
Pelly Bay (Kugaaruk), 190, 194, 195, 201, 204, 205, 209, 215, 216, 221-223, 226, 227, 252, 285, 295, 296, 298, 303, 344, 346
Perry River, 92, 186
Peters, Omer, 191, 193, 200, 309
Petersen, Robert, 250, 281
Pin Main, 147, 148, 153
Pin One, 141, 142
Pitseolak, Lypa, 297
Point Barrow, 38, 46, 70, 71, 79, 101
Point Hope (Tikiraqtaq) 60, 64, 68, 78
Pond Inlet, 135, 169, 187, 195, 201, 205, 209, 211, 219, 223, 249, 344
Pootoogook, Ejevaluk, 298
Porritt, Bobby, 182, 184, 190
Port Burwell, 216, 224
Port Harrison (Inukjuak), 211, 306
Porter, George, 32, 91, 92, 104
Portland, 91
Post, Lee, 155, 157, 158, 208
Poste de la Baleine (Kuujjuaraapik), 216, 224. *See* Great Whale River
Powell, Lord Baden, 99
Presbyterian missions, 248
Prince Albert Sound, 140
Prince Albert Strait, 136
Prince of Wales, 24, 82, 239
Project Surname, 81, 192, 195, 203, 212, 225, 231, 232, 241, 242, 248, 255, 285, 313, 347
Prudhoe Bay, 253, 258
Pryde, Duncan, 186, 189, 190, 197, 208
Ptarmigan, 32, 53, 60, 63, 95, 112, 118, 181
Public Service of Canada, 318
Puvirnituq (POV) 194, 285, 287, 292, 297, 306, 307, 308

– Q –

Qailutailuk, 62, 79
Qajaq, 60, 64, 236
Qammalik, 272
Qaviaraq, 89
Qewaq, Pat, 140
Qikiqtarjuaq, 132, 156
Quartz, 283
Quassa, Paul, 213, 318
Quebec City, 168, 343
Quebec, 189, 216, 272, 285, 299-301, 308, 344, 353

– R –

Radi, Sam, 256
Rae Lake, 265

Rankin Inlet, 159, 163, 178, 180, 181, 186, 187, 189, 210, 216, 219, 225, 250, 291, 296, 345
Rankin Nickel Mine, 161, 178, 186, 345
Rasmussen, Knud, 92, 205, 228, 233, 239, 332, 335
Rasmussen's College, 233, 335
RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police), 17, 21, 22, 40, 51, 52, 85, 86, 99, 104, 118, 124, 133, 136, 140, 142, 144, 154, 160, 172, 179, 209, 210, 213-216, 224, 240, 266, 292, 296, 299, 309, 330, 336, 344
Regina, 197, 310, 314
Rehabilitation Centre, 166, 168, 169, 173, 276, 283, 290, 292, 344, 345
Reilly, Pat, 253
Reincarnation, 235
Repulse Bay, 158, 214, 216, 223, 308
Residential school, 13, 21, 40, 41, 86, 93, 94, 96, 103, 104, 106, 108, 120, 152, 198, 247, 248, 254, 263, 311, 314, 329, 347, 350, 351
Resolute Bay, 20, 173, 181, 189, 194, 209, 214, 216, 261, 292, 295
Rheaume, Gene, 155, 156, 157, 160
Rickenbacker, Eddy, 101
Rifle, 46, 53, 63, 88, 110, 116, 118, 129, 141, 307, 324
Robertson, Gordon, 159, 183
Rocher, Johnny, 181
Roman Catholic missions, 104, 133, 187, 200, 250, 308, 326
Ross, John, 206-208, 224
Ross, Sir John, 206, 207, 224
Rousselière, Guy-Mary O.M.I., 205, 223
Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), 17, 54, 172, 357
Royal Canadian Navy, 172
Ruben, Edward, 107, 141
Rudnicki, Walter, 160
Russell, Chessley, 211
Russia, 20, 25, 57, 60, 61, 68, 70, 72, 78, 125, 127, 149, 187, 235, 308
Ryan, Joan, 291

– S –

SAC (Strategic Air Command), 172, 175, 247
Sachs Harbour, 36, 86, 136, 140, 189, 232, 265, 295, 296
San Fransisco, 39, 41, 72, 130
Sanikiluaq, 216
Sariaktuq, Charlie, 171, 175
Schneider, Lucien O.M.I., 166, 178
Schooner, 29, 30, 36-38, 92-94, 103-105, 130, 277, 331, 341
Schulte, Paul, 118, 133
Scotland, 151, 213
Scott, Ian, 257
Seal, 41, 61, 63, 75, 81, 82, 84, 89, 90, 113, 135, 137, 138, 141, 177, 204, 205, 207, 219, 228, 236, 252, 261, 293, 295, 297, 325, 328, 338-340
Selawik, 58
Shamanism, 16, 27, 29, 31, 45, 62, 67, 68, 77, 87, 226, 231, 297, 335
Sheep, 41, 44, 57, 67, 78, 233, 328, 353
Sheshalik, 78. *See* Sisualik
Shingle Point (Tapqaq) 31, 34, 49, 75, 93, 96, 105, 121, 144, 151, 243
Sibbeston, Nick, 319
Siberia, 34, 61, 62, 72, 82, 89, 127, 177, 234, 336
Sickness, 46, 76, 83

Sigguk, 205
Sillatgiaq, 105
Simmington, Fraser, 291
Simon, Isaac, 136
Singiituq, 162, 178, 180, 291
Sisimiut, 251. *See* Holsteinborg
Sisualik, (Sheshalik) 57, 58, 61, 78, 235
Sittichinli, Jim, 160
Sivertz, Bent, 155, 160, 182, 184, 190
Skid Row, 310
Skidoo, 90, 176, 251, 281, 303, 336, 352, 354-356. *See also* snowmobile
Smallpox, 46, 47, 54, 75
Smith, Charlie, 292
Snowball, Jeannie, 293
Snowden, Don, 194, 286, 291
Snowdrift (Lutselk'e), 265
Snowmobile, 201, 307. *See also* skidoo
Social worker, 157, 160, 168, 297, 319
Sod, 57, 61, 71, 272
Spalding, Alex, 158, 160
Spence Bay (Taloyoak) 31, 48, 90, 96, 190, 191, 194, 195, 203-205, 207-209, 219, 229, 239, 296, 312, 335, 346, 347
Spence, Doctor Ahab, 191, 199, 313
St. Lawrence Island, 50, 302
St. Roch, 19, 104, 140
Stalin, stalinist, 25, 101
Star Weekly Magazine, 100, 101, 115
Steamboat, 75, 80, 105
Stefansson, Alex, 109, 143, 156, 243
Stefansson, Vilhjalmur, 42, 156, 238, 239, 243, 333, 340
Steinmann, André O.M.I., 201, 285, 287, 292
Stevenson, Alex, 140, 156, 160, 178, 291
Stokes Point (Ikpiqiuk), 144
Strategic Air Command, 172, 247. *See* SAC
Stringer Hall, 347
Stringer, Isaac, 43, 54, 77, 239
Supernatural, 45, 63, 67, 68, 77, 87-89, 225, 226, 235
Suzuki, David, 302
Swan, 52, 110, 170
Swedish Stove, 138
Sylvia Grinnell River, 176

– T –

Taloyoak, 90, 91, 104, 195, 226, 284, 346. *See* Spence Bay
Tardy, Henri O.M.I., 292, 295, 306
Television, 62, 238, 257, 277, 302, 350, 354
Territorial Council, 17, 22, 163, 181, 183, 190, 192, 195, 197, 207, 208, 255, 257, 262, 265, 290
Thibert, Arthur O.M.I., 213
Thom Bay (Ikpikkat) 204, 206
Thompson, John and Jamie, 120
Thomson, Cliff, 160
Throat singing, 50
Thule, 84, 92, 179, 206, 23, 84, 92, 179, 206, 233, 234, 247, 251, 281, 335
Tikiraqtaq, 60, 64. *See* Point Hope
Tikivik, Joe, 174, 179
Toonik Tyme, 175, 179, 316
Toronto, 54, 190, 191, 255, 261, 293, 309-311, 316
Tourism, 303, 313
Tower Construction, 153
Trader, 30, 31, 41, 51, 61, 68, 86, 92, 104, 106, 124, 130,

139, 147, 177, 184, 195, 197, 266, 329, 330
Trappers, 29, 106, 111, 116, 122, 129, 130, 138, 197, 274, 322, 331
Trasher, Billy, 107
Treaty, 20, 78, 79, 125, 193, 200, 262, 319, 322-324, 326
Tribal Council, 193, 269
Trimble, Lyle, 182, 184, 190
Trout Lake, 265
Tuberculosis, 21, 22, 40, 76, 120, 123, 125, 127, 128, 154, 155, 168, 173, 187, 198, 347
Tuktoyaktuk, 21, 46, 47, 67, 105, 161, 203, 265, 271, 276, 333, 336
Tupper, Ernest, 153

– U –

Ukiivik Residence, 242, 247-248, 347
Ukrainian, 213, 282
Umauq, Thomas, 166
Umiak, 58, 70, 235
Ungava Bay, 194, 291
United Nations, 19, 125, 187, 314
Usher, Peter, 266
Utqiarvik (Barrow), 42, 71, 79, 333
Uvayuaq, 333
Uyarak, Johanasi, 226, 227, 228, 332, 338

– V –

Vallee, Frank, 183, 184
Vancouver, 310, 312, 341
Vandevelde, Frans O.M.I., 205, 220, 223
Victoria Island, 41, 91, 92, 95, 136, 243, 260, 268, 283, 323
Viivii, 234

– W –

Wah-Shee, James, 192, 311, 318
Wainwright, Jack, 143
Walrus, 67, 112, 226, 236, 252, 295, 296, 333
Weber, Doctor, 164
Weideman, Bruno, 116
Western Arctic, 40, 153, 165, 189, 243
Western Electric, 145, 148, 154
Wha ti, 265. *See* Lac La Marte
Whale Cove, 214, 216
Whaling ship, 41, 46, 70-72, 243
Whaling, 31, 38, 39, 41, 46, 54, 64, 68, 70-72, 79, 93, 94, 112, 151, 243, 322, 331, 333
Whitehorse, 54, 132, 265
White Mountains, 58
Wilkee, James, 320
Wilkinson, Doug, 164, 178
Williams, Hank, 153
Williamson, Bobby, 157, 159, 160, 173, 178, 186, 187, 189, 190, 208, 291
Wilson, Meeka, 317. *See* Meeka Kilabuk
Winnipeg, 153, 158, 176, 180, 181, 195, 202, 216-217, 285, 312-313, 318, 326
York, 154 World War I, 41
World War II, 17, 133, 187, 198
Wuttenee, Bill, 256, 311

– Y –

Yellowknife, 22-25, 153, 155, 157, 178, 180, 181, 183, 184, 186, 190-192, 194, 195, 197, 207-209, 211, 216, 218, 221, 248, 253, 255-257, 262, 267, 301, 310-312, 314, 318, 319, 337, 345-347, 349, 350, 352
Yukon, 31, 55, 77, 78, 108, 120-122, 134, 143, 258, 265, 268, 319, 341
Yupik, 72, 239, 302