

My name is Jessica Patterson and I am originally from Frobisher Bay NWT, which is now called Iqaluit Nunavut. I was born on July 31<sup>st</sup> 1981 in an exciting and historical period for Inuit. I am so fortunate to be the daughter of Marie Uviluq (Iglulik) and Dennis Patterson (Vancouver).

Why was this an exciting time to be born and why am I so very fortunate to be the daughter of these two people? There are several reasons for this and I would like to include you in this adventure of a lifetime and let you in on a piece of history and my family.

I was born in the midst of the creation of Nunavut, during the signing of the Inuit land claim agreement. This meant that Inuit would have exclusive entitlement and land ownership. For any aboriginal group in Canada and especially in the north, it was a very important time.

I always knew, even at a young age, that something very exciting was about to take place. I knew that my family was involved. How can a young girl have this feeling? I was the only daughter born to Marie and Dennis and I was always very close to my dad. I often wondered why my dad was constantly travelling and why he couldn't be at home with our family. It must have been important. As it turns out, it was.

I've often wondered how a traditional Inuk viewed this idea of land ownership. According to my mother in traditional Inuit society the land was never owned by anyone. We (Inuit) were simply using the land to survive, and before the Inuit made their first contacts with the white men it was the same. Why would the Inuit ever agree to sign an agreement that went against what they believed and how they lived for thousands of years?

This would prove to be a difficult hurdle for the people in government who were working so hard for the Land Claim to be reached and for the possibility of creating a new Territory. A Territory that would be roughly the size of 20 percent of Canada!

This also raises the question of my father's involvement in the Land Claims. Why would a successful lawyer from the south trade his career for a life in a land he had never been to? Let's go back to before I was born. I think it is important to know where my parents came together and how my father got involved in politics.

My mother was born on the land in the area of what is now Iglulik. At a young age she was made to go to residential school in Churchill Manitoba. After a bit of schooling at the Winnipeg school of arts she moved to Ottawa to help teach Inuktitut with Mick Mallon. The program was successful, and in turn they moved the program to Iqaluit in the mid-70s.

My father had completed his law degree (with honours) at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia and was offered a job in Frobisher Bay to open the first legal aid

office in Eastern NT. After a job interview over the phone and “sight-unseen” he took the job.

This is where they met. Imagine living in Halifax and picking up and moving to a very small, mostly Inuit, extremely remote town for a job that you had accepted over the phone. Some would say that idea was crazy.

In the early years of living in Iqaluit my father learned quite a lot of things that he did not agree with. He decided that many Inuit needs weren't being met. He also noticed the true remoteness of Iqaluit when you look at where the Government center was. In the 70's there was no scheduled air service between Yellowknife and Iqaluit. In order to get to Yellowknife one had to fly to Montreal, spend the night and then fly to Edmonton and finally the last leg to Yellowknife.— a total 4 days of travel for one trip!! This is how the previous lawyers would get to Iqaluit for a case.

He also learned a lot about the north that he did like. The beauty of the land despite its harsh conditions, the ways of the Inuit and their traditions. Talks of self-government were ongoing and the possibility of a self-governing territory was always very interesting to my father.

He accepted the job as the first legal aid lawyer in Nunavut (before this lawyers would fly to Iqaluit for a few days and hold sessions, and as soon as the work was completed they went back south). This job was created through the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada (ITC). The Inuit in the area did not know their rights. Part of the job was to inform them of their basic rights

By travelling and giving public info on the legal system and Inuit basic rights he was gaining recognition and trust from the Inuit. They appreciated his growing involvement.

Maligannik Tukisinniarvik had been hosting AGM's about the possibility of Land Claims and due to my father's involvement with ITC, he was invited to the meetings. This got him involved in law reform. This meant making changes to laws that were not meeting Inuit needs.

For example, the government in west proposed an amendment to the Wildlife Act, which restricted the minimum age for people using firearms. This would prove to be destructive to Inuit culture. Traditionally elders or parents would deem when you are old enough to make your first kill. It is a very proud time for most children, and the age varies. This would be very damaging to Inuit cultures and traditions if this bill had been passed. The amendment was never made.

This would be my father's first involvement in politics. The government had been failing the Inuit in so many ways, so he and his colleagues decided that changes needed to be made. The MLA at the time needed to be replaced. The search for a candidate to run against the present MLA was unsuccessful. After a few short years of living in Iqaluit

people were pining for him to run in the next election! This was generally unheard of as most of the previous MLA's had been living in north for a long time.

In his few years in the north he had started a family, established himself in Iqaluit and found himself campaigning and a possibly becoming the MLA of Iqaluit. He made so many contacts, and had proven his worth. Dennis Patterson won the election by a landslide. His political career had begun.

He decided early in his career, "It was my one unwavering goal to work towards Nunavut and the settlement of the Land Claims". This was on top of all his other duties. If you compare this Land Claim to others across Canada, the Inuit did not sign any treaties, and there were no language barriers and the majority of the population at the time was 2/3 Inuit and a lot Inuit spoke English. For these reasons, he thought Land Claims were possible.

As soon as my father was in office, he and his Inuit colleagues decided to create the Nunavut Caucus. It was created solely for the purpose of furthering Land claims for the Inuit and advancing the creation of the Nunavut Territory. This would prove to be an extremely important move within the Legislative Assembly.

In his first session, there were only 10 members representing the east. It was apparent that there was little regard for constituents in the east. It reassured the importance of creating a territory that would protect the values, culture, language and traditions of the Inuit.

It was important for my mother and her family as well. I grew up in a bilingual house. My mother spoke to me in Inuktitut and I was learning English in school. It would be so good for the traditions and values and this very unique lifestyle be protected.

Before Nunavut could be created there needed to be overwhelming support from all residents of the territory. So the GNWT held a plebiscite to determine whether the residents would support division. This meant campaigning across the entire NWT.

A Yellowknife office opened in the early 1980s to assure western residents that division would not be terribly onerous, and to educate people about the importance of Inuit Land Claims.

In 1983 the NWT held its first plebiscite. One of the major focuses for the east was voter turnout. This was largely because the west had a much higher population and it was determined that the East needed to have a higher turnout than the west.

Tons of enthusiastic campaigning went on throughout the territory to ensure a high voter turnout. The reason for this was that in case the vote ended up being a "no," the Inuit could prove that there was a higher turnout in a small population, which would help persuade division despite the outcome.

George Erasmus who was the Chief of the Dogrib First Nation had urged his members to vote for the division to further development of all First Nations. This added to the overwhelmingly positive voter turnout in the East, which resulted in a victory!

How does one go about creating a new territory? It would seem to me that the most obvious thing was to settle the Land Claims agreement with the federal Government before creating the territory. It was decided that the Inuit would not sign a Land Claims agreement unless they were granted another separate territory. A clause was added (first of its kind) in the agreement stating that upon its signing, a territory would be created.

This is stated very clearly in Article 4 of the Land Claims agreement. My father, the government leader, and Paul Quassa (President of Tungavik Federation of Nunavut) wrote a letter to the Prime Minister restating that Inuit wanted their own territory. I believe that without these two key documents, the agreement would not have been signed and there would be no separate territory.

My mother felt that signing a land claim agreement would be a good step for the Inuit for various reasons. It would eliminate laws that were mostly applicable in the western territories and also give better opportunities to the youth of Nunavut. Perhaps living a territory that was governed by Inuit would spark a unique sense of pride and motivate youth to further their education, and become leaders.

It also takes her people back in time when the Inuit were betrayed by the government. In the past promises were made to the Inuit which were not fulfilled. Governments promised Inuit families from all over the Eastern Arctic that if they would relocate to more central communities they would receive better education, food and housing for their families. As a result of relocation, their lives deteriorated significantly and left families in a state of poverty. They were far worse than where they had been.

This made some Inuit very reluctant to support the Land Claim and creation of the Nunavut Territory. What promises will be broken by the Federal and Territorial governments? Will the lives of Inuit change for the better?

In and around all of this excitement, the Inuit and the Federal Government were working very closely to finalize the Land Claim agreement. It was the spring of 1990 and Iglulik was much busier than I ever seen it. The elders of the town had built a huge Igloo that was to hold at least a hundred people and there were feasts of country food, Inuit drummers and dances happening. It turns out that the Government of Canada and the Inuit of the Northwest Territories had finalized negotiations and the Inuit were to have their own Land Claim Agreement!

I watched as my father, Paul Quassa and Tom Siddon (Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs) sign the documents, which would give Inuit total entitlement to the Land and its resources!

But why would the progressive conservative government support the Inuit Land Claim Agreement and allow the territories to divide? Brian Mulroney's term as Prime Minister was coming to an end, and it was largely felt that he was not going to continue another term. His government had failed to complete the Meech Lake accord, had been involved during the OKA crisis in Quebec.

On top of this, Quebec was about to hold a referendum on becoming a sovereign nation. What a perfect time to show that Canada was a strong Confederation. And to prove this, the government of Canada supported a division that it hoped would improve the lives of northern Canadians.

Was it possible that Mr. Mulroney wanted to leave office on a good note? Was it possible that this could be Mr. Mulroney's legacy? Whether that was the case, we – the Inuit – were doing it! The Inuit were en route to living in their very own territory, which would be governed by their people.

On Victoria Day in 1993 the Inuit of the NWT signed the Land Claim agreement, finalizing all the effort that boards, councils and government had been putting in for over 20 years. This was a very exciting day for Inuit and Canadians -- for the world as well. Mr. Mulroney had organized that this historical moment be transmitted by satellite to all Canadian embassies around the world!

I am so happy to have been involved with Nunavut's creation. Despite my mother's hesitation to support the ownership of the land, and the creation of the territory, today she's happy that it happened. Her relatives have greatly benefited its creation and have furthered their education and are proud residents.

I believe that if there was another party governing Canada, if Paul Quassa and my father had not written the letter to the Prime Minister, and if the Land Claim Agreement had not been signed when it was, Nunavut would not exist today. It was very satisfying being around during the creation of Nunavut.

It was also very difficult at times. My parents are no longer together and at times, I'm sad that my brothers and I did not have as much time with my father as other families do. But I would not trade that for anything in the whole world. I am a very proud Inuk and I am so proud to be the daughter of Marie Uviluq and Dennis Patterson.