

**Interview with Bob Gamble
Yellowknife, April 27, 2004**

Interview took place in Bob's office, and began with me showing him the work I had done charting out the people who were part of the various organizations involved in the process of the creation of Nunavut.

I am collecting something similar from the Inuit side. One of the best ones I've got is when Louis Pilakapsi got a phone call in the middle of the night by someone complaining that the Inuit weren't getting enough land in the agreement. So he said, "You go out there and walk every kilometre of it, and if you still think it's not enough, then call me!"

Well I really left myself open and set myself up. We were having negotiations in North Baffin, in Pond Inlet, and of course we had a park proposal here and that wasn't settled yet. Inuit had already put in a claim that they wanted a park, but it was just that the configuration hadn't been decided upon yet. So, it was springtime, May, June. We were meeting in the Anglican Church and the doors opened out onto a beautiful view of Bylot Island with the glaciers and mountains and it was a gorgeous view. I was trying to make the case for more park over there and not so much Inuit owned lands. I was arguing that it would be great for tourism. Tourists would come up here and you could point across there and everybody could see Bylot Island and that's a national park! Then Paul Quassa stood up and said, "Yeah, bet it would be even better if tourists could come up here and we could point across and say that's all Inuit owned land!"

You walked right into that one! So who is on the opposite side of the table from you? I mean you are with all these feds? Who's across from you?

Oh a whole cast of characters! Dozens in there. I can't remember them all. There are people from Arctic Transport and there were even people from Department of National Defence (DND) because we were even dealing with some DEW-Line sites that couldn't be turned over because of liability issues. I remember particularly in Pangnirtung because some sessions were night and day, and the federal caucus was spread out into the hallway and the Inuit were caucusing and there was quite a cast of thousands.

Is there anybody that you particularly remember, because what I am interested in is your perceptions of their side?

Well, there was Malachi Arreak and Bruce Gillis. I remember Bruce and I would get frustrated at the same kind of things. I mean I really got frustrated with the federal team. It's really hard, I mean you can't break ranks. I found some of their positions really hard to take and Bruce and I would go and mutter off in a corner and just kind of relieve our frustrations somehow. It varied according to what region we were dealing with. In North Baffin the people from the communities would be different that when we were meeting in South Baffin. In South Baffin, I remember one of the delegates from the community, Harry Dialla.

What do you remember from those times? How were Inuit presenting themselves to the feds and what did the feds think of their positions and their strategies? Because I have listened to what Inuit think, but I have yet to have the chance to ask someone from the other side of the table.

A couple of us, like Dave Meshenko of Fisheries and Oceans and I, were only some of the few that had actually traveled in these areas, on the ground. In South Baffin, Dave had much more experience than I, but in North Baffin, I knew areas Inuit were talking about. They were playing some clever tricks, but I didn't feel it was my place to tell the feds about it. The way I justified was that there was nothing here that was going to jeopardize national security because after the Committee for Original Peoples' Entitlement (COPE) experience, they limited the coastal land of ownership. There's no way they were going to give away or turn over or allow Aboriginal groups to keep long tracts of coast so that was a principle, that you can't have big sections of coast. Federal people, because they didn't have any experience on the ground, there were areas that looked on the map like they had access. Well, the Inuit worked hard in creating this illusion. I don't know, I was just there for Parks. I didn't feel compelled to jump in everywhere. I just didn't say anything, and if they hadn't done their research or if they are just going by contours on the map then Inuit had the advantage because they had intimate knowledge, so they should be able to use it.

What did the rest of the federal people think of the Inuit negotiating team?

I think some of them realized that they were at a disadvantage.

Really?

Oh yeah, because they have people on the ground. They've got people from their side in the communities so there is no way that we can match them. We have to rely on what they say, what they tell us. I wasn't entirely silent. I remember one particular case in Pond Inlet where I saw someone on the federal side was so adamant about access, and saying you can land a plane here and you could do this there when I knew you couldn't. I thought, let them follow this guy. Inuit are going to get what they want here and they know they are pulling it over on the feds.

Did the feds respect the people who were on the Inuit side?

It varied. I think in general, yes. And I think the Inuit had some fun with the feds, too. But some of the feds realized that.

That they were being toyed with?

Yeah.

Did the feds respect the cleverness of Inuit for that?

I think it just made some of them insecure, you know we are taking a big chance here and we can't know for sure. There were mixed reactions sometimes, too. There was one horrendously contentious issue with a block of Inuit owned land or that Inuit were proposing as Inuit owned land, across from Cumberland Sound, a route between Pangnirtung and Iqaluit. Inuit wanted this block of land because it was associated with their history because of a shaman who got his just desserts and eventually exploded and so it was kind of a sacred place. They only revealed that when they got to their wits end because it was a mystery on the federal side. And it was finally Harry Dialla who came up with the story. And that was enough, the feds respected that.

During those discussions about Inuit owned lands, were you also discussing what would be for the non-Inuit owned lands – oversight or co-management?

These negotiations were just to select the land because the land selection process started with a formula. There would be x number of square kilometres of Inuit owned lands, divided surface and subsurface. So the formula was set, it was negotiated, then it came down to Inuit having to actually select the land. The process was that the Inuit would identify 150 per cent of what they might eventually own and then they would have to negotiate back from that. That was tough, because I know I was just visiting with people that I knew, and they didn't realize that this was what they were going to have to do. They thought there was a lot of consultation in the communities, they formed community land identification negotiation teams, they worked long and hard at it, there was a lot of involvement of the community in selecting this quantum, and a lot of people when it came down to it, they didn't realize that they were going to have to reduce this, and that they were only going to get basically a third. They had to cut back by two thirds! That was the formula, and they didn't realize that they were going to have to do this, holy smokes!

And I had a problem with Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. (NTI) during the Agreement in Principle stage. They weren't revealing to the people in the communities the full story and the full picture of what was in the claim. Because they were having trouble getting the word out, they were trying by radio and so forth, but people had the impression that Inuit owned lands were absolute, that they could keep people out and that wasn't the case. There were access provisions and these things weren't being revealed. They weren't going into these kinds of details. And it may be a bit presumptuous of me to say that it was deliberate, but I think it was deliberate. They just revealed what looked good.

What were people's perceptions, especially on the federal side of NTI or Tungavik Federation of Nunavut (TFN) at the time? Did they feel that it represented people, or were they concerned about that?

Well I'm not in a good position to say because I was not on the federal negotiating team. I was only on the ownership issue. I found information was really difficult to get. I actually got more information from the TFN newsletters because they did pretty good summaries. Anyway, I wasn't at the negotiating table, but I have my own views, which was TFN, just on the issue of parks, was trying to get the federal government to commit

to establishing parks in each of the natural regions of Nunavut as a pure commitment in the claim. To me, that was just another example of trying to impose something on the communities.

I'd been dealing with Wager Bay and I've known people from the communities from the 1960s when I first started working there. I knew that eventually they would probably agree to have a national park, but if TFN came in and imposed one on them then they were going to rebel. There was no way that they would put up with that. Another community I was working in, Coral Harbor, one of its problems is too many leaders, too many strong people. As a consequence, many people have left, moved away to leave room for others. I felt at that time that I was in closer touch with what the community than TFN if they were seriously considering this. Where were they coming from?

Did you think that they might be like this in other areas?

Well, that would be a land grab, like occupying huge chunks of land, which would be different than other things in the land claim, which would be processes.

Do you think though that that kind of thing had to be in order to get an agreement?

That's the impression that I got. In the odd community it worked. The outstanding one to me was John Tungak in Pond Inlet who read everything that came out on the claim. This is an Elder, and he was more knowledgeable than any community person anywhere in what was going on in the claim because when I was distributing this stuff, TFN stuff, he already knew it. And he could tell me more than I knew. I would check and he was right on top of it. He was amazing. In Arctic Bay, we established a park committee, and the Pond Inlet one was amazing. The first time there was to be a change in the organizations and such and they said, listen we want some continuity here, so let's ask if they will make us permanent members until the job is finished and that's what they did. And the hamlet council agreed so the same people stayed on this committee through the whole process, nine or ten years, and John Tungak was one of those.

So, when I started to come to meetings – they had most of their meetings when I wasn't there because they just had to deliberate on their own stuff – I would fax them info and they would get me feedback. But when I would come with claims information, John was right on top of it. He was amazing. But very few of the people in the communities, the average Joe, had very little knowledge of what was going on and it was quite hard to get people interested, frankly. I mean there's a lot of things day to day, your basic housing and making a living, and people dying and suiciding and people are overloaded in these committees, education committee, and hamlet council, and health committees and Hunters and Trappers, and to pay attention to something else coming in from the outside, it's little wonder.

Often, without thinking, you know we expect more of these little communities than we would of a community like Yellowknife or Edmonton or Ottawa. We expect everybody to be involved, and there already are a higher percentage of people involved in

community organizations than in these others. So when I was working with Inuit Tapirisat of Canada (ITC) or with Parks, you can't go in and demand people's attention. If you are able to come in a couple times of year and ask for peoples' attention and keep giving them advance information so they can prepare...but to get peoples' attention more than two or three times a year, that's as much as you could possibly expect.

And with the claims, it was the same thing, and I think TFN often had the attitude that they were doing kind of 'Lord's work,' 'motherhood stuff,' so sometimes they got really defensive if they were ever questioned. They felt a little too self-righteous in what they were doing.

Don't you think that is a little justified? Some of these guys literally gave their lives, years to this, so when you are criticizing something they've negotiated or done, you are criticizing 20 or so years of their life, not that it's right, just that it may be understandable.

It takes extraordinary effort and the whole thing slows down tremendously if you try to consult with everybody.

That used to frustrate negotiators when they were negotiating with the First Nation on the overlapping boundary agreements.

There's a real cultural difference between the Inuit approach to things and the Dene approach to things. Inuit just want to get it done. Dene like to mull it over, and talk about it.

The same things had to be important. They had their sacred spaces, they had a lot of the same kinds of things.

Inuit seem more interested in getting something done rather than the process, and the Dene seem interested in the process and going over things. The only land claim negotiations table that I was ever a part of was in the Yukon. I've never been a permanent part of the federal caucus so to be able to contrast the negotiations process between them, I don't know.

Do you think that there is anything to be learned by other Indigenous Peoples from the Nunavut story?

Inuit were so lucky in a lot of ways because they are such an overwhelming majority so the government could agree to something like a Nunavut territory, public government right? You've got the same thing in the Yukon, a public government in a territory but Indigenous Peoples are not in the majority. There are very few other places where Aboriginal Peoples are in a similar situation, where they have a very specific territory where they are in the majority and where it makes sense, and has been under discussion for years before that... you know, the division of the territory – the Carruthers Commission, and the Drury Commission before that. People have been studying and

considering dividing this cumbersome NWT and it had nothing to do with Aboriginal issues. It was administrative issues, and it just so happened that Inuit could parlay into this because they have the majority.

Some feel that it may not always be that way, though.

Well, I've heard people express that concern.

Do you think it was a good land claim agreement?

I think so. They're struggling with parts of it to implement, and some of it is still hard to figure out because maybe it's not implementable. I think this is where Inuit maybe fell into the trap of their legal advisors. I think maybe some of their advisors meddled too much.

They brought them to the table.

That's right, and I think that was a mistake because some things in the claim I can see reflecting people like Terry Fenge or Mary Crnkovich, not Inuit. Especially some of the complex convoluted process. It makes some things overly cumbersome, when you could have achieved the same result just being gatekeeper at some points, but it became really bureaucratic, setting up bureaucracies.

The Nunavut Wildlife Management Board (NWMB) is one example. It is probably more complicated than it needed to be, and it is one area where TFN misled people, giving people the impression that these were final decision-making authorities, right? They called their advice decisions, right? Well, it is a very high level of advice, but it is not the final word, because the final word in a democracy has to come from somebody who is duly elected, that you can get at through the elected process, that's who has to be finally accountable, not an appointed Board. But when they were explaining things to these people, these Boards were characterized as the final authority.

Has there been any case where Boards have been overruled?

Not that I am aware of, but if you talk to anybody at the NWMB, they have more on their plate than is manageable because of the claim. There are things that are discretionary in the claim that they are not going to touch. The NWMB may approve the plans for something because there is so much they have to do that they can't take on this discretionary stuff.

Is there any claim out there that would be a better example of what could be done?

I think that some of the processes in the Inuvialuit claim are fairly straightforward, not quite as cumbersome. The impression I have from some of the Boards and agencies there is that they are not so bureaucratically set out in the claim. The perspective in the Inuvialuit claim is that all Boards are called advisory. The Committee for Original

Peoples Entitlement (COPE) was not afraid to use the term advisory. They don't make the final decision. They will advise the minister. For Inuit in Nunavut, the word advisory is pejorative, which is understandable. Because the Inuvialuit claim doesn't really provide anything in terms of economic preferences, when you negotiate those you have to get a North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) exemption, which is not hard to do. You can apply for those specifically in these cases, but you don't go for a NAFTA exemption in a lower level agreement, say a park agreement. Because the Inuvialuit claims did not provide for it, they were willing to put into the Treasury Board

So the Nunavut agreement has these NAFTA exemptions?

Yes, under the provisions for economic benefits, but the Inuvialuit and James Bay agreements do not so we put the provisions in the park agreement

So the Nunavut agreement learned from everybody else, starting with Alaska, and then these others?

Yep. That's right.

How strong is the NAFTA exemption because I know people are concerned that if they have to abide by the international accords, it will jeopardize elements of the agreement and the Government of Nunavut (GN)?

It allows the government to give preference to Inuit firms.

You lived in Sanikiluaq for awhile? Was there ever a question that they would join Quebec?

I think people were very receptive to Nunavut. Maybe there was more controversy later on because I left in the late 1970s.

What do you remember the most fondly from the whole experience that you have had?

I guess just by experience that the people in the community, being out on the land, people in the small communities are the greatest hosts in the whole world, particularly when you are out on the land, in the camp. They share everything and make sure you are okay. They have always got an eye out for you without being paternalistic, just accepting people for who they are, a total lack of pretense, just practical and a real sense of humor. That's just an overall perspective.