

Interview with Charlie Evalik
May 2, 2004, Cambridge Bay

Interview took place in Charlie Evalik's office at the Kitikmeot Inuit Association (KitIA) offices. I showed him the list of names I gathered of those who had been involved in the Inuit organizations year by year.

Your name appears all over the place. How did you first become involved in trying to get a greater voice for Inuit?

When I graduated I guess in 1971, I became involved in social services and a couple of years later with the hamlet in Cambridge Bay in community development, bringing the community councils into play. That's basically where I started, in 1975 or 1976. In 1977, I became involved with KitIA until about 1978, somewhere around there. In terms of Inuit organization, it started as a regional organization under Inuit Tapirisat of Canada (ITC). Then I left it for a few years and went to work for the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) on economic development issues. As well, I was one of the negotiators on the claim itself when we negotiated the wildlife provisions. Then left it and went back here to the government and then left and started my own private business and then left it and went back to KitIA I guess in 1993 and I've been here ever since.

What were the negotiations like?

I think we started with the wildlife provisions because it would quickly impact Inuit in terms of their protection of wildlife or how it could impact hunting and what kind of protection is the wildlife going to need, and protection of the environment. That's the premise that was the fuel for those negotiations. I served as a GNWT negotiator, and George Dixon, he had wildlife. Back then it was called the Land Claims Commission. We tried to assist them and lending our expertise. It was pretty interesting.

Who was on the commission back then?

I think Thomas Suluk and John Amagoalik were on the commission. I forget who else was on the other side. The GNWT was part of the federal negotiating team.

Who else was on the federal side at that time?

Robert Mitchell was the chief negotiator before Tom Molloy got in. Me and Robert Mitchell were negotiating for the government side along with the advisors. I think that the perception from the Tungavik Federation of Nunavut (TFN) was that Inuit were working for the government side, but it was to assist and forward the land claims process, the negotiations. It was pretty interesting.

What kind of person what Mitchell?

I think he was from Saskatchewan. He was a lawyer and he was pretty good at negotiating on the wildlife provisions and Tom Molloy took over after that. Mitchell was pretty understanding of what needed to be done, and because of the wildlife provisions, he relied pretty heavily on the GNWT and asked for advice in terms of negotiations. He was a nice person. He advanced the start up of the *Nunavut Land Claims Agreement* (NLCA) wildlife provisions. That was his mandate.

I heard that during the days you would negotiate hot and heavy on opposing sides and then afterward you guys would all go out together?

Yeah, we would go out together, negotiate everything that should be contained in the agreement and then at night and weekends, Inuit would get together just to work together in terms of what could be contained in the agreement, to try to make it workable and to try to understand each other's side, what we were getting at before going back to the table.

So it never stopped?

No, it never stopped.

What is the most memorable event of those times for you?

I think when John Munroe was the minister at the time, and the land claims commission thought the negotiations would be with the federal government directly, but the GNWT had restrictions on the wildlife agreement, so there were some issues and they had that jurisdiction and they didn't want us there so I took my people back to Yellowknife. The negotiations were suspended for a couple of days, and then they said they wanted me back. So I would call that memorable, you get kicked out and wanted back.

So tell me about KitIA. You got involved soon after it was formed?

Yes, I got involved in the administration side soon after it was formed for the region. I had some experience on the hamlet council. It was a similar kind of organization that we were trying to develop. I can try to get some information to the communities on what the claim would entail. It's a new playing field so we were working toward wildlife issues and possibly economic issues of the future, land issues that were going to be involved. We needed to do the land use occupancy of the Inuit so that we could be better prepared for when we went into negotiation with the federal government. These are the lands that have been used in the past or hadn't been used by the Inuit, to help the negotiations.

What was the difference between the study that you guys did and the one (Milton) Freeman did?

I think it's the Freeman report that I am referring to, but Inuit had to be involved and we had to find out who the leaders were to get the information out for Dr. Freeman and to assist in the review for the Freeman report.

You were working to get closer to the people to be more accurate, continuing that work?

That's correct, because it wasn't sufficient, there was some missing information that couldn't be recorded and when we saw the first draft, which was tabled, for what should be contained in the agreement, it was not full, drawing on the voice of the Inuit as to what should be contained in the agreement. We could assist in terms of vetting what was in that report and what should be addressed in future talks. The mandate was to work toward the NLCA and subsequently, when we signed the agreement in 1993, KitIA had more of a role in the implementation as well as the negotiations.

Do you have a list of KitIA leadership through the years? It would be helpful in creating accurate charts.

We probably have a list or something like that in terms of the minutes in storage.

I would love to check it against the list that I am putting together. I am drawing from people's memories and the old ITC and Tungavik Federation of Nunavut (TFN) newsletters. Had you been aware when you were just graduating of all the things that had been going on? 1971 was a banner year for activity.

I think so. You know there were only five of us who graduated in the whole of the Kitikmeot that time and we got grabbed by the government to work in Social Services.

Who were the five?

There were two of us from Inuvik and three of us from here. When ITC was first getting established, we started hearing about Tagak Curley. My father-in-law was involved in establishing that as one of the first directors, Peter Kaminguak.

What did you think of all of that?

I think that it was something that we needed to do to get better services and programs that couldn't be acquired by the Inuit. We were following the Indians who had a better dream, and we looked at that and what they were trying to achieve.

Did you ever go on any of those trips to other places because I know that members of ITC and the regional organizations and others traveled a lot in the early days to learn from people like the Inuit in Alaska?

I am aware of some of that. KitIA was on that trip to Barrow and Greenland and down South to visit the Indian people in New Mexico and the Navajo. That was before my time, before I got involved with KitIA. But since then, after the NLCA was signed in 1993, I went to Australia to take a look at the Aboriginal involvement in mining over there and I went to Alaska to talk to the Alaska Inuit involved in mining operations, and we sent some delegations down to mines in Saskatchewan.

There is a huge Australia-Nunavut connection. What was it like going back and forth between both sides on the negotiations? It must have given you a different perspective, more broad than most others?

I was only involved on the wildlife negotiations. I didn't really become involved in the other until the implementation of the agreement. What working on the wildlife negotiations did was it gave me an appreciation of what the nature of the land was, and the needs, and how Inuit should be sensitive to the impact of activities, like mining or whatever. Inuit have Aboriginal rights to hunt and fish and trap, we learned that when I was involved in the wildlife provisions. And it was after the wildlife agreement and the implementation that I became more involved on the environmental assessment phase, as well as the economic provisions for Inuit. As well, when you negotiate, you try to ensure that Inuit had opportunities for business or training opportunities.

It's the same for the DEW-Line clean up negotiations. I was involved with those from the beginning. They started in 1992 with the Department of Defense. I helped negotiate the environmental impact provisions and the economic provisions and the training provisions. Year by year, the DEW-Line sites are going to be cleaned up. We set up minimum content levels for contracting and so on. It was pretty intensive.

You have a reputation for being very development-minded, but also traditionally oriented.

You've got to balance the activity of what is going on. The DEW-Line clean ups dealt with capacity building and they needed to be cleaned up for health and environment reasons, for the Inuit as well as for the wildlife. That's how those negotiations were, and the economic provisions were secondary to what the DEW-Line clean up is all about.

And then you were also involved in the committee for national issues?

I was involved with the Inuit committee for national issues in trying to raise the profile on Inuit priorities. Peter Jull was involved in that.

It interacted with and helped to create a unity among all Indigenous Peoples on the Constitution.

I think the Constitution was one of them, and how the Inuit were going to be involved in that process and it was related to the whole Inuit circumpolar issue, the protection of the Arctic and the environment, as well as economic training and health. I think it raised the profile for what the shortcomings for the Inuit, how we could try to become involved nationally on all the issues that involved the Inuit.

Did you have to travel a lot? Were you there for any of the first minister's conferences?

I was not fully involved on the Inuit committee for national issues, but I was involved to a degree in terms of working behind the scenes, what is it that we are discussing with the first ministers and that kind of thing.

Who was out front?

I think John Amagoalik and Tagak Curley and people like that. Peter Jull was fully involved in providing advice on things.

That's another thing that amazes me, how well Inuit speak of the advisors that worked for them.

We've got advisors in KitIA, but we still rely on outside advice and lawyers. We need consultants and things like that, particularly when we are working on big documents, policy papers that you have to review. That's got to be done to see if they conform to our way of life and conform to the NLCA that was signed in 1993.

Do you find the same kind of loyalty then to now?

I think it exists. You have the same kind of contract relations. Because of the implementation of the NLCA, that it might be more structured now, more of a formal process than it used to be.

How did you learn the leadership skills because you have been in a number of leadership positions?

I think it starts from when you are young. My Dad was always one of the leaders in the communities and he tried to form the establishment of the communities, and I think I learned from him, Norman Evalik. Then you get sent to school and get a formal education. You learn from the process of the GNWT and the government and other structures outside of Canada even and then you kind of assist the communities to be more formal structurally. We took training courses for the things like the establishment of the hamlet councils.

Who organized that?

The GNWT, they would arrange training. I was involved in that and worked to establish those. I was involved with the hamlet council as deputy mayor for a number of years. Firstly though, it came from the Elders that you would meet in the community.

When you came in it was a tumultuous time for the Inuit organizations. How did people get through the difficult times?

I think formal meetings each year, as well as who should be doing what being decided at the national level. I came in a little bit later on, looking at what is required to implement the NLCA. There are a lot of outside forces trying to direct the process. Sensing what was

meant when KitIA was established and carrying that on, it becomes structured and it is much easier for the present staff when there are problems to solve. We needed to establish structurally how we were going to solve and deal with outside forces, such as mining.

Did KitIA ever need to get into reorganization, or get rid of some people who were causing ripples like they did in other organizations?

I don't think so. In this region we try to be cooperative. With existing organizations, if we disagree with their approach, we let it be known. We know mining was going to be done in the Kitikmeot so we took the lead on how to approach that, the assessment and benefit agreement process. The only way you could respond was to set priorities and decide what would benefit the Inuit.

How do you reach a unified response?

You've got to go to the communities and listen to what they want and then develop an approach. They want to protect their water, wildlife and customs of the past and still today its one of the most important things in their lives, but there is a younger generation coming out of the schools today and they want jobs so you've got to balance the two. Some of the younger people today cannot live off the land, but they could live off the land through mining for instance.

What's the biggest challenge?

In the beginning it's trying to establish the structure, continuity and getting good people, but our region is able to maintain the continuity. We need to listen. That is one of the challenges.

Because you have all these different voices clamoring at you?

That's right. Yeah.

Are you aware of things that you learned from your father that you might have used, even if you were not aware of it at the time?

I think you have got to know where to hunt. Those are the most important things that tell me to be sensitive for Inuit development and what kind of development should occur. You've got to listen to the Elders. You've got to protect the water basin that is our drinking water, as well as the migration of the caribou and you've got to be sensitive to the seasons and the migrations. Caribou don't migrate all year and you have got to learn all of that and be sensitive to those occurrences.

What advice would you give to other Indigenous Peoples who are trying to achieve similar things?

You've got to review and assess possible potential proponents and things like that. You've got to look at their backgrounds and assess how sensitive they would be to the Aboriginal Peoples or to the environment, wildlife, that kind of stuff, and you go from there. Once you establish agreements, you have to monitor and keep on monitoring those agreements to ensure there are no adverse effects and things like that.

It doesn't stop with the signing.

That's right, it doesn't stop with the signing. You have to keep at it everyday.