

Spirit and Intent: Jack Kupeuna

MR: Could you tell me what years you were involved and what your role was?

JK: I was involved in negotiating the claim for over 15 years. I did everything. Not that I always wanted to. I was asked to because I could speak big fancy words. I was hospitalized twice. I and my family made a lot of personal sacrifices. I would be down South. I would try to fly home as much as possible. Once I came home for one day and my children cried because I was leaving again the next day. Inuit negotiators missed home, their families, communities and doing things like going hunting in the spring time. One year I didn't even get to go hunting in the spring. My wife told me that what I was doing was not just for myself but for our children and their children.

I had to go to lots of meetings. We all did. There were better people than me, but we lost some people. The Elders and the community kept wanting me to go. So I went.

Inuit wanted their own territory. That was one thing that we would not give up on. But we felt as if we were and wanted to remain part of Canada. In the end, we got Nunavut. We got our own government.

Some people want things to change overnight, but it takes time and patience. It's like a child. You have to let it grow. It's like a plant. You have to make sure it gets water and sun.

MR: It seems as if Inuit negotiators believed that the main way in which Inuit would realize their rights and benefits is through the creation of the territory and the Government of Nunavut. However, it seems as if the GN is struggling with lack of resources and political or bureaucratic will to fulfill their land claim obligations.

JK: The government is new and young. There's Article 23 and we're getting more Inuit employed in the government. It takes time for the government to set itself up so that it can deliver programs. We got what we wanted. People are benefitting from the creation of the territory. There are more jobs for Inuit.